

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Bureau of Land Management

Needles Field Office

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FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

for Fenner Gap Mutual Water Company Northern Pipeline Conversion

DOI-BLM-CA-D090-2025-0018-EA

INTRODUCTION:

The Bureau of Land Management (“BLM”) prepared an environmental assessment (“EA”): DOI-BLM-CA-D090-2025-0018-EA, analyzing Fenner Gap Mutual Water Company’s (“FGMWC”) application for a right-of-way (“ROW”) under Title V of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (“FLPMA”) to convey water through the Northern Pipeline. This Finding of No Significant Impact applies to the Proposed Action as described in Section 2.2 of the attached EA. The Proposed Action includes the conversion of approximately 162 miles of an existing pipeline in Southern California (“Northern Pipeline”) between Cadiz, California in San Bernardino County and Mojave, California in Kern County, for the transportation of water (the Northern Pipeline Conversion). The Proposed Action includes the construction of seven pump stations, three of which will be located on BLM-managed lands, as well as up to 140 air and vacuum relief valves (“AR/AVs”) and 140 blow-off (“BO”) appurtenant facilities. Each pump station requires approximately two acres of land to accommodate construction and operation. The Proposed Action includes the design features and avoidance and minimization measures described in section 2.2.3 of the EA.

AVOIDANCE AND MINIMIZATION MEASURES:

The Applicant has proposed a number of avoidance and minimization measures (“AMMs”) which would be implemented as part of the Proposed Action to avoid and minimize potential impacts to the environment. These AMMs are intended to minimize potential adverse effects to the environment identified. The measures discussed in Section 2.2.3 of the EA would be implemented during Project construction and operations.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT:

Based on my review of the attached EA and supporting documents, I have determined that the Proposed Action (Alternative B), as described in Section 2.2 of the EA, will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement (“EIS”) is not required. This finding is based on the degree of the effects described in the following sections within the identified affected environment.

Potentially Affected Environment

The Affected Environment of the Proposed Action is described in Section 3 of the EA. The Northern Pipeline is an existing buried pipeline located in a corridor parallel to other existing utility infrastructure, including a buried natural gas pipeline. The Northern Pipeline was constructed between 1985-1988. It is located entirely within the BLM's Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan ("DRECP") planning area.

The Project area overlaps the Bristol Area of Critical Environmental Concern ("ACEC"), Pisgah ACEC, Superior Cronese ACEC, and Fremont-Kramer ACEC. Other special designated lands within the ROW area include the South Mojave – Amboy National Conservation Lands ("NCL"), National Trails Viewshed SRMA, and the Mojave Trails National Monument ("MTNM"). The existing pipeline is also installed within a portion of the Section 368 Energy Corridor, which is a corridor designated by BLM as a priority corridor for oil, natural gas, and hydrogen pipelines, as well as electricity transmission and distribution infrastructure.

The ROW area is located in the Mojave Desert Geomorphic Province, which is a broad interior region of isolated mountain ranges of igneous and metamorphic bedrock as well as valleys made up of Tertiary to recent sedimentary deposits and expanses of desert plains encompassing approximately 54,000 acres of southeastern California. The proposed ROW stretches 162 miles from the Fenner Watershed on the east to the Antelope Valley to the west. Riverine resources were identified within the ROW as dry, ephemeral washes. These features are isolated ephemeral features that follow on-site topography. Surface flows within these features are only provided by direct precipitation from storm events.

The ROW area is not located within the planning area of an adopted Habitat Conservation Plan, Natural Community Conservation Plan, or other approved local, regional, or state Habitat Conservation Plan. No special-status plant or wildlife species were observed. Based on habitat requirements for specific species and the availability and quality of on-site habitats, the ROW area has a high potential to support federally threatened desert tortoise, state threatened Mohave ground squirrel, and a state species of special concern the San Joaquin coachwhip.

The Proposed Action is located in the Mojave Desert Air Basin ("MDAB") and is within the jurisdiction of the Mojave Desert Air Quality Management District ("MDAQMD") for the San Bernardino County portion of the MDAB and the Eastern Kern County Air Pollution Control District ("EKAPCD") for the eastern Kern County portion of the MDAB. The western most portion of the existing pipeline (approximately 10 to 11 percent of the total linear distance) extends into the San Joaquin Valley Air Basin ("SJVAB"), which is within the jurisdiction of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District ("SJVAPCD").

Recreational uses on public lands within the ROW area are guided by the DRECP LUPA and areas have been designated within the DRECP as Special Recreation Management Areas ("SRMAs"). The pipeline traverses the National Trails Viewshed SRMA established by the DRECP. The Northern Pipeline is not located within a BLM- designated Off-highway vehicle ("OHV") area. However, the Mojave Desert is relatively accessible and attractive for OHV use, and therefore portions of the ROW area could have historically been utilized for

OHV recreation.

Cultural resources were identified within an Area of Potential Effects (“APE”) including the 162 miles of ROW, easements, and private property that the existing pipeline crosses, the access roads used for operations and maintenance, the locations of the pumpstations, and the space between the access road and the appurtenance locations. While the entirety of the APE is being analyzed for the purposes of compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (“NHPA”), assessment of cultural resources under NEPA includes the ROW and access roads on federal land, the locations of the appurtenances on non-federal land, the pumpstation locations, and the area of potential pipeline replacement. As described in Section 3.4.1 of the EA, there are a total of 85 resources identified intersecting the surveyed portion of the APE, including six historic properties, one of which has 45 loci within the surveyed portion of the APE. No human remains were identified within the surveyed area. All identified or unevaluated resources will be avoided or otherwise protected in accordance with applicable laws and the AMMs listed in Section 2.2.3 of the EA for the Proposed Action.

The Project area does not include any county, state or federally designated scenic vistas. As discussed in Section 3.9 of the EA, the proposed pump station 2 would be located within a Visual Resources Management (“VRM”) Class III area and pump stations 3 and 4 would be located within a VRM Class IV area. All other proposed pump stations would be constructed on non-BLM land and not rated for VRM.

The Project area includes a portion of the Bissell grazing allotment. As discussed in Section 3.10.2.2 of the EA, implementation of the Proposed Action modifications would add new constructed elements to areas along the existing Northern Pipeline, but these minor additions would be within the alignment and would minimally alter or block grazing along the Northern Pipeline corridor. No pump stations would be constructed within the Bissell allotment.

Degree of Effects

The following have been considered in my evaluation of the Proposed Action:

i. Beneficial and adverse short- and long-term effects

The Proposed Action, including the AMMs and PDFs described in Section 2.2.3 of the EA, will result in insignificant short-term and long-term adverse effects to resources as summarized below and described in Chapter 3 of the EA. Short-term adverse impacts from the Proposed Action are generally associated with construction activities which would generally last for less than one year. Specifically, construction of each pump station is anticipated to take between 9 months and one year, as discussed in Section 2.2.1 of the EA. Other construction and conversion activities, including pipeline repair and installation of valves, would also result in short-term impacts. Long-term impacts are generally associated with operation and maintenance activities over the course of the 50-year ROW term. Implementation of AMMs and PDFs will avoid and minimize adverse impacts such that they are not significant.

Biological Resources: The proposed Action would permanently occupy approximately 14

acres on lands adjacent to an existing ROW including 7 acres of BLM-managed land. These areas are sparsely vegetated with desert scrub habitats. Through consultation with USFWS, the BLM has determined that the Proposed Action is within the scope of the CDCA programmatic consultation and associated programmatic biological opinion (PBO) (USFWS, 2017) and therefore Conservation Measures included in the CDCA PBO to protect sensitive wildlife, vegetation, and habitats apply to the Proposed Action. Similarly, EAFB has determined through consultation with USFWS that the Proposed Action is within the scope of the EAFB Operations PBO (USFWS, 2014), and subject to applicable Conservation Measures therein. With implementation of these Conservation Measures and the AMMs listed in Section 2.2.3 of the EA, the potential for impacts to wildlife and sensitive habitats, including Mohave ground squirrel and San Joaquin coachwhip, would be minimized through monitoring and impact avoidance measures. Pre-construction nesting bird clearance survey would be conducted prior to ground disturbance, and a preconstruction desert tortoise clearance survey would be implemented to ensure desert tortoise are absent from the work areas within the ROW, as described in Section 3.1.1.2 of the EA. Similarly, construction activities will be monitored for Mohave ground squirrel to avoid impacting individuals. Impacts to wildlife species would be avoided through implementation of AMMs and would therefore be minimal. The Proposed Action would avoid affecting special-status plant and wildlife species. Disturbance within desert tortoise Critical Habitat would be minor and limited to AV/AR/BO installations within the ROW. Impacts to biological resources would not be significant.

Air Quality: The Proposed Action would result in temporary increase in air emissions associated with the use of construction vehicle and dust emissions. With implementation of the AMMs listed in Section 2.2.3 of the EA, and compliance with applicable air district regulations and permits, the Proposed Action would not have significant adverse impacts to air quality.

Recreation and Visitation: The Proposed Action would be located largely within an existing utility corridor. The Proposed Action would not result in physical impacts to surrounding recreational facilities and would not result, directly or indirectly, in an increase in population. The Northern Pipeline is an existing facility with an access road along its length that is generally open to the public. During construction, trucks on the access road may slow travel through the area, but no areas would be blocked off and no access roads would be closed. The construction activity and new facilities would be located within and adjacent to the existing utility corridor. The Proposed Action would not increase recreational visitation that could affect natural resources of the area. The use of the existing pipeline to convey water rather than natural gas would not conflict with the goals of the National Trails Viewshed SRMA. The Proposed Action would not have significant adverse effects on on-going recreational activities, site access, or alter the visitor experience.

Cultural Resources: The BLM has evaluated effects of the Proposed Action on identified historic properties under Section 106 of the NHPA and determined that there will be no adverse effects to historic properties. The Proposed Action is anticipated to result in negligible impacts to cultural resources. All identified or unevaluated historic properties will be avoided or otherwise protected in accordance with applicable laws and the AMMs listed in Section 2.2.3 of the EA.

Lands and Realty: The Proposed Action is consistent with applicable land use plans and the Mojave Trails National Monument Proclamation. The Proposed Action would not measurably impact resources that the CDNCL areas and CMAs were developed to address, and thus the Proposed Action does not adversely affect the values for which the CDNCL are designated. The Proposed Action would mitigate effects by replacing and providing substitute resources and/or habitats through the enhancement or restoration of lands consistent with the DRECP LUPA. The Proposed Action would minimally impact or conflict with management direction for specially designated lands or activities in other existing ROWs.

Geology and Soils: The Proposed Action would temporarily stockpile excavated soils within the ROW and would return the material as backfill. AMMs would be implemented to minimize erosion on the stockpiles. As a result, the Proposed Action would not have significant adverse effects to soils, geology, or mineral resources.

Paleontological Resources: The Proposed Action would have the potential to contribute only minor disturbance to paleontological resources. With the implementation of AMMs, the construction and operation of the Proposed Action would not have significant adverse effects on paleontological resources.

Hydrology: The Proposed Action would not contribute to the degradation of surface water or groundwater quality and/or quantity or otherwise significantly adversely affect water resources within the ROW area. The Proposed Action incorporates BMPs, including an SWPPP and Spill Prevention and Countermeasure Plan (SPCP) to protect hydrologic resources.

Visual Resources: The Proposed Action would result in minor effects to the visual resources of the area and would not adversely affect the character, cultural values, or historic resources within the viewshed. With implementation of the proposed design features and AMMs, the Proposed Action would have no significant adverse effects to the visual resources of the Project area.

Grazing and Range Resources: The Proposed Action would permanently develop up to 0.01 acres of land within the Bissell allotment and would have no significant adverse effects to the grazing and range resources within the Project area.

Beneficial effects of the Proposed Action, as stated in Section 1.6 and Appendix H of the EA, include local economic stimulus through creation of construction jobs and related local and regional economic activity. The Proposed Action is also anticipated to benefit the quality of life of the American people by providing access to a new reliable water supply for communities in Southern California and increase regional water delivery flexibility.

ii. Effects on public health and safety

No significant adverse public health and safety impacts were identified in the EA. The Proposed Action would provide benefits to public health and safety by converting an existing natural gas pipeline to convey water—a non-toxic substance. The activities under the Proposed Action are also subject to regulation under other state and local laws and

regulations protecting public health and safety, such as regulation of air emissions under the Clean Air Act (CAA) and regulation of discharges under the Clean Water Act (CWA).

Further, AMMs and PDFs incorporated in the Proposed Action (see Section 2.2.3 of the EA) include measures to protect public health and safety, including preparation of a Wildfire Prevention Plan, measures for the management of any hazardous materials, measures for dust control, and preparation and implementation of a Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan.

iii. Economic effects

The Proposed Action, as stated in Section 1.6 and further described in Appendix H of the EA, benefits the local economy by creating construction jobs and stimulating related local and regional economic activity. Further, as discussed in Appendix H of the EA, the Proposed Action stimulates supplier industries that provide materials and services for construction, creating indirect impacts. Subsequent increases in wages and business income would result from supplier stimulation which would therefore lead to increased household spending in the local economy (induced impacts). Together, these direct, indirect, and induced effects make up the total economic impact of the Proposed Action. Temporary construction as well as long-term operational new jobs and economic growth stemming from the Proposed Action will produce new revenue streams for California through contribution to state and local taxes.

iv. Effects on the quality of life of the American people

The EA does not identify any significant adverse effects on the quality of life of the American people. As described above, the Proposed Action will provide benefits to the local, regional, and State economy in terms of short- and long-term employment and other direct, indirect, and induced economic activity. Further, the Proposed Action is anticipated to benefit the quality of life of the American people by providing access to a new reliable water supply for communities in Southern California and increasing regional water delivery flexibility. As discussed in Appendix H of the EA, the Proposed Action will allow the Northern Pipeline to connect with existing water infrastructure providing flexibility for communities in Southern California. This then enables the Northern Pipeline to become a regional water infrastructure asset, providing access to new water supplies and groundwater storage facilities that will improve reliability for more than 100 public water systems throughout Southern California.

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Date