

Public Notice Announcing the Availability of a Finding of No Significant Impact

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Rural Development (RD)

Tuolumne Utilities District (TUD): Notice of Finding of No Significant Impact

AGENCY: Rural Utilities Service (RUS), United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)

ACTION: Notice of Finding of No Significant Impact.

SUMMARY: The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Rural Utilities Service (RUS) has made a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) with respect to a request for possible financing assistance to Tuolumne Utilities District (TUD) for the construction of the Sierra Pines Regional Water Treatment Facility in Tuolumne County, California.

FURTHER INFORMATION: To obtain copies of the EA and FONSI, or for further information, contact: **Cyndi Schlenz, Engineering Coordinator, cschlenz@tudwater.com, 209-532-5536.** The EA and FONSI are also available for public review at **Tuolumne Utilities District, 18885 Nugget Blvd. Sonora, CA 95370**, or at www.tudwater.com.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The proposed project consists of the construction of a new water treatment facility on a currently undeveloped 46-acre site owned by TUD. Construction includes a 30 acre-foot raw water pond, flocculation and sedimentation basins, filters, UV and chlorine disinfection facilities, chemical storage facilities, water storage tanks, sludge lagoons, underground pipelines, and other associated site improvements. Alternatives considered by USDA and TUD include: No action; reconstruct existing treatment facilities at existing sites, install conventional vs. packaged treatment facilities. The alternatives are discussed in the **Sierra Pines Regional Water Treatment Facility Project Environmental Assessment with California State Supplement**. RUS has reviewed and approved the EA for the proposed project.

The availability of the EA for public review was announced via notice in the following newspaper: **Union Democrat** on **July 26, 2022, July 27, 2022, July 28, 2022**. A 14-day comment period was announced in the newspaper notices. The EA was also available for public review at the USDA Rural Development office and website as well as Tuolumne Utilities District main office.

One public comment was received from the Central Sierra Environmental Resource Center (CSERC) requesting barriers, fencing, netting, or other measures be taken to minimize risks to waterfowl or other wildlife that maybe attracted to the sludge lagoons. TUD will incorporate design measures to deter waterfowl and wildlife from accessing the sludge lagoons. CSERC also recommended TUD eradicate invasive bullfrogs on the project site, which compete with native amphibians. The Environmental Review, both CEQA and NEPA, did not conclude that the proposed actions would result in significant impacts or increases in bullfrog populations and therefore no mitigation is required. However, TUD will engage the appropriate resource agencies to evaluate the feasibility of implementing such an eradication program.

Based on its EA, commitments made by Tuolumne Utilities District, and public comments received, RUS has concluded that the project would have no significant impact to water quality, floodplains, land use, aesthetics, transportation, or human health and safety.

RUS has assessed the environmental impacts of this proposal and determined that the location of the Sierra Pines Regional Water Treatment Facility will convert or effect wetlands. In accordance with Executive Order 11990, Protection of Wetlands, and USDA Departmental Regulation 9500-3, Land Use Policy, the Agency is notifying the interested public of this land conversion. It has been determined that there is no practicable alternative to avoiding this conversion or effect and that there is a significant need for the proposal.

The basis of this determination is that there are no other practical locations to construct the 30-acre-foot raw water pond that is necessary for the function of the proposed water treatment facility. Construction of the 30-acre-foot raw water pond will convert areas of existing pond, wetland swale, and marsh. There is no other practical alternative to provide sufficient water storage. No comments were received regarding the conversion of wetlands.

The proposed project will have no adverse effect on resources listed or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. The Agency has also concluded that the proposed project is not likely to affect federally listed threatened and endangered species or designated critical habitat thereof. The proposed project would not disproportionately affect minority and/or low-income populations.

No other potential significant impacts resulting from the proposed project have been identified. Therefore, RUS has determined that this FONSI fulfills its obligations under the National Environmental Policy Act, as amended (42 U.S.C. 4321 et seq.), the Council on Environmental Quality Regulations (40 CFR §§ 1500-1508), and USDA Rural Development's Environmental Policies and Procedures (7 CFR Part 1970) for its action related to the project.

RUS is satisfied that the environmental impacts of the proposed project have been adequately addressed. RUS federal action would not result in significant impacts to the quality of the human environment, and as such it will not prepare an Environmental Impact Statement for its action related to the proposed project.

Dated: 10/17/2022