
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

This Draft EIR addresses the environmental impacts that could result from implementing the proposed East Highline Reservoir and Intake Channel Project (Proposed Project or Project). The Draft EIR was prepared in accordance with CEQA to inform the public and meet the needs of local, state, and federal permitting agencies.

The Imperial Irrigation District (IID) is acting as the state lead agency under CEQA, since IID is responsible for primarily carrying out the full Project. The lead agency has directed and supervised the preparation of this Draft EIR and has independently evaluated its information and findings. The County of Imperial (County) is the land use authority and would have to approve the abandonment of right-of-way (ROW) within the Project footprint and related discretionary permits. Reclamation is the federal agency that would have to approve a new ROW for the intake channel that crosses a parcel of Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands withdrawn to Reclamation.

1.1 PROJECT LOCATION AND REGION OF INFLUENCE

The project's region of influence comprises the areas that would be affected by the Proposed Project. Based on the locations of the project components, the project's region of influence consists of the immediate area around the Proposed Project site, including farming activities in the Imperial Valley, BLM lands to the east, and the broader IID irrigation and drainage system. Figure 1-1, Project Location, identifies the project's region of influence, distinguishing the immediate from the broader regions. Figure 1-2, Vicinity Map, shows the five parcels of land on which the Proposed Project site is set. See Chapter 2, Environmental Setting, for more detail on the existing site conditions and surrounding land uses.

1.1.1 Lower Colorado River

The Lower Colorado River (LCR) covers over 202,000 square miles of the west with a focus on the lower 688 river miles of the Colorado River system from Lee's Ferry in northern Arizona to the border with the Republic of Mexico (Reclamation 2018). The Proposed Project would redirect a portion of IID's Colorado River water entitlement already channeled through the All-American Canal (AAC) to the Proposed Project site for temporary storage. Section 1.4, Other Proposed Projects Related to Resources Affected by the Proposed Project, provides an overview of the allocation of Colorado River water among water rights holders in California and the key LCR diversion facilities. The LCR is subject to compliance with the Clean Water Act (CWA), Colorado

River Basin Salinity Control Act, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPAs) Water Quality Standards for Salinity Control.

1.1.2 IID Water Service Area and All-American Canal

IID is a limited-purpose public agency, formed under the laws of the State of California. IID holds senior rights to divert water from the Colorado River and deliver it to farmers, tenants, and landowners in Imperial County. IID provides agricultural water to approximately 475,000 acres of some of the most intensively farmed land in the nation. IID does not have authority to approve or disapprove land use, water use, or crop selection by farmers. IID's operational activities are associated with irrigation, drainage, hydroelectric power, and energy services.

Irrigation

To deliver water to its service area, IID first diverts water from the Colorado River at Imperial Dam. This water is conveyed through the 82-mile AAC to three primary main canals. These primary canals (EHL, Central Main, and Westside Main) branch off the AAC as it moves across the southern portion of the Imperial Valley. The main canals supply water to numerous canals and laterals throughout IID's water service area. All canals and laterals are owned and operated by IID.

In total, IID operates and maintains a gravity flow water delivery system consisting of approximately 1,667 miles of main canals and lateral canals, including approximately 1,136 miles of concrete-lined canals, approximately 504 miles of unlined earthen canals and 27 miles of piped conveyance (IID 2019). To improve system efficiencies, IID currently uses 11 independent regulating reservoirs to level out the variability in water supply and demand. The supply of water must be ordered from Parker Dam one week in advance; the quantity is based on the estimated demand. Actual demand is affected by weather conditions.

In addition, lateral interceptor systems are in place to capture lateral operational discharge for reuse within the irrigation system, which conserves water and provides improved service to farmers. Each of these lateral interceptor systems discharges into one of the 11 aforementioned reservoirs. The captured discharge is used for water regulation and delivery purposes.

Drainage

IID's drainage operations include collection, conveyance, measurement, and discharge of drainage water through IID's main and lateral drain system to the New and Alamo Rivers and the Salton Sea. IID operates an extensive gravity flow agricultural drainage system consisting of 1,456 miles of earthen (1,334 miles), concrete lined (1 mile) and piped (121 miles) drains, 750 surface and subsurface drainage pumps, thousands of miles of subsurface drains (or tile drains) (which are

owned by Imperial Valley farmers), and associated collection pipelines and water recovery systems. As with the canal system, the drain system is composed of main and lateral drains.

1.2 BACKGROUND

This section provides the background and history of the Proposed Project, including an overview of the allocation of Colorado River water among water rights holders in California and the key LCR diversion facilities.

1.2.1 Colorado River

From its headwaters in the Rocky Mountains of Colorado, the Colorado River flows southwest for 1,470 miles to the Gulf of California in Mexico. It drains an area of approximately 242,000 square miles, and the river or its tributaries travel through parts of seven Colorado River Basin (Basin) states in the United States (U.S.). The Colorado River is also the international boundary between the U.S. and Mexico for approximately 17 miles between Arizona and Mexico. From the international boundary, it travels southward to form the boundary between the Mexican states of Baja California and Sonora before flowing into the Gulf of California.

The Upper Basin includes portions of Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming; the Lower Basin consists of portions of Arizona, California, Nevada, and New Mexico. The dividing point between the Upper and Lower Basins, as defined in the Colorado River Compact of 1922, is at Lee's Ferry, Arizona, approximately 17 miles downstream of Glen Canyon Dam.

Two reservoirs—Lake Powell (behind Glen Canyon Dam) in the Upper Basin and Lake Mead (behind Hoover Dam) in the Lower Basin—have a combined active storage capacity of approximately 51 million acre-feet. Additional facilities on the Colorado River with relevance to California include the Davis, Parker, Headgate Rock, Palo Verde, Imperial, and Laguna Dams. Palo Verde Dam serves as the Colorado River diversion structure for irrigated agriculture in eastern Riverside County, California, and the Imperial Dam serves as the Colorado River diversion structure for the AAC in California, which supplies water to IID, CVWD, and the Gila Gravity Main Canal in Arizona (IID 2002).

1.2.2 Quantification Settlement Agreement

In 1999, the California Colorado River Water Use Plan was drafted to outline the state's proposed plan to maintain its use of Colorado River water at 4.4 million acre-feet per year. Key components of the plan were used as the framework for the Quantification Settlement Agreement (QSA) completed in 2003. The QSA enabled California to implement major Colorado River water conservation and transfer programs, stabilizing water supplies for 75 years and reducing the state's demand on the Colorado River to its 4.4 million acre-foot

entitlement. The QSA includes water conservation/transfer and exchange projects among IID, including the San Diego County Water Authority (SDCWA), CVWD, and MWD. The QSA provides part of the mechanism for California to reduce its water diversions from the Colorado River in normal years to its apportioned amount of 4.4 acre-feet per year under the California Plan. The implementation of the QSA, which includes water conservation and water transfers from agricultural use to principally urban use, would result in a net reduction of Colorado River diversions to California from its historic use. The water agencies that are affected by the implementation of the QSA are the participating agencies: CVWD, IID, MWD, State of California, SDCWA, and U.S. Department of the Interior (SDCWA 2018). As implemented through the QSA, the IID to SDCWA transfer would be limited to 200,000 acre-feet per year with an additional up to 100,000 acre-feet per year transferred to CVWD or MWD.

1.3 CEQA/NEPA DOCUMENTATION RELATED TO THE PROJECT

This section describes closely related water resources management actions and programs affecting the allocation and distribution of Colorado River water. These actions and programs have undergone environmental review. Actions and programs listed below may contribute to cumulative impacts in combination with those of the Proposed Project; these are further assessed in Chapter 6, Other CEQA Considerations.

1.3.1 Water Conservation and Transfer Project and Habitat Conservation Plan EIR

IID certified an EIR for the Water Conservation and Transfer Project and Habitat Conservation Plan in 2002, which evaluated the environmental impacts from water conservation measures and transfer transaction together. The Water Conservation and Transfer Project would conserve and transfer up to 300,000 acre-feet per year of Colorado River water, from the IID water service area, which IID is otherwise entitled to divert for use within IID's water service area in Imperial County. The conserved water would be transferred by IID to SDCWA, CVWD, and/or MWD. The IID Water Conservation and Transfer Project and Habitat Conservation Plan Final EIR was amended with the Amended and Restated Addendum to the EIR for the IID Water Conservation and Transfer Project and Habitat Conservation Plan approved in 2003. In 2008, IID prepared a Supplement to the Final EIR that provided additional environmental assessment required to implement the managed marsh complex required by permits and approvals for the Water Conservation and Transfer Project and Habitat Conservation Plan.

1.3.2 Program EIR for the Implementation of the Colorado River Quantification Settlement Agreement

The QSA authorizes a number of diverse programs and activities, including the Water Conservation and Transfer Project. IID, MWD, CVWD, and SDCWA are the co-lead agencies for

the preparation, in accordance with CEQA, of the QSA Program EIR (PEIR) (IID 2002). The QSA PEIR is a programmatic assessment of the environmental effects of implementation of the QSA by these California water agencies and provides an overall assessment of the multiple projects included in the QSA.

This Draft EIR will assess, at a project level, the effects of the Proposed Project that would conserve allocated LCR water and manage delivery thereof, within the IID water service area. Water conservation and water management is consistent with the goals and intent of both the Water Conservation and Transfer Project and Habitat Conservation Plan and the QSA. The Water Conservation and Transfer Project and Habitat Conservation Plan EIR evaluated project-level impacts of implementation regarding the effects of a change in the point of diversion on the Colorado River in order to transfer conserved water to SDCWA or MWD, and the effects of receipt and use of conserved water by SDCWA within the SDCWA Service Area. The effects of receipt and use by MWD within the MWD service area of conserved water transferred from IID to MWD were assessed at a programmatic level in the Water Conservation and Transfer Project and Habitat Conservation Plan EIR. A project-level assessment of MWD's receipt and use of transferred water is set forth in the QSA PEIR.

1.3.3 AAC Surface Water Seepage Recovery Project Draft MND

IID has a substantial seepage recovery program from main system laterals within the IID service area that are currently producing approximately 35,000 acre-feet of conserved water annually. IID began seepage recovery along the AAC in 1947, along the EHL Canal in 1967, and has been expanding these projects to meet QSA/Transfer Agreements obligations since 2009. There are 19 seepage recovery systems situated on the EHL Canal and three more currently in development. There is an additional seepage recovery pump located off the AAC and two others that are situated on the Westside Main Canal. IID has identified additional areas of seepage recovery opportunities that are emanating from the earthen sections of the AAC between Drop 3 and Drop 4. IID has proposed the development of up to nine shallow surface water seepage recovery wells to recover AAC water seeping from unlined portions of the canal. Based on the collected monitoring data and the modeling effort, there is the potential to conserve 30,000–35,000 acre-feet of additional seepage between Drop 3 and Drop 4. The AAC Surface Water Seepage Recovery Project would target recovery of those near surface seepage waters (with depths from 0 to approximately 180 feet) rather than groundwater (with depths of approximately 200 feet or greater). Water would be pumped up at the wells and conveyed northerly through pipelines to the existing drain which feeds back into the AAC. The primary goal would be to recover up to 22,000 net acre-feet annually of shallow subsurface seepage waters.

1.4 OTHER PROPOSED PROJECTS RELATED TO RESOURCES AFFECTED BY THE PROPOSED PROJECT

Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program

The LCR Multi-Species Conservation Program (LCR MSCP) is a partnership of state, federal, tribal, and other public and private stakeholders with an interest in managing the water and related resources of the LCR Basin. The purposes of the LCR MSCP are as follows:

- Conserve habitat and work toward the recovery of covered species within the historic floodplain of the LCR, pursuant to the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA), and reduce the likelihood of additional species listings under the ESA.
- Accommodate current water diversions and power production and optimize opportunities for future water and power development, to the extent consistent with law.
- Provide the basis for federal ESA and California ESA compliance via incidental take authorizations resulting from the implementation of the first two purposes.

The LCR MSCP covers the mainstream of the LCR from below Glen Canyon Dam to the southerly international boundary with Mexico. Conservation measures focus on the LCR from Lake Mead to the international boundary. The comprehensive program is planned to be implemented over a 50-year period. It addresses future federal agency consultation needs under Section 7 of the federal ESA and non-federal agency needs for approval of incidental take authorization for endangered species under federal ESA Section 10. The LCR MSCP provides long-term federal ESA and California ESA compliance and incidental take authorization for a number of actions affecting the LCR. Reclamation is the implementing agency of the LCR MSCP. The actions covered by the LCR MSCP on a long-term basis include changes in the point of diversion of up to 1.574 acre-feet per year of Colorado River water.

1.5 PROJECT APPROVALS

This Draft EIR was prepared to meet environmental compliance requirements for federal, state and local agencies. IID is acting as the lead agency for CEQA compliance, and Reclamation is the lead agency for National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) compliance. The lead agencies have directed and supervised the preparation of this Draft EIR and its associated Environmental Assessment (EA) (Appendix A), and have independently evaluated the respective information and findings. Although IID is the agency preparing the environmental documentation and responsible for construction, operation, and maintenance of the Proposed Action, Reclamation is considered the lead agency for NEPA because Reclamation has the authority to make permitting and project approvals.

This environmental process includes a public comment period, during which the public is asked to supply the lead agency with comments on this Draft EIR. During the public comment period, public meetings and/or hearings will be held so that the lead agency can receive the public's oral and written comments. Once the public comment period closes, the lead agency will consider and respond to the comments and produce a Final EIR. Each of the lead and/or responsible agencies described below will review the Final EIR prior to taking action on the project. The federal, state, and local permits and authorizations required for the project are further described below.

1.5.1 Federal

In order to implement the Proposed Project, the following federal agency permits and approvals are required:

- **Implementation Agreement for Construction and Operation.** Reclamation is requested to issue IID an Implementation Agreement (IA) to allow for construction and operation of an intake channel conveying water from the AAC to a proposed operational water storage reservoir and associated access facilities.
- **Federal Endangered Species Act Consultation.** Prior to issuing an IA, Reclamation will consult with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to determine whether the Proposed Project could adversely affect threatened or endangered plants or wildlife.
- **National Historic Preservation Act Section 106 Consultation.** Prior to issuing an IA, Reclamation will consult with the California State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) to determine whether the Proposed Action could adversely affect cultural or historic resources.

1.5.2 State

To implement the Proposed Project, the following state agency permits and approvals are required:

- **Section 1602 Streambed Alteration Agreement.** At the time that construction is proposed, a Streambed Alteration Agreement would be requested from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), consistent with Section 1602 of the Fish and Game Code to authorize construction across the 0.4 acres of CDFW wetlands.
- **Section 402 NPDES Certification.** IID shall apply for a Clean Water Act 402 Permit issued by the California Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB) for all project-related disturbances of waters of the state and/or associated wetlands.
- **Encroachment Permit.** The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) is requested to issue an Encroachment Permit for intake channel crossing under State Route 98 (SR-98) and authorize a temporary detour of SR-98.

1.5.3 Local

To implement the Proposed Project, the following local agency permits and approvals are required:

- **Imperial County Air Pollution Control District Permit.** The Imperial County Air Pollution Control District (ICAPCD) is requested to issue approval of authority to construct and/or permits to operate and to issue approval of a Dust Control Plan.
- **Imperial County Vacation of Roadway.** The Imperial County Public Works Department (ICPWD) is requested to issue a ROW abandonment for a section of Holdridge Road which currently runs through the Proposed Project site.
- **Imperial County Design/Construction Permit for Roadway Realignment.** The ICPWD is requested to approve design, permit construction and accept new ROW associated with the realignment of Holdridge Road.

1.6 CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

1.6.1 Agency Coordination and Consultation

IID coordinated with federal, state, and local agencies and Native American Tribes during preparation of this Draft EIR; potential concerns have been identified, addressed, and assessed. Ongoing coordination with identified agencies facilitated the environmental review and the approval and permitting process for the Proposed Project. As appropriate, consultation with agencies and Native American Tribes continues. The types of agencies included in the coordination and consultation activities are:

- Agencies and other interested parties that have jurisdiction over the Proposed Project by law.
- Agencies and other interested parties that have special expertise on the environmental issues that should be addressed in the Draft EIR.
- Agencies that are defined as Cooperating Agencies (40 CFR 1508.5) under NEPA or Responsible Agencies (40 CFR 15381) or Trustee Agencies (40 CFR 15386) under CEQA in relation to the Project.
- Federally recognized Native American Tribes whose interests may be affected by the Project.

The following lists the specific agencies that are considered Cooperating and Responsible Agencies for the purposes of this Draft EIR.

Cooperating Agencies

- U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation)

Responsible Agencies

- County of Imperial (County)
- State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB)
- Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB)
- California Department of Transportation (Caltrans)
- California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW)
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFW)

1.6.2 Public Scoping

The scoping process for the Proposed Project was designed to solicit input on the issues related to the project description, the scope of the impact analysis, and the project alternatives to be assessed in the Draft EIR from (1) the public; (2) federal, state, and local agencies; and (3) other interested parties. The CEQA Notice of Preparation was published by the California State Clearinghouse January 30, 2019, and the scoping period lasted until March 1, 2019.

Four comment letters were received by the District.

- Steven Quinn, on behalf of the Native American Heritage Commission (NAHC), submitted a letter dated February 12, 2019, recommending consultation with California Native American Tribes that are traditionally and culturally affiliated with the geographic area of the Proposed Project.
- The Imperial County Planning and Development Services Department submitted a letter dated February 28, 2019, regarding the project's land use, applicable permits, requesting a site plan detailing driveways for maintenance, concerns regarding aesthetics and biological resources.
- Chief Sharon Tapia, on behalf of the Department of Water Resources, Division of Safety of Dams, submitted a letter dated February 28, 2019, stating that the proposed single cell reservoir meets the criteria for a dam in accordance with Section 6002 and 6003 of the California Water Code.
- Melina Pereira, on behalf of the California Department of Transportation, District 11 Office, submitted a letter dated March 22, 2019, regarding discretionary review of any work performed within Caltrans ROW and recommended early coordination.

1.7 PROJECT SUMMARY

The potential effects of the Proposed Project are evaluated for the following resources in this Draft EIR:

- Aesthetics
- Air Quality
- Biological Resources
- Cultural Resources
- Hazards and Hazardous Materials
- Hydrology and Water Quality
- Land Use and Planning
- Noise

Refer to Table ES-2 for a summary, by resource area, of the potential effects for each component of the Proposed Project.

1.8 DRAFT EIR ORGANIZATION AND CONTENTS

The environmental setting, including the project's location, existing site conditions, and surrounding land uses is described in Chapter 2 of this EIR. The Proposed Project and the schedule for its implementation are described in detail in Chapter 3 of this EIR. The existing setting, environmental impacts of the Proposed Project, project alternatives, and mitigation measures for potentially significant effects are described in Chapters 4 and 5 for each resource considered. Other long-term CEQA considerations, including growth-inducing impacts, cumulative impacts, and significant irreversible environmental changes, are discussed in Chapter 6. Project alternatives, including alternatives eliminated from consideration and the No Project Alternative, are considered in Chapter 7. The remaining sections include references and a list of preparers.

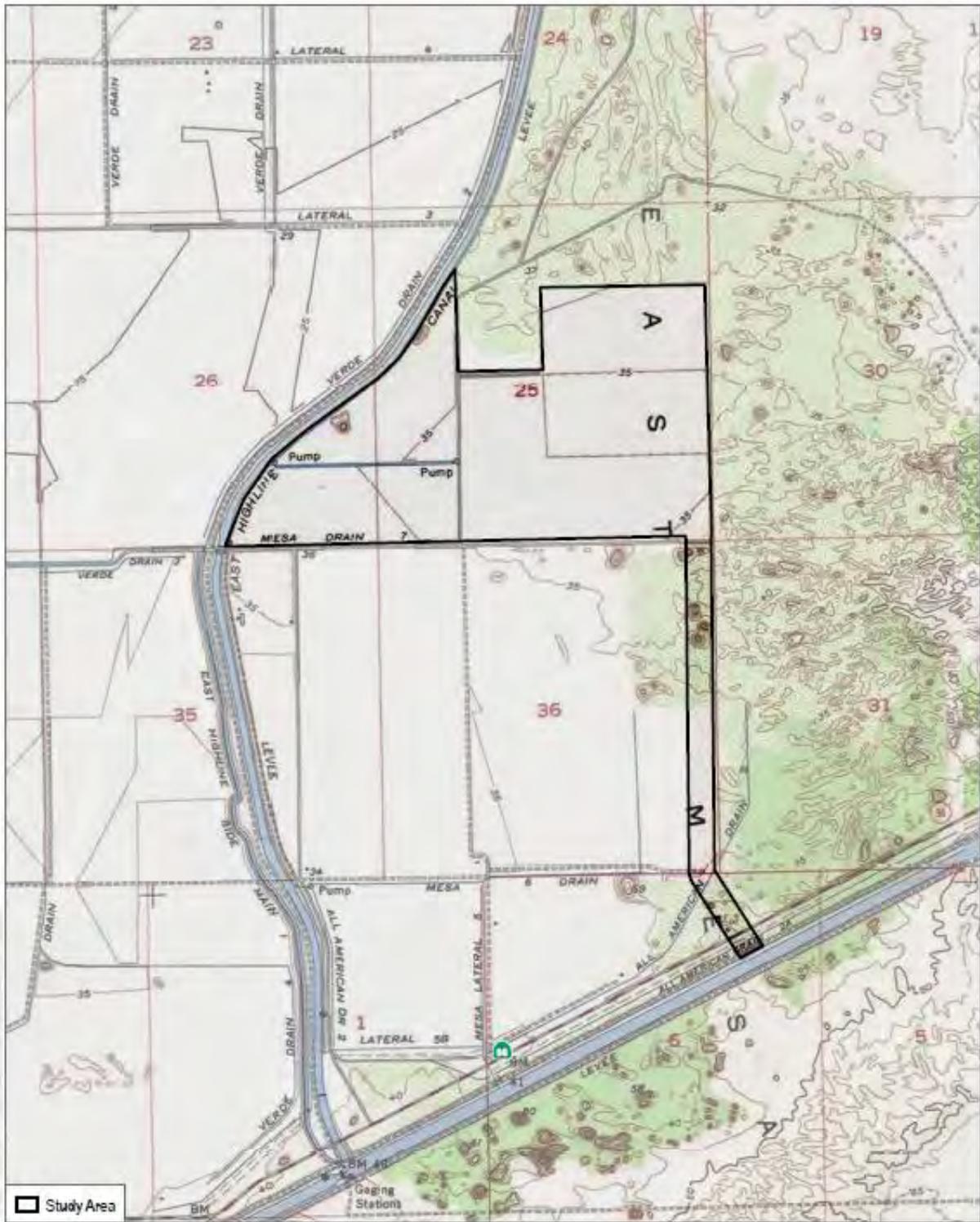


FIGURE 1-1

Project Location

East Highline Reservoir and Intake Channel Project

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SOURCE: SOURCE: USGS 7.5-Minute Series Bonds Corner Quadrangle



FIGURE 1-2

Vicinity Map

East Highline Reservoir and Intake Channel Project

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