

August 1, 2016

CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION

TO ALL INTERESTED AGENCIES AND PUBLIC GROUPS:

Consistent with the state environmental review process adopted in the permanent rules of the Texas Water Development Board (TWDB) for projects funded through the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (DWSRF) Program, specifically 31 Texas Administrative Code (TAC) Chapter 371, Subchapter E, and with the terms and conditions of the National Environmental Policy Act, 42 U.S. Code § 4321, *et seq.*, the Executive Administrator of the TWDB has determined that the proposed action identified below may be exempted from further environmental review requirements:

City of Winters, Runnels County, Texas
Alternative Water Supply Project
DWSRF, TWDB Project Number 62623
Total TWDB Commitment: \$603,500 (L1000255, LF1000256)
Total Amount of Loan Forgiveness: \$178,500

The City of Winters (City) provides potable water for its 4,806 residents. Currently, the City's sole water source is surface water withdrawn from the Elm Creek Reservoir, also known as Lake Winters. Water levels in this reservoir have declined to critical stages in recent years, reaching Stages 2 (moderate) and 3 (severe) levels. Because the lake levels have been chronically low, the City is uncertain whether it can continue to fulfill demand and/or to meet future needs without procuring additional raw-water supplies.

To address this concern, the City sought and received DWSRF funding from the TWDB. On June 18, 2014, the City obtained a commitment of \$603,500, comprising a \$425,000 loan (L1000255) and a loan with forgiveness in the amount of \$178,500 (LF1000256). These funds were to be used for planning, design, and acquisition.

After considering alternatives, the City had originally planned to develop an additional water source by rehabilitating one or more existing irrigation wells at a site east or southeast of the community and constructing the infrastructure needed to produce and utilize the groundwater. This plan proved infeasible when the City was not able to obtain a permit to utilize the groundwater in a timely manner, causing the City to seek a different solution.

The City now proposes to meet its needs by improving raw-water transmission, contact treatment, and storage, and reducing losses from its existing supply of surface water. The required project elements include:

- 1) Replacing an existing 0.4 million gallon clearwell with a ground storage tank of equal size at the City's water treatment plant and demolishing the old clearwell.
- 2) Replacing a 16-inch raw-water valve.

- 3) Improving the disinfectant injection equipment and vault.
- 4) Replacing existing air-relief valves on the raw-water transmission line.

The TWDB staff reviewed the potential environmental impact of the proposed water system improvements and determined that they would have minimal adverse effect, thus qualifying for Categorical Exclusion (CE) from full environmental review. Historically, the entire project area was cleared of natural vegetation and remained under cultivation until the community expanded to its current extent. Subsequent construction of the existing water treatment facility and transmission line resulted in further disturbance, but the proposed improvements would not increase treatment capacity or change the type and level of treatment. The effects of construction would be localized and temporary, comparable to that of previous maintenance activities.

None of the proposed construction would affect protected natural or cultural resources, significantly impair the human environment, or disproportionately impact any racial or economic group within the community. Although the existing transmission pipeline crosses several streams, none of the proposed construction sites are in proximity. Therefore, the project would not affect: 1) streams, wetlands, or other Waters of the United States under the jurisdiction of the United States Army Corps of Engineers; or 2) floodplains under the administrative authority of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, which has not mapped flood-hazard areas in the City. Similarly, the proposed installations are not expected to impact endangered, threatened, or rare species or their habitats as recognized by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service or the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. Examination of the Texas Historical Commission's Archeological Sites Atlas indicates there are no known archeological or historical sites within the proposed project area or nearby, and construction at sites of previous disturbance is not likely to affect any significant or potentially significant cultural resources that are yet unknown. Based on these assessments, the TWDB staff has concluded that the proposed project should not entail significant adverse impact.

On the basis of this review, the Executive Administrator of the TWDB has issued this Categorical Exclusion. Documentation supporting this determination is on file at the TWDB.

This determination shall be revoked if it is found that:

- (1) the proposed improvements no longer meet the requirements for a Categorical Exclusion as a result of changes in the project;
- (2) the project involves or results in extraordinary circumstances as described in 31 TAC Chapter 371, Subchapter E; or
- (3) the project violates or may violate federal, state, local, or tribal laws.

The project also must comply with the following conditions:

- Standard emergency condition for the discovery of cultural resources; and
- Standard emergency condition for the discovery of threatened or endangered species.

Comments regarding this determination may be submitted to the Director of Regional Water Planning and Development, Texas Water Development Board, P.O. Box 13231, Austin, Texas 78711-3231.

Sincerely,

Clay Schultz, Director
Regional Water Planning and Development

SCC/CS:

Attachments



