REGION 9

SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94105

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Wastewater Collection and Treatment System Rehabilitation for the City of Naco, Sonora, Mexico January 2024

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region 9 intends to authorize an award of funds from the Border Environment Infrastructure Fund (BEIF) to the City of Naco, Sonora, Mexico for the rehabilitation of the wastewater collection system, improvements to the wastewater treatment plant and effluent disposal system, and debris removal in the West Creek. All components are located in the City of Naco, Sonora, Mexico.

EPA Region 9's authorization of funds for the proposed project is a federal action requiring compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), 42 USC §§4321-4370f. In accordance with NEPA, Council of Environmental Quality Regulations at 40 CFR §§1500.1–1508.28, and EPA NEPA regulations at 40 CFR Part 6, EPA Region 9 has prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA) describing the potential environmental impacts associated with, and the alternatives to, the proposed project. This Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) documents EPA Region 9's decision that the proposed project will not have a significant effect on the environment.

Project Location and Description

The City of Naco is in the northeastern area of the Mexican State of Sonora. It is adjacent to the international border and directly south of the City of Naco, Arizona in the U.S. The city limits are Agua Prieta to the east, Bacoachi to the south, and Cananea to the west.

The project consists of rehabilitation of the wastewater collection system, improvements to the wastewater treatment plant and effluent disposal system, and debris removal in the West Creek. The rehabilitation of the collection system includes replacement of wastewater collection system pipes that are past their useful life in the northern part of the city, adjacent to the U.S.-Mexico border. The wastewater treatment plant improvements consist of installation of a new preliminary treatment unit that includes a screen, a grit chamber, and a raw water pumping station; dredging of the first two lagoons to improve their function; installation of baffles to improve pollutant removal efficiency; stabilization of the lagoon banks; and installation of new pumps at the pump stations. Pressure relief valves would be installed along the effluent disposal pipeline to protect against system failures and debris removal in the West Creek would prevent future blockages of the wastewater collection system. The project will help protect public health and the environment on both sides of the border.

Purpose and Need for Proposed Project

The proposed action will improve the wastewater collection, wastewater treatment, and effluent disposal systems and will result in mitigation of transboundary flows entering the United States. It will also improve sanitary conditions on both sides of the border by reducing the discharge of untreated and inadequately treated wastewater.

Fugitive transboundary sanitary sewer overflows (SSOs) from the Naco, Sonora wastewater system have affected both sides of the border for decades. The Naco, Sonora collection system and lagoon treatment systems are undersized for current flows and surcharge during wet weather. SSOs drain to the north and west toward Naco, Arizona, and since December 2016, raw sewage has flowed intermittently from Naco, Sonora, into Naco, Arizona. Naco Sonora's sewer lines and collectors have deteriorated, and there has been significant inflow and infiltration into the system, especially during major rainstorms, resulting in overflows of raw sewage or inadequately treated wastewater across the international boundary.

In preparing the EA, EPA examined two alternatives, the No-Action alternative and the proposed alternative. Under the No-Action alternative, no construction activities will take place. The proposed alternative includes replacement of the failing wastewater collection system lines, improvements to the lagoon wastewater treatment plant and effluent disposal systems, and removal of debris from the West Creek. These actions include improvements that were identified through a diagnostic study that was conducted to analyze long-term solutions to transboundary flows. The proposed alternative was selected based upon engineering feasibility, compliance with regulatory requirements, preliminary cost estimates, and environmental considerations.

Environmental Consequences

After carefully considering the regulatory, environmental (both natural and human) and socio-economic factors as described in the EA, EPA Region 9 has not identified any significant impacts to the environment that would result from the implementation of the proposed project.

Public Review

EPA made the EA and FONSI available for public review through January 13, 2024, on the internet at https://www.epa.gov/small-and-rural-wastewater-systems/us-mexico-border-water-infrastructure-grant-program-public. Notice of the public comment period was published in the *Bisbee Observer* on December 14, 2023.

EPA did not receive any comments on the EA and unsigned FONSI prior to the close of the public comment period on January 13, 2024.

Finding

Based on the information contained in the EA, and after opportunity for public comment, EPA has determined the proposed project will not result in significant impacts to the environment and an environmental impact statement is not required.

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1/17/24

Date