

March 21, 2007

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

TO ALL INTERESTED GOVERNMENT AGENCIES AND PUBLIC GROUPS:

In accordance with the environmental review guidelines of the Council on Environmental Quality found at 40 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Part 1500, and with the use of the implementing environmental review procedures of the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) found at 40 CFR Part 6 entitled "Procedures for Implementing the Requirements of the Council on Environmental Quality on the National Environmental Policy Act" as guidance, the EPA has performed an environmental review of the following proposed action:

Drinking Water Line Construction Project
proposed by the City of Meridian
located in Bosque County, Texas

EPA Project Numbers: XP-986997-01-0, XP-976318-01-0,
XP-976593-01-0, XP-966321-01-0

Estimated EPA Share: \$2,065,800
Estimated Local Share: \$1,690,200

The Fiscal Year 2001, 2002, 2003, and 2004 Appropriations Acts for the EPA included special Congressional funding for water and wastewater construction projects. The City of Meridian (City) was selected to receive funding support through these special appropriations for the construction of a new drinking water line to transport treated drinking water from the City of Clifton, which is located approximately 13 miles southeast of Meridian. The City of Meridian currently supplies all of its water needs from three groundwater wells pumping water from the Travis Peak Formation of the Trinity Aquifer situated under the area. However, the overall increase in the amount of water withdrawn by all users of the aquifer, compared to the rate at which the groundwater replenishes, has resulted in a decline of 8 to 10 feet per year in the City's wells over the past several decades. During an extended drought, it is predicted that the City will be unable to supply the necessary drinking water to meet the needs of the citizens living in the area.

The City of Meridian will purchase treated drinking water from Clifton, and will construct a new 6-inch water transmission line approximately 12.5 miles in length to transport the purchased water between the two cities. As part of the overall project, the City will install and construct all necessary pump stations, appurtenant pipelines, a storage tank, and a blending tank to blend the newly purchased treated water from Clifton with water from the three

groundwater wells currently in use in Meridian. The City will utilize special Congressional

funding support in conjunction with local funds to finance the proposed construction project.

The environmental review process, which is documented by the enclosed Environmental Assessment, indicates that no potential significant adverse environmental impacts are anticipated from the proposed action. The project individually, cumulatively over time, or in conjunction with other actions is not expected to have a significant adverse effect on the quality of the environment. On the basis of the environmental review determination that there are not any predicted or cumulative significant adverse impacts expected with the project, I have determined that the project is not a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment, and that preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement is not necessary. My preliminary decision is based upon the enclosed Environmental Assessment, a careful review of the Environmental Information Document prepared for the project, the results of the public participation process, and other supporting data which are on file in the office listed below and available for public review upon request. Therefore, I am issuing this preliminary Finding of No Significant Impact pertaining to the project.

Comments supporting or disagreeing with my preliminary decision may be submitted for consideration to the attention of the Office of Planning and Coordination (6EN-XP), Environmental Protection Agency, 1445 Ross Avenue, Dallas, Texas 75202-2733. After evaluating any comments received, the EPA will make a final decision. No administrative action will be taken on this preliminary decision for at least 30 calendar days after release of this Finding of No Significant Impact. The preliminary decision and finding will then become final after the 30-day comment period expires if no new significant information is provided to alter this finding.

Responsible Official,

John Blevins
Director
Compliance Assurance and
Enforcement Division

Enclosure

cc: Clark Vandergriff, Mayor
City of Meridian

Kevin Ward, Executive Administrator
Texas Water Development Board

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

DRINKING WATER LINE CONSTRUCTION PROJECT
proposed by the CITY of MERIDIAN
located in BOSQUE COUNTY, TEXAS

BACKGROUND

The City of Meridian (City) is located in Bosque County, which is in the north central portion of the state approximately 50 miles southwest of Fort Worth. The City currently supplies all of its drinking water needs from three groundwater wells pumping water from the Travis Peak Formation of the Trinity Aquifer situated under the area. Due to the overall increase in the amount of water withdrawn by all users of the aquifer, compared to the rate at which the groundwater replenishes, the City has experienced a decline of 8 to 10 feet per year in the three wells over the past several decades. During an extended drought, it is predicted that the City will be unable to supply the necessary drinking water to meet the needs of the citizens living in the area.

Due to the population growth and the increase in water demands on the Trinity Aquifer, the City is experiencing increasing water demands with decreasing water supplies. As evidenced by the annual decline in the water level within the aquifer, the City has an increasing difficulty in supplying its water needs even in a normal or average year. In response to the declining water supplies in the area, the Brazos River Authority conducted an evaluation of the regional water needs for Bosque County, including viable alternatives for future water supplies. The final report was issued in March 2004, and is known as the Bosque County Regional Plan. The study and the report were a joint effort with The Texas Water Development Board, the City of Meridian, and the City of Clifton. Based upon the report's evaluation of the County's future water needs, Meridian further evaluated the option of purchasing treated surface water from Clifton, and transporting the water to Meridian. The City of Meridian has decided to proceed with the project, which is known locally as the Treated Water Delivery System, and has proposed the construction of a new water transportation line to deliver water to the residents in the area. The City will utilize special Congressional funding support in conjunction with local funds to finance the proposed project. The project area is shown on the map enclosed as Figures 2-1 and 2-2.

The proposed project is considered to be a Federal action requiring compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). In accordance with the environmental review requirements of the Council on Environmental Quality found at 40 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Part 1500, and with the use of the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) implementing regulations found at 40 CFR Part 6 entitled "Procedures for Implementing the Requirements of the Council on Environmental Quality on the National Environmental Policy Act" as guidance, the EPA is preparing this Environmental Assessment to assist in determining the environmental impacts of the proposed action, and in evaluating whether an Environmental Impact Statement or a Finding of No Significant Impact will be prepared for the proposed project.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The new drinking water transportation line, known locally as the Treated Water Distribution System, will be approximately 12.5 miles in length and will transport the purchased water between the cities. This additional water supply from Clifton will not only provide a new and reliable source of water to Meridian, but it will also help slow the excessive depletion of the Trinity Aquifer. Various components of the construction project will include the following:

1. The transmission line and a pump station;
2. Blending tank to mix the treated surface water from Clifton with the existing groundwater from Meridian;
3. Collection system to convey groundwater from Meridian's three existing wells to the proposed blending tank; and
4. Booster pump to deliver blended water into Meridian's distribution system.

All facilities for the proposed project will be located within or adjacent to existing city-owned property or roadway rights of way owned by the Texas Department of Transportation. Construction of the facilities will not alter the current use of the land, since the pump station is within the City of Clifton, the blending tank and booster pump are located within the City of Meridian, and the water transmission line will be constructed within a utility easement dedicated to Meridian. The overall improvements will be located within previously disturbed areas, and will provide a safe and dependable source of drinking water for the citizens in Meridian.

ALTERNATIVES TO THE PROPOSED PROJECT

The funding recipient evaluated and considered a range of various alternatives to address the infrastructure needs of the area. Important factors influencing the evaluation of the processes and their recommended solutions include environmental acceptability, overall costs, availability of land for the intended uses, maximum reuse of existing facilities when applicable, operation and maintenance costs, system reliability, accommodation of future expansion needs, and public acceptance. A complete description of the alternatives is provided in the Environmental Information Document developed and provided by the funding recipient for the project.

ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

The topography in the area is characterized by gently rolling hills, and has a humid subtropical climate noted by hot summers. The area is located in the Edwards Plateau physiographic region of Texas, also known as the Hill Country. The area has a low lying valley with an agriculture landscape and sporadic woodlands. Soils types in the area are generally clay and clay loam. The City is located on the east bank of the North Bosque River, which flows generally south to southeast towards Clifton. Meridian owns water rights in the North Bosque River amounting to 1,336 acre-feet per year (1.9 million gallons per day), however facilities have not been developed by the City of utilize the water.

Within Bosque County, groundwater sources are primarily from the Travis Peak Formation of the Trinity Aquifer. There are several other formations within the aquifer, but the Hosston Sand Member within the Travis Peak Formation is the water bearing level located

approximately 700 feet below the surface. As previously stated, the City has experienced annual declines of 8 to 10 feet within the three groundwater wells currently used by the City to supply its drinking water needs. Similar declines have been reported by other users of the aquifer, which indicates that the aquifer is being over drawn and will not be able to sustain future combined water demands from all water users.

The City has a current population of approximately 1,500 residents, and is expected to have a population of approximately 1,900 residents by the year 2030. Development of the proposed project will be consistent with applicable zoning ordinances within the city limits, and will not affect the current land use plan developed by the City. Since the transmission line will be placed within utility easements and city owned rights of way along local roads, the current use of the properties for transportation and agriculture will remain unchanged. There has been little or no change in land use since the 1940s since both cities are well established. The City provides basic services to the local citizens including police and fire protection, and water and wastewater service. The benefits, costs and impacts of the project will be shared equally by all citizens.

IMPACTS OF THE PROPOSED PROJECT

The proposed project was analyzed to identify potential short-term, long-term, and cumulative impacts on the environment. Factors that were considered include the probability of impact occurrence, magnitude of any occurrence, if any predicted occurrence is determined to be reversible/irreversible, direct/indirect or one-time/cumulative, the proposed action's conformity to legal mandates, and the social distribution of risks and benefits. The proposed project is not expected to have a substantial negative impact upon current land uses or land values, nor is it anticipated to have a substantial impact upon the values of surrounding land holdings. The proposed action is expected to have energy requirements typical of other construction projects of similar scope, size and duration, and will be conducted in accordance with the requirements of all local and state regulations.

The majority of the impacts associated with the proposed project will be short-term and temporary due to actual construction activities, and will cease immediately upon completion of construction work in any particular area. There are not any anticipated significant adverse environmental impacts associated with the proposed action that cannot be reduced to acceptable levels. The only irretrievable resources committed to this project are labor, machinery wear, materials, funds spent, and energy consumed during construction. The potential short and long-term, direct, indirect and cumulative impacts resulting from the proposed action are identified and discussed below.

1. Biological Resources Including Threatened and Endangered Species: Based upon initial coordination with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD), construction of the proposed project should not have significant adverse impacts to biological resources. The funding recipient is responsible for continued coordination with the USFWS and the TDPW to insure that protected species and their

designated habitat in the area will not be adversely impacted by construction.

2. Cultural/Historic Resources: Based upon initial coordination with the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO), construction of the proposed project should not have significant adverse impacts to archaeological, historical, architectural, or cultural resources. The funding recipient is responsible for continued coordination with the SHPO to insure that protected species and their designated habitat in the area will not be adversely impacted by construction. If cultural materials are encountered during construction, work will stop immediately in the general area of the discovery, and the funding recipient will immediately notify the SHPO of the discovery.
3. Floodplain: Based upon coordination with the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the local Floodplain Administrator, construction of the proposed project should not have significant adverse impacts to the floodplain.
4. Wetlands: Based upon initial coordination with the United States Army Corps of Engineers (COE), construction of the proposed project should not have significant adverse impacts to designated protected wetlands within the project construction area. The funding recipient is responsible for continued coordination with the COE, and must obtain and abide by any/all necessary permits to insure that designated wetlands in the area will not be adversely impacted by construction.

In order to further protect the natural beneficial functions of the floodplain and wetlands, and to minimize the potential flood hazards to life and property, the construction funding is conditioned to read:

- a. The recipient agrees not to collect or treat wastewater generated by new development in the floodplain or wetlands by the project facilities for a period of 50 years from the date of the environmental assessment related to this project. This restriction does not apply to development in the floodplain or wetlands which existed prior to that date;
- b. The recipient agrees to adopt and enforce suitable ordinances and implementing procedures for effective local administration of this floodplain and wetlands service area restriction. On application of the recipient's governing body and after considering all relevant information on a proposed development's effects on the natural functions and values of the affected floodplain and wetlands, the EPA Regional Administrator may waive the service area restriction in individual cases; and
- c. EPA and the recipient intend that this floodplain and wetlands service area restriction shall benefit any person, organization, or entity possessing an interest in preservation of the natural environment in the 100-year floodplain and wetlands subject to this restriction. Any such beneficiary may seek enforcement of the restriction against the recipient or its successor in a court of competent jurisdiction, if notice of the intent to seek enforcement is first given to the recipient and the EPA Region 6, and neither entity initiates corrective action within 90 days of receiving such notice.

5. **Surface Water Resources:** Based upon initial coordination with the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ), construction of the proposed project should not have significant adverse impacts to surface water resources. The funding recipient is responsible for continued coordination with the TCEQ, and must obtain and abide by any/all necessary permits to insure that surface water resources in the area will not be adversely impacted by the construction.
6. **Ground Water Resources:** Based upon coordination with the TCEQ and the EPA Region 6 Ground Water Section, construction of the proposed project should not have significant adverse impacts to groundwater resources.
7. **Prime and Unique Farmlands:** Based upon coordination with the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), the construction area may contain soils classified as Important Farmland. However, the NRCS does not consider pipelines to be a conversion of the land since the property can still be used after construction. Therefore, construction of the proposed project should not have significant adverse impacts to protected soils or farmlands.
8. **Air Quality:** Based upon coordination with the TCEQ and the EPA Region 6 Air Planning Section, construction of the proposed project should not have significant adverse impacts to air quality. The proposed project is located in an attainment area, which is in compliance with the National Ambient Air Quality Standards for all criteria air pollutants. All vehicles and equipment used in the construction of this project must comply with Federal regulations concerning the control of air pollution from mobile sources. Adherence to these recommendations will insure that construction of the proposed project should not have significant adverse impacts to air quality.
9. **Environmental Justice:** The project was reviewed to ensure that construction will be conducted in an appropriate manner so that all persons and populations are served equally by the infrastructure improvements. Based upon the results of an evaluation to rank the potential environmental impacts to local communities using a computer-assisted mathematical formula, including Geographical Information System maps and census demographic data, no persons or populations will be discriminated against or denied the benefits of the proposed project. Since all persons and populations will be served equally by the project, there will be no adverse impacts that are considered disproportionate to any particular portion of the population.
10. **Coastal and Barrier Resources:** Since the entire project planning area is located inland and not adjacent to any coastal location, construction of the proposed project should not have significant adverse impacts to coastal and barrier resources.
11. **Cumulative Impacts:** Potential cumulative impacts would be those impacts to the local environment that would result from the proposed project in combination with other ongoing actions, and those reasonably foreseeable future actions. No other major construction activity is being conducted presently or planned for the immediate future. The proposed project will not individually nor cumulatively over time have a negative impact on the quality of the human or natural environment.

DOCUMENTATION, COORDINATION, AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

A public hearing for the proposed project was held on August 14, 2006, at the Meridian Fire Station located at 110 Bateman. All necessary information related to the project was available for public review and comment at the Meridian City Hall and the Meridian Public Library prior to the hearing. The project was discussed during several meetings of the Meridian City Council during 2005 and 2006. The purpose of the hearing was to inform the public of the proposed project, to identify any concerns, and to request public participation. The project is supported by the community, and no adverse public comments or concerns were received.

During the process of conducting the environmental review and preparing this Environmental Assessment for the project, coordination has been conducted with all required resource protection agencies and offices to solicit and incorporate their initial review and comments. Copies of this Environmental Assessment will be provided to those agencies and offices for their final review and comments. Other interested parties may request a copy of the Environmental Assessment in writing from the EPA, Office of Planning and Coordination (6EN-XP), 1445 Ross Avenue, Dallas, Texas 75202-2733.

References

1. Environmental Information Document, Treated Water Delivery System, City of Meridian, August 2006; and
2. Facilities Plan, Treated Water Delivery System, City of Meridian, August 2006.

RECOMMENDATION

Based upon completion of this Environmental Assessment, and a detailed review of the Environmental Information Document for the project, it has been determined that construction activities are considered to be environmentally sound. Therefore, it is recommended that a Finding of No Significant Impact be issued for this project.