Notice of Exemption

To:
Office of Planning and Research
P.O. Box 3044, Room 113
Sacramento, CA 95812-3044

From:
Grassland Water District
200 W. Willmott Avenue
Los Banos, CA 93635

Project Title: CVPIA Refuge Water Supply Contracts - GWD

Project Applicant: Grassland Water District (GWD)

Project Location: Merced County, California

Project Description: This project is for the renewal of a Central Valley Project Improvement Act (CVPIA) Refuge Water Supply Contracts that will deliver CVPIA refuge water supplies to the Grassland Resource Conservation District in Merced County, California. The Contracts extend for an additional 25-year period of refuge water deliveries through existing facilities as required by federal statute for the mitigation of environmental impacts by the Central Valley Project. These water supplies are used to provide wetland habitat to support wetland-dependent wildlife species.

Public Agency Approving Project: Grassland Water District

Person or Public Agency Carrying out Project: Grassland Water District

Exempt Status:

☒ Categorical Exemption. California Code of Regulations, Title 14, sections 15301, 15307, and 15308, Class 1, 7, and 8

Reasons why project is exempt: See attachment.

GWD Contact Person:
Ricardo Ortega, General Manager
Grassland Water District
200 W. Willmott Avenue, Los Banos CA 93635
(209) 826-5188, rortega@gwdwater.org

Signature: _____ Date: 10/14/2025
Ricardo Ortega, General Manager

☐ Signed by Lead Agency ☑ Signed by Applicant. Date Received for filing at OPR:

October 14, 2025

ATTACHMENT TO THE NOTICE OF EXEMPTION

CVPIA Refuge Water Supply Contract Renewal

The Grassland Water District (GWD) has taken final action by approving the renewal of a Central Valley Project Improvement Act (CVPIA) refuge water supply contract. The contract specifies delivery terms of CVPIA refuge water supplies to Grassland Resource Conservation District in Merced County, California. The current contract will be extended for an additional 25-year period of refuge water deliveries through existing facilities as required by federal statute for the mitigation of environmental impacts by the Central Valley Project. The water supply deliveries are used to provide wetland habitat that support wetland-dependent wildlife species.

For purposes of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), GWD renewed the contract relying on three categorical exemptions that apply to existing facilities, regulatory agency actions for the protection of natural resources, and regulatory agency actions for protection of the environment (CEQA Guidelines §§ 15301, 15307, and 15308) Each exemption as relevant to the action is discussed below.

Categorical Exemptions for Existing Facilities

Title 14, Section 15301, Existing Facilities (Class 1) exemption consists of the operation, repair, maintenance, permitting, leasing, mechanical equipment, or topographical features, involving negligible or no expansion of existing or former use. An example includes the maintenance of fish screens, fish ladders, wildlife habitat areas, artificial wildlife waterway devices, streamflows, springs and waterholes, and stream channels (clearing of debris) to protect fish and wildlife resources.

The CEQA Guidelines emphasize that the key consideration for Class 1 exemptions is whether the project involves negligible or no expansion of use. GWD's contract renewal would allow for the continued water delivery under an existing system and use of the existing distribution network to wetlands within the Grassland Resource Conservation District for the benefit and maintenance of wildlife habitat and resources. There will be no expansion of the area covered, no additional use of existing facilities, and no changes in the amount of water delivered from prior approved contracts.

Categorical Exemptions to Protect Natural Resources and the Environment

GWD concluded for the purposes of CEQA that its action falls within Title 14, Section 15307, Actions by Regulatory Agencies for Protection of Natural Resources (Class 7) and Title 14, Section 15308, Actions by Regulatory Agencies for Protection of the Environment (Class 8) categorical exemptions.

Class 7 consists of actions taken by regulatory agencies that are authorized by state law or local ordinances to assure the maintenance, restoration, or enhancement of a natural resource where the regulatory process involves procedures for protection of the environment. Class 8 actions include those taken by regulatory agencies to assure the maintenance, restoration, enhancement, or protection of the environment where the regulatory process involves procedures for the protection of the environment.

The contract renewal ensures the continued water deliveries for the protection of the natural resources and environment of wetland habitat in Merced County. Specifically, the contract renewal ensures the continued deliveries of firm water supplies for the restoration of wetlands located in the Grassland Resource Conservation District and to restore and enhance the region's wildlife resources. By renewing the contract, GWD is ensuring that wetland areas continue to receive water supplies in a manner necessary to maintain, enhance, and restore wetland habitats in the Central Valley.