REGION 9

SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94105

PRELIMINARY FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

To: All Interested Persons

In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) procedures for implementing NEPA (40 CFR part 6), the EPA completed an independent environmental review of the proposed project as described below:

Project Name:	North Kona Deep Well
Name and Address of Applicant:	Department of Water Supply (DWS), County of Hawaii 78-6717 Māmalahoa Highway Holualoa, HI 96725
Project Location:	Near Hōlualoa and Kailua-Kona in the Honuaʻula ahupuaʻa of the North Kona District, Island of Hawaiʻi
EPA Community Grant Amount:	$2,080,000

Background

The Fiscal Year 2023 Consolidated Appropriations Act (P.L. 117-328) included Congressional funding for water infrastructure projects which are awarded through the EPA Community Grant Program. The Department of Water Supply (DWS), County of Hawaii was designated to receive appropriations funding support from the EPA for the North Kona Deep Well Project (the Proposed Action). The Hawai'i County Department of Water Supply (DWS) is proposing to drill and test an exploratory well as a potential source for potable water for the municipal North Kona Water System. The Proposed Action site is approximately 0.38 acres located near the communities of Hōlualoa and Kailua-Kona in the Honuaʻula ahupuaʻa of the North Kona District, Island of Hawaiʻi. The well would be located on a right-of-entry obtained from the private property owner. The Proposed Action would consist of site preparation, drilling and casing an exploratory well, pumping, and water quality testing.

Site preparation would include:

- Removal of one bayan tree, approximately 0.67 acres of shrubs, 355 feet (ft) of rock wall, and 81 ft of barbed wire fence.
- Grading the site (0.47 acres) and prepping the site with 3,356 cubic yards of fill.
- Placing steel plates across an existing wooden bridge over Honua'ula Stream to reinforce the bridge during equipment crossing.

Well drilling activities would include:

- Drilling a 12-inch diameter borehole until freshwater is encountered (expected at approximately 1,200 ft underground).
- Drilling into the groundwater at a depth sufficient enough to provide a satisfactory yield (expected at 475 to 500 feet below mean sea level).
- Running an open hole pump test by pumping water from the freshwater zone with a submersible pump.

If the open hole pump test results warrant possible development of the site as a production well, the pilot borehole would be reamed to a 27-inch diameter and the well would be cased with 20-inch casing to isolate the freshwater zone. Finally, several pump tests would be conducted to determine the well's hydraulic capacity and long-term yield. If fresh water is not encountered or if the pilot borehole pump tests demonstrate an insufficient amount of supply, then the pilot borehole would be sealed, and the Project would end at the respective point.

Environmental Review

The EPA completed an Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Proposed Action and, based on the environmental impacts described in the EA (Enclosure 1), determined that no significant environmental impacts are anticipated from the issuance of the grant and the Proposed Action does not constitute a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment, making the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) unnecessary. Therefore, the EPA is issuing this preliminary Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) to document this determination. The EPA determined that implementation of mitigation measures is required to avoid significant impacts. These mitigation measures are described below:

1. Woody plants greater than 15 feet tall would not be disturbed, removed, or trimmed during the Hawaiian horary bat birthing and pup rearing season (June 1 through September 15).
2. Barbed wire fencing would not be used.
3. Proposed Action personnel would not approach, feed, or disturb nēnē.
4. If nēnē are observed loafing or foraging within the Proposed Action Area during the breeding season (September through April), a biologist familiar with nesting behavior would survey for nests in and around the Proposed Action Area prior to the resumption

of any work. A biologist would repeat surveys after any subsequent delay of work of three (3) or more days (during which the birds may attempt to nest).

5. If a nest is discovered within a radius of 150 ft of the Proposed Action, or a previously undiscovered nest is found within the 150 ft radius after work begins, the work would cease immediately, and Proposed Action proponents would contact USFWS for further guidance.
6. In areas where nēnē are known to be present, reduced speed limits would be posted and enforced, and Proposed Action personnel and contractors would be informed of the presence of federally listed species on-site.
7. The spread or survival of non-native or invasive species would not occur.
8. Mosquito populations would be decreased by removing or preventing stagnant water habitat.
9. Wildlife threat to montane forest habitats would not occur.
10. Tree cover would not be removed during the peak Hawaiian ‘akepa breeding season between January 1 and June 30.
11. In areas where waterbirds are known to be present, signage for reduced speed limits would be posted and implemented, and Proposed Action personnel and contractors would be informed about the presence of endangered species on site.
12. A biological monitor that is familiar with the species’ biology would conduct Hawaiian waterbird nest surveys where appropriate habitat occurs within the vicinity of the Proposed Action site prior to project initiation. The monitor would repeat surveys again within three (3) days of Proposed Action initiation and after subsequent delay of work of three (3) or more days (during which the birds may attempt to nest). If a nest or active brood is found the following steps would occur:
    - USFWS would be contacted within 48 hours for further guidance.
    - A 100-ft buffer would be established and maintained around all active nests and/or broods until the chicks have fledged.
    - A biological monitor that is familiar with the species’ biology would be present on the Proposed Action site during all construction or earth-moving activities until the chicks fledge to ensure that Hawaiian waterbirds and nests are not adversely affected (i.e., mortality of young, or parents kept from the nest).
13. All permanent and temporary outdoor lights would be fully shielded so the bulb can only be seen from below.
14. Automatic motion sensor switches and controls would be installed on all outdoor lights or lights would be turned off when human activity is not occurring in the lighted area.
15. Nighttime construction during the seabird fledging period, September 15 through December 15, would not occur.
16. A biologist familiar with the Blackburn’s sphinx moth would survey areas of proposed activities for the species and its larval host plants, 4-6 weeks prior to work initiation.

Surveys would include searches for eggs, larvae, and signs of larval feeding (e.g., chewed stems, frass, or leaf damage).

17. If native ‘aiea or tree tobacco over three (3) feet tall, or adult Blackburn’s sphinx moths are found during surveys, they would not be disturbed and USFWS would be contacted immediately for additional guidance to avoid take.
18. Any tree tobacco less than three (3) feet tall would be removed and the site would be monitored every 4-6 weeks for new tree tobacco growth, during, and after the proposed ground-disturbing activity. Picture placards of tree tobacco at different life stages would be provided for all monitoring personnel.

This preliminary FONSI determination will be made available for a 30-day public comment period as required by 40 CFR Part 6.203. An electronic copy of the EA is available for download from the EPA’s NEPA Compliance Database at https://cdxapps.epa.gov/cdx-enepa-II/public/action/nepa/search.

Comments regarding this preliminary decision may be submitted for consideration to:

Clarice Olson
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Region 9
Pacific Islands Office
300 Ala Moana Blvd., Room 5124
Honolulu, HI 96850
(808) 539-0546
olson.clarice@epa.gov

After evaluating any comments received, the EPA will make a final decision. This 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.

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Tomás Torres, Division Director
Water Division

April 18, 2025
Date

Enclosure: Draft Environmental Assessment of North Kona Deep Well