

Final Plan to Minimize Impacts to Adjacent Landowners Hanson El Monte Pond Flood Control, Restoration and Recharge Project San Diego County, California

Program Background

The Safe Drinking Water, Clean Water, Watershed Protection, and Flood Protection Act of March 2000 (Proposition 13) created the Flood Protection Corridor Program (FPCP). The California Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Act of 2006 (Proposition 84) allocated additional funds to continue FPCP through the newly named Flood Corridor Program (FCP). FCP is authorized to fund projects providing non-structural approaches to flood management, including the acquisition and restoration of wildlife habitat and agricultural land preservation. Proposition 13 and FCP guidelines require the Department of Water Resources (DWR) to ensure that a Plan to Minimize Impacts to Adjacent Landowners (PTM) is prepared and approved prior to acquiring any interest in land using funds from the Program. Water Code Section 79041 states: “Prior to acquiring an easement or other interest in land pursuant to this article, the project shall include a plan to minimize the impacts on adjacent landowners. The plan shall include but not be limited to, an evaluation of the impact on floodwaters, the structural integrity of affected levees, diversion facilities, customary agricultural husbandry practices and timber extraction operations, and an evaluation with regard to the maintenance required for any facilities that are proposed to be constructed or altered.”

The purpose of the PTM is to inform local stakeholders and the public of the potential impacts the project will have on floodwaters, levees, diversion facilities, customary agricultural practices, timber extraction operations, and maintenance of facilities that are proposed or altered as a result of the project. While the project described here is subject to and follows the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), the PTM is a specific requirement of the FPCP and FCP per California Water Code Section 79041, and is separate from CEQA. This PTM was issued in draft form to adjacent landowners as an opportunity for public comment. Three public comments were received during this period.

Project Overview

The Hanson El Monte Pond (HEMP) Flood Control, Restoration, and Recharge Project site (project site) is located in the unincorporated community of Lakeside, within San Diego County (County), California, north of El Monte Road, south of the San Diego River, approximately 5 miles west/downstream of El Capitan Reservoir, and immediately east of the San Diego County Water Authority’s (SDCWA) and Helix Water District’s (HWD) pipeline easements and access road. The site is located within the El Monte Valley, which is an east–west-trending valley that includes the San Diego River. The project site is located on the El Cajon U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) 7.5- minute quadrangle, in Section 17 of Township 15 South, Range 1 East. The property’s street address is 10402 El Monte Road within the County’s (18) Rural Lands (RL-20) Land Use Regulation area (see Figures 1 through 3).

The HEMP project is a grant-funded flood control, habitat restoration, and groundwater recharge project. The grantor(s) include DWR FCP; California Natural Resources Agency, under the Environmental Enhancement and Mitigation Program (Project No. EEM-2009 (027)); and, as necessary, a potential grant awarded to the Endangered Habitats Conservancy (EHC) by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), Wildlife Conservation Board. Lakeside’s River Park Conservancy (LRPC) is the DWR FCP grant recipient in charge of the HEMP project design, permitting, and construction.

The site was previously a sand mining operation, which was discontinued in the late 1990s. The property was subsequently purchased by EHC in 2009. The overall parcel acreage is approximately 145 acres. The HEMP project area occupies approximately 97 of the 145 acres, including the ~43-acre man-made pond.

The goals of the HEMP project are to help alleviate downstream flooding, create and restore native wetland and upland habitats, and improve groundwater recharge in the project vicinity. It is anticipated that the project goals can be met by restoring the site's hydrologic connection to the San Diego River floodplain by removing a portion of the existing erosion barrier, removing and controlling invasive weed species, planting and seeding the appropriate native species, and expanding the overall native wetland and upland acreages.

The site contains a combination of relatively newly recruited native and non-native vegetation, including wetland and upland vegetation communities. As evidenced by historical photos, a majority of the vegetation has become established since the sand mining operation was discontinued in the late 1990s. Along the pond periphery and surrounding the pond are various wetland vegetation communities. Above the wetland vegetation is a mixture of native and non-native vegetation. The site's wetland areas are dominated by the open water pond, freshwater marsh, and disturbed southern willow scrub/forest habitats. The site's upland areas are dominated by disturbed habitat, non-native grasslands/weeds, and coastal sage scrub.

Currently, the site is not open to the public and is generally a conservation area for wildlife and aquatic species. Horseback riders and occasional hikers use the trail located immediately north of the site that runs parallel to the San Diego River.

The site is currently isolated from the surface hydrology of the San Diego River by an erosion barrier designed by the previous landowner to prevent inflow from a 100-year storm event and pit-capture. Because the site is hydraulically cut off from the river, it currently does not help alleviate downstream flooding by storing/holding water during a flood event. Similarly, the lack of surface hydrology from the San Diego River diminishes the site's ability to provide seasonal surface hydrology to the riparian and wetland vegetation communities.

Proposed Condition/Uses

The HEMP project seeks to help alleviate downstream flooding, improve local groundwater recharge, and increase the biological functions and values of the site by restoring the site's hydrologic connection to the San Diego River and creating and restoring native wetland and upland vegetation communities. This is proposed to be accomplished in a variety of ways, including reconnecting the site to the San Diego River's surface hydrology and allowing inflow of surface water during the appropriate storm/flow event, removing invasive species and annual weeds and replacing them with native plants and seeds, and grading disturbed areas currently dominated by weeds to elevations that will allow for the establishment of additional wetland habitat. Emphasis is placed on providing habitats suitable for special-status species, including but not limited to least Bell's vireo (*Vireo bellii pusillus*), tri-colored blackbirds (*Agelaius tricolor*), coastal California gnatcatcher (*Polioptila californica californica*), southwestern willow flycatcher (*Empidonax traillii extimus*), and cactus wren (*Campylorhynchus brunneicapillus sandiegensis*).

An open space trail, two small trail kiosks and decomposed granite parking area will be constructed as part of the HEMP project. Existing trails are currently located on the southern bank of the San Diego River, immediately north of the site boundary that runs in an east to west direction parallel with the river. Another trail is located in the hills west of the project site, within EHC's property boundaries, and runs generally north to south from the river to El Monte Road. These trails are used primarily for equestrian purposes. Another path is located on top of the erosion barrier on the HEMP site, but is generally not used by the public due to an existing barbed-wire fence.

A mixed-use trail will be included as a part of the project and is anticipated to be located along the existing path on top of the erosion barrier. This trail will extend from the north east corner of the site to the northwest corner and have commanding views of both the riverbed and the pond. The existing north-south trail will be improved and will extend from the northwest corner of the site to El Monte Road. A majority of the north-south trending trail will be located along the same alignment as the existing unimproved horse trail.

Lastly, EHC plans to study the effects of varying water surface elevations on native wetland vegetation communities over time.

Adjacent Properties/Uses

The area immediately north of the site is owned by HWD and contains the San Diego River and 8" and 12" water pipelines with an associated well. North of the river is Willow Road, which is two way, two lane County maintained road. North of Willow Road are residences and foothills. East of the site is a large empty field that contains both native and non-native vegetation communities including grasslands and scrubs with scattered eucalyptus and tamarisk trees. This area includes a couple of access roads including a HWD access road and associated easement.

West of the project site is generally flat with a two dirt access roads surrounded by grasslands and scrub vegetation. This area includes a SDCWA water utility easement for their pipeline/aqueduct and a HWD pipeline easement. The area north west of the project site includes a small cattle ranch and equestrian operation. Further to the west are foothills with annual grasslands, scrub and chaparral vegetation.

The area south of the project site includes relatively flat grasslands and a mound of contoured soil left behind by the previous land owner (sand mining operation). The mound is approximately 30 feet high on the high side and is vegetated with mostly nonnative grasses and invasive species along with scrub communities. Further to the south is El Monte road, a two lane, two way County maintained road. South of El Monte road there are residences and foothills. All adjacent property owners or lessees have been notified of the project including HWD, County, SDCWA, and the Team Penning Equestrian Center either via phone, email or personal communications. The CEQA document will also be posted for review and comment by the public.

Evaluation of Impacts to Floodwaters

Table 1 below summarizes the site studies and analysis that have been completed, or that are underway. The studies indicated below have been utilized during the schematic design phase and to guide the final design and construction plan preparation. CEQA and resource agency permitting processes are underway.

**Table 1
 Project Studies**

Biology/CEQA	Engineering Analysis	Habitat Restoration
Vegetation mapping/inventory	Topography	Soils analysis
Wildlife inventory/assessment	Bathymetry	Invasive species mapping
Special status species assessment	Pond basin sediment analysis	Water table/groundwater data
Wetland delineation	Geotechnical investigation	Feasibility report
Cultural resources assessment	Subsurface hydrology analysis	Biological studies
Vector control/management	Hydraulic and sediment transport analysis report LOMR/CLOMR	
Biological Technical Report	Water quality modeling	
Initial Study	Evapotranspiration analysis	
MND/ND		

A hydraulic and sediment transport analysis and corresponding report has been prepared for the selected design. The report evaluated the project's existing and proposed conditions including effects on floodwaters. In summary, the report concludes that the project grading will not affect river hydraulics; however the proposed arched culvert inlet will provide some flood inundation benefits along the San Diego River. The report indicates that flows will begin to be directed toward the pond at slightly less than a 10-year event. This will reduce the flows in the river channel providing some upstream and downstream flood inundation benefits. The effects on adjacent lands from flood waters will therefore be less under the post-project conditions. Floodwaters diverted and stored onsite will result in improved groundwater recharge in the vicinity and improved hydrology for both existing and proposed wetland habitats. The Hydraulic and Sediment Transport Analysis report, by Chang Consultants, dated August 19, 2014 is available upon request.

The location and scope of this project requires substantial review of project plans by a variety of permitting agencies including the County, who will ultimately issue a grading permit based on the final construction plans and specifications, the Regional Water Quality Control Board, the United States Army Corps of Engineers, Regulatory Division, and CDFW.

Evaluation of Impacts on Structural Integrity of Affected Levees

There are no levees located adjacent to or within the property boundary. However, there is an erosion barrier that was constructed by the previous land owner in order to protect their sand mining operations from flood events, including a 100-year event from entering into the project site. The erosion barrier extends into the HWD property located immediately north of the site. The removal of a small portion of the barrier to install an arched culvert inlet will not jeopardize the structural integrity of the erosion barrier because the inlet is being designed and engineered by qualified, registered civil engineers, structural and geotechnical engineers in consultation with Chang Consultants who are performing hydraulic and sediment transport modeling of the inlet design and associated river bed. Furthermore, civil and geotechnical engineers will provide inspection services during construction. The construction of the inlet will temporarily affect HWD's access road for approximately 60 days. HWD is aware of and in support of the arched culvert inlet which has been submitted for their review, comment and approval.

Evaluation of Impacts on Diversion Facilities

There are no agricultural or drainage diversion facilities in the project vicinity. The project site itself includes an erosion barrier along the northern property line that was constructed by the previous land-owner. The barrier was designed to preclude floodwaters from the San Diego River from entering the sand mining pit and affecting mining operations. The proposed project includes the placement of an arched culvert through the erosion barrier that will allow a portion of slightly less than 10-year flows to enter the pond in order to provide improved hydrology for wetlands vegetation and groundwater recharge. The inlet will allow the pond to act as a storage basing during flood events thereby reducing the potential for downstream flooding. The culvert inlet will be designed by registered civil and structural engineers and hydraulically modeled to ensure there are no negative hydrological effects. The arched culvert will allow all existing access roads to remain, although they may be temporarily affected during construction. The adjacent property owner (HWD) has been notified of this and is in support of the project, which has been submitted for their review, comment and approval.

Evaluation of Impacts on Customary Agricultural Husbandry Practices

There is one small cattle ranch located to the north west of the project site. This operation is located on EHC property and is operated under a lease provided by EHC. This operation will not be affected by the proposed project and will be less likely to be flooded under the post-project conditions. The operation includes approximately 10 cows. The proposed project will help improve groundwater resources which would offer a net benefit to agricultural practices that utilize well water. No other agricultural uses exist adjacent to the property site.

Evaluation of Impacts on Timber Extraction Operations

There are no timber extraction operations within or adjacent to the project site.

Evaluation of Impacts on Maintenance of any Facilities Proposed to be Altered or Constructed

The project proposes to construct an arched culvert inlet, an open space trail, two trail information kiosks, and a decomposed granite parking area. These facilities will be located within the EHC property boundary and are not anticipated to affect adjacent lands.

The inlet structure will be fitted with a debris grate that may need to be cleared of racking following a 10-year or greater event. The inlet is otherwise expected to be maintenance free. The open space trail is anticipated to require maintenance at intervals of approximately 5 years including filling of pot holes, rills or other items. Any associated barrier fencing e.g. post and rope, non-barbed wire, wood lodgepole or similar will likely need maintenance every 15-20 years. The inclusion of a trail and parking area will likely create some level of trash accumulation. If trash cans are provided they will need to be emptied periodically. Trash accumulation along the open space trail and parking lot is estimated to need removal on a monthly basis. The information kiosks at the trail head location and or at the river junction will be constructed of treated wood and or cedar wood and have a life expectancy of 15-20 years. It may occasionally need minor repairs, including re-staining, waterproofing/sealing and/or painting every 5-10 years. The decomposed granite parking area is anticipated to need surface repairs of ruts and other wear items every 5-10 years with surface decomposed granite re-application and compaction/stabilization every 10 years.

The maintenance of onsite facilities is not expected to impact adjacent lands, with the exception of trash which could migrate via wind to adjacent properties if not collected.

Future maintenance requirements are anticipated to be paid for by grants awarded to EHC and/or LRPC, or funds from tax deductible donations, fund raisers and memberships are also possible. The County is expected to help pay for trail and parking area maintenance as part of their open space trail program/funding, but has yet to be confirmed.

Conclusion

In summary, the project and its subsequent maintenance is not anticipated to have significant adverse impacts on adjacent property owners, land use practices or flood control facilities. In addition to restoring and creating native vegetation communities, including wetlands, it will improve habitat for endangered species and other species of concern. The project will help reduce downstream inundation levels/flooding during a 10-year or greater as demonstrated by the hydraulic analysis. The establishment of surface hydrologic input to the pond during a ~10-year or greater event is expected to help improve ground water recharge in the project vicinity.

Attachments:

Attachment 1 - Summary of Adjacent Landowner Comments and Responses

Attachment 1

Hanson El Monte Pond Flood Control, Restoration and Recharge Project Summary of Adjacent Land Owner Comments and Responses

Helix Water District Comment 1: Helix Water District (Helix) stated they want the open space trail, signage kiosks and any related parking areas kept outside of HWD property.

LRPC Response 1: The open space trail, signage kiosks and parking were relocated outside of their easement/property. The open space trail may cross their easement at two locations but this will be coordinated with them.

Helix Water District Comment 2: Helix stated their property immediately north of the site where the HEMP project had proposed locating a culvert outlet contains 8” and 12” water pipelines and a well.

LRPC Response 2: The culvert outlet pipe was re-evaluated and removed from the project design.

Helix Water District Comment 3: Helix indicated they are aware of and in support of the arched culvert inlet subject to review and approval by HWD (a portion of the inlet is on their property).

LRPC Response 3: The 100% design submittal will be submitted to Helix for their review/approval.

Helix Water District Comment 4: HWD indicated that maintenance language will have to be added to their easement grant document for the inlet to ensure all maintenance (debris removal, etc.) is the responsibility of Grantee.

LRPC Response 4: Requested language will be added to easement grant document once the inlet foot print is finalized and the easement boundary surveyed.

Helix Water District Comment 5: HWD indicated they want the location of trail signage/kiosks shown on the construction plans along with any proposed parking areas.

LRPC Response 5: Locations of trail signage, kiosks were added to plans. Parking lot was removed from plans.

Helix Water District Comment 6: HWD indicated they will need ample notice of the proposed construction of the inlet in order for staff to be advised and make arrangements to temporarily use the alternate (Authority’s) gated access off of El Monte Road.

LRPC Response 6: LRPC indicated ample lead time will be provided so they can make arrangements for alternate access.

Helix Water District Comment 7: Helix indicated the re-submittal is still pending and that they have not approved the final inlet design.

LRPC Response 7: The final design will be submitted for their review and approval.

San Diego County Water Authority Comment 1: The Authority's (Tad Brierton) indicated that they needed additional information including any proposed improvements or changes within the Water Authority's easement; scour study information to provide our engineers; any habitat restoration plans that may have an effect on the easement.

LRPC Response 1: Additional information was provided via email and email attachments including plans and a stream hydraulic and sediment transport analysis report.

San Diego County Water Authority Comment 2: We will want to know anything that may impact the Water Authority's ability to make full use of its easement rights or have a negative impact on the pipeline within the easement.

LRPC Response 2: An was sent on January 28, 2015 indicating no work or improvements were being proposed within the Water Authority's easement, except for an open space trail that may cross the easement at up to three locations. Trail plans showing proposed crossing locations were submitted for their review.

San Diego County Water Authority Comment 3 (via email): For now our preliminary comments are listed below:

1. Include our standard signature block for our Director of Engineering, William J. Rose – attached.
2. Include San Diego County Water Authority review to “Declaration of Responsible Charge” paragraph or as attached.
3. Include San Diego County Water Authority NOTES for any work that may take place within our easement – attached.
4. Include and call-out our SDCWA 60’ WSP.
5. Include and call-out our SDCWA 80’ easement.
6. Additional SDCWA notes:
 - a. No grading shall occur within our Water Authority easement without prior approval from the Water Authority.
 - b. If contractor plans to transport large grading equipment over Water Authority easement/road, contractor to submit list and weight of equipment for review and approval by the Water Authority.

Once our comments are incorporated, please forward to my attention. But in the meantime, if you have any questions, feel free to contact me (Maria Silva).

LRPC Response 3 (via email): Thanks Maria.

San Diego County Water Authority Comment 4 (via email): By the way – you can disregard Item #3 to include our notes. Just if somewhere on plans it can be clearly stated that “NO WORK OVER WATER AUTHORITY EASEMENT” or something to that effect.

Also, for access into your project, not sure if this is going to be off El Monte Road and over our easement and pipeline so we will need details on that too.

Thanks again and have a nice day.
Maria

LRPC Response 4 (via email): Maria, That sounds great. I was thinking the same thing because the project is not going to use/access the site via the Authority’s easement; in fact the easement is going to be outside the project “limits of work” on all plan sheets with the exception of the trail plans. During trail construction a small bobcat, work trucks and maybe a small dump truck may need to access/cross the easement, but that is about it. The bobcat can even be offloaded outside of the easement (they are sometimes delivered by an 18 wheeler, but usually just towed behind a small dump truck). We have no grading, planting, landscaping, irrigation or anything else within the easement, simply a couple of at-grade (unimproved) trail crossings. We will put a “NO WORK OVER WATER AUTHORITY EASEMENT” note on the plans. For the trail plans we will add a note indicating no work/grading etc. is to occur within the easement but that access to the trail may occur from the easement. We will also add a note to the trail plans stating the contractor shall video the easement prior to construction and that any damages to Authority access roads, fences, gates, signage etc. shall be repaired by the contractor at his or expense. Basally I think it’s just making it clear there is no work/grading/improvements within the Authority’s easement via plan notes (just some limited access during trail construction) and coordinating the approval of the trail crossing the easement in a couple locations.