

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the EIR

The California Department of Water Resources (DWR) has prepared this Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) to provide the public and the responsible and trustee agencies information about the potentially significant effects on the local and regional environment associated with construction and operation of the Perris Dam Emergency Release Facility (proposed project). This Draft EIR has been prepared pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) of 1970 (as amended), codified at California Public Resources Code Sections 21000 et. seq., and the Guidelines for the implementation of the California Environmental Quality Act (Cal. Code of Regulations, Title 14, § 15000, *et seq.*, hereafter *CEQA Guidelines.*).

This Draft EIR describes the environmental impacts of the proposed project and suggests, where feasible, mitigation measures to reduce impacts to a less-than-significant level. The impact analyses are based on a variety of sources, including agency consultation, technical studies, and field surveys. DWR will use this Draft EIR to consider implementation of the proposed project. As Lead Agency, DWR may use this Draft EIR when deciding whether to approve the proposed project, to make Findings regarding identified significant impacts, and, if necessary, to adopt a Statement of Overriding Considerations regarding significant and unavoidable impacts.

1.2 CEQA EIR Process

1.2.1 Notice of Preparation

In accordance with Section 15082 of CEQA Guidelines, DWR, as Lead Agency, prepared and circulated a Notice of Preparation (NOP) (see **Appendix A**) on September 9, 2013. The NOP was mailed to approximately 174 interested parties, including local, state, and federal agencies; news publications; and other groups or individuals who had previously expressed interest in the project. Copies of the NOP were made available for public review at the Riverside County Library, Perris Branch, and the DWR website: www.water.ca.gov/lakeperris.

The NOP provided a general description of the facilities associated with the Perris Dam Emergency Release Facility, a summary of the probable environmental effects of the project to be addressed in the Draft EIR, and maps showing the project location. The NOP provided the public and interested public agencies with the opportunity to review the proposed project and to provide comments or concerns on the scope and content of the environmental review document, including the range of actions, alternatives, mitigation measures, and significant effects to be analyzed in

depth in the Draft EIR. The 30-day project scoping period, which began with the distribution of the NOP, remained open through October 9, 2013.

1.2.2 Public Scoping Meeting

DWR held a public scoping meeting on September 19, 2013, at the Lake Perris Fairgrounds in Harrison Hall. DWR placed display ads prior to the scoping meeting in the Press Enterprise on September 9, 2013. The purpose of the meeting was to present the proposed project to the public through use of display maps, route alignments, and handouts describing project components and potential environmental impacts. DWR staff, local water agency staff, and members of the public attended the scoping meeting. Attendees were provided an opportunity to voice comments or concerns regarding potential effects of the proposed project.

The scope of the Draft EIR was determined based on the responses to the NOP and the issues raised at the public scoping meeting. Issues not related to environmental effects, such as financing, are not addressed in the Draft EIR but may be considered by the DWR Director before making a final decision on the proposed project. Please refer to Appendix A for written comments received during the scoping meeting and information related to the circulation of the NOP. These issues were considered during preparation of the Draft EIR.

1.2.3 Draft EIR

This document constitutes the Draft EIR. The report contains a description of the proposed project, description of the environmental setting, identification of project impacts, and mitigation measures for impacts found to be significant, as well as an analysis of project alternatives. The Draft EIR addresses the potential environmental effects of implementing the proposed project.

Significance criteria have been developed for each environmental resource analyzed in this Draft EIR, and are defined at the beginning of each impact analysis section. Impacts are categorized as follows:

- Significant and unavoidable
- Potentially significant, but can be mitigated to a less-than-significant level
- Less than significant (mitigation is not required under CEQA, but may be recommended)
- No impact
- Beneficial

CEQA requires that a Lead Agency shall neither approve nor carry out a project as proposed unless the significant environmental effects have been reduced to an acceptable level, where possible (CEQA Guidelines Sections 15091 and 5092; and Public Resources Code Section 21081). Reducing impacts to an acceptable level is defined as eliminating, avoiding, or substantially lessening the significant effects. If such a reduction is not possible, a Lead Agency must adopt Findings and a Statement of Overriding Considerations. As defined in CEQA

Guidelines Section 15093, a Statement of Overriding Considerations balances the benefits of a project against its unavoidable environmental consequences.

1.2.4 Organization of the Draft EIR

This Draft EIR has been organized into the following sections:

- ES. Executive Summary.** This chapter summarizes the contents of the Draft EIR.
1. **Introduction.** This chapter discusses the CEQA process and the purpose of the Draft EIR.
 2. **Project Description.** This chapter provides an overview of the proposed project, describes the need for and objectives of the proposed project, and provides detail on the characteristics of the proposed project.
 3. **Environmental Setting, Impacts, and Mitigation Measures.** This chapter describes the environmental setting and identifies impacts of the proposed project for each of the following environmental resource areas: Aesthetics; Air Quality; Biological Resources; Cultural and Paleontological Resources; Energy; Geology, Soils and Mineral Resources; Greenhouse Gas Emissions; Hazards and Hazardous Materials; Hydrology, Water Quality, and Groundwater; Land Use and Planning/Agricultural and Forestry Resources; Noise; Public Services, Utilities, and Service Systems; Recreation; and Traffic and Transportation. Measures to mitigate the impacts of the proposed project are presented for each resource area.
 4. **Cumulative Impacts.** This chapter describes the potential impacts of the proposed project when considered together with other related projects in the project area.
 5. **Growth Inducement and other CEQA Topics.** This chapter describes the potential for the proposed project to induce growth.
 6. **Analysis of Alternatives.** This chapter presents an overview of the alternatives development process and describes the alternatives to the proposed project that were considered.
 7. **Acronyms List.**
 8. **Report Preparers.** This chapter identifies authors and consultants involved in preparing this Draft EIR, including persons and organizations consulted.
 9. **References.**

1.2.5 Public Review

This document is being circulated to local, state, and federal agencies, and to interested organizations and individuals who may wish to review and comment on the Draft EIR. Publication of this Draft EIR marks the beginning of a 45-day public review period, during which written comments may be directed to the address below. During the 45-day review period, DWR will hold a formal public hearing on the Draft EIR. The public hearing will be held on September 27, 2016 at 6:00 p.m. at the Lakeview Pavilion in the Lake Perris State Recreation Area, 17801 Lake Perris Drive, Perris, CA 92571.

Comments on the Draft EIR should be sent or emailed to:

Tom Barnes, Environmental Science Associates
on behalf of the California Department of Water Resources
626 Wilshire Boulevard, Suite 1100
Los Angeles, CA 90017
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1.2.6 Final Environmental Impact Report, Certification and Findings

Written and oral comments received in response to the Draft EIR will be addressed in a Response to Comments document which together with the Draft EIR will constitute the Final EIR.

DWR will then consider EIR certification (CEQA Guidelines Section 15090). Prior to approving the project, DWR must make written findings with respect to each significant environmental effect identified in the EIR, approve a Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program, and if necessary approve a Statement of Overriding Considerations, in accordance with Sections 15091, 15097, and 15093 of the CEQA Guidelines, respectively.

CEQA requires that a Lead Agency shall neither approve nor carry out a project for which an EIR has been certified which identifies one or more significant environmental effects of the project unless the public agency makes one or more written findings for each of those significant effects. (CEQA Guidelines §15091 and §15092). CEQA requires lead agencies to balance, as applicable, the economic, legal social, technological, or other benefits of a proposed project against its unavoidable environmental risks when determining whether to approve a project. If the specific economic, legal, social, technological, or other benefits of a proposed project outweigh the unavoidable adverse environmental effects, the adverse environmental effects may be considered acceptable. The lead agency may adopt a statement of overriding considerations prior to approving the project by stating in writing the specific reasons to support its action based on the final EIR and/or other information within the record. (CEQA Guidelines §15093)

Once the EIR has been certified and findings have been adopted, DWR may proceed to consider project approval.

1.2.7 Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program

State law requires Lead Agencies to adopt a mitigation monitoring and reporting program for those changes to the project that have been adopted or made a condition of project approval in order to mitigate or avoid significant effects on the environment (CEQA Guidelines, § 15097). The CEQA Guidelines do not require that the specific reporting or monitoring program be included in the Draft EIR. Throughout this Draft EIR, however, proposed mitigation measures have been clearly identified and presented in language that will facilitate establishment of a monitoring program. All adopted measures will be included in a mitigation monitoring and reporting program to verify compliance.