



Topic: **Authority Board Agenda Item 2.1d**

2020 April 22

Subject: **Prepare a Revised Draft EIR based on Value Planning Report Results**

Requested Action:

Consider direction for staff to revise and recirculate a Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) to analyze the environmental effects of the options identified in the Final Sites Project Value Planning Alternatives Appraisal Report dated April 13, 2020 (Report), including VP7.

Detailed Description/Background:

In August 2017, the Authority and the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) jointly issued a Draft Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement (EIR/EIS) for the Project pursuant to their respective lead agency obligations under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)¹. The public comment period on the Draft EIR/EIS was subsequently extended and then closed on January 15, 2018. A total of 141 comments letters were received on the Draft EIR/EIS along with comments received at two public hearings held during the public review period. From approximately March 2019 thru the end of September 2019, staff were developing responses to the comments received on the Draft EIR/EIS. On October 1, 2019, this work was put on hold in order to focus on the Value Planning Effort by the Ad Hoc Value Planning Workgroup.

The Ad Hoc Value Planning Workgroup completed their effort and has provided the Sites Project Value Planning Alternatives Appraisal Report (Report) for your consideration in Agenda Item 2.1a today. The Report identifies additional project alternatives through a screening process that considered total project cost, impacts on landowners, impacts on traffic and public safety, ability to meet participant demands, ability to provide public benefits to the State, relative magnitude of environmental impacts, and the estimated cost per acre-foot of water delivered.

Staff recommends that the Draft EIR be revised to analyze the environmental effects of the new alternatives in the Report, including VP7, and recirculated for public review. The alternatives considered in the Report generally have smaller footprints and reduced diversions into Sites Reservoir, thus resulting in fewer adverse environmental impacts than the alternatives evaluated in the 2017 Draft EIR/EIS. VP7 consists of a 1.5 million acre-foot reservoir, 1,000 cubic feet per

¹ Release of the draft EIR/EIS for public comment coincided with release of Reclamation's draft Feasibility Report and the Authority's submission of its Proposition 1 (WSIP) application to the California Water Commission.

second release capacity to the Colusa Basin Drain, a bridge to provide access to the west of the reservoir, an unpaved road to maintain access to residents along the southern portion of the reservoir, and would utilize the existing Tehama-Colusa Canal and Glenn-Colusa Canal facilities for diversions into Sites Reservoir.

For full and open disclosure, to provide the opportunity for the public to comment on the new alternatives, and to promote informed decision-making by the Authority and other governmental agencies with approval authority over the Project, Staff will begin development of the revised draft EIR and will return to the Board to (1) identify a preferred alternative once a more complete description of the range of alternatives has been developed; and (2) review and approve release of the recirculated Draft EIR. Direction is needed from the Committee and the Authority Board on how best to move forward with CEQA compliance in consideration of the additional alternatives identified in the Report.

Reclamation will need to make a separate decision on how to proceed with the EIS under NEPA, including possible continuation of the joint EIR/EIS approach followed previously for this Project. Staff will work cooperatively with Reclamation on a joint path forward.

Prior Action:

February 26, 2020: Approved a recommendation to re-start efforts on the EIR for the Sites Reservoir Project and assess the most appropriate approach for completing the EIR pursuant to CEQA.

July 20, 2017: Approved a recommendation to forward the Draft EIR/EIS to the Authority Board for its consideration to formally receive and adopt the document for inclusion in the Authority's Water Storage Investment Project application.

July 31, 2017: Approved the release of the Draft EIR for public and agency review, in connection with the Authority's application to the California Water Commission by August 14, 2017. The document was published as joint Draft EIR/EIS by the Authority under CEQA and Reclamation under NEPA.

December 19, 2016: Approved release of a revised Notice of Preparation to transfer CEQA lead agency status from the Department of Water Resources to the Sites Project Authority. Public scoping meetings were conducted on February 14 and 15, 2017.

Fiscal Impact/Funding Source:

Costs to begin this effort were included in the Phase 1B Work Plan which was approved by the Sites Project Authority at its January 22, 2020 Board meeting.

Costs to complete the recirculated Draft EIR/EIS and begin preparation of the Final EIR/EIS are considered in the Amendment 2 Work Plan.

Costs to complete the Final EIR/EIS will be considered in a future Work Plan.

Staff Contact:

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Attachments:

None.