



Topic: **Authority Board Agenda Item 2.2**

2020 October 21

Subject: **20/21 Geotech Investigations Project Approval and CEQA
Notice of Exemption**

Requested Action:

Authorize the Executive Director to approve the Sites Reservoir 2020/2021 Geotechnical Investigations and file a Notice of Exemption under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

Detailed Description/Background:

The Sites Project Authority (Authority) and Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) are jointly proposing additional geotechnical and geophysical investigations east of Funks Reservoir in Colusa County and south of the town of Dunnigan in Yolo County. The investigations will further inform the design of the proposed Sites Reservoir and its associated facilities. Proposed field investigations would be focused in areas where additional or updated data are needed for engineering cost refinement, for design efforts, and to support future permit applications. Both surface and subsurface investigations are proposed. Surface investigations would consist of soil mapping and geophysical surveys. Subsurface geotechnical investigations would include approximately 5 borings and 15 cone penetration test probes. The proposed investigations are scheduled to begin around November 2020 and continue through March 2021.

To avoid adverse effects on environmental resources and on existing agricultural activities, geotechnical investigations would be confined to areas previously disturbed such as areas currently used for temporary storage, to other similarly developed areas where specific access is granted by the landowner, and/or to existing rights-of-way and easements. Similar to the 2019/2020 geotechnical investigation efforts, the Authority will implement standard geotechnical project protocols and procedures to avoid potential environmental effects. Locations for these geotechnical evaluations have been selected to provide additional information at key Sites Reservoir Project facilities while avoiding and minimizing impacts to environmental and cultural resources, as well as current agricultural practices.

Similar to the 2019/2020 geotechnical investigation efforts, Reclamation will complete the borings and cone penetration test probes. The Authority will be using its delegated authority under the approved Real Estate Policy and with consultation of the Land Management Committee to approve agreements, including compensation, for access to private property. The Authority will also provide biological, cultural, and Tribal monitors for the effort, utility location services, and dust and traffic control services. Legal Counsel is supporting the development of land access agreements that will be signed by the Executive Director with landowners. Consultants performing work for the Authority are required to insure for any damages to landowners under the existing contracts and Reclamation will provide its own access agreement and insurance to

landowners, although the Authority will make clear to landowners that the Authority is the point of contact for any issues.

Based on continued efforts to define the scope of work for the collection of additional geotechnical data and to better analyze the potential effects associated with this field data collection, impacts have been determined to be localized, temporary and minor. As such, the Geotechnical Investigations meet the criteria for a Categorical Exemption pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15304 and 15306 and staff is now preparing a Notice of Exemption. Similarly, Reclamation plans to complete a Categorical Exclusion in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act. The project approach to avoid environmental effects and file a Notice of Exemption is the same approach as was taken for the 2019/2020 geotechnical investigation efforts.

Prior Action:

None.

Fiscal Impact/Funding Source:

Actual costs to prepare the CEQA Notice of Exemption and the supporting evaluations along with completing the Authority's components of the 2020/2021 geotechnical investigations are within the amounts budgeted in the Amendment 2 Work Plan (Budget), which was approved by the Authority at its August 26, 2020 Board meeting. Reclamation is responsible for all costs associated with its portion of the work. The existing cost share MOU with Reclamation generally defines roles and responsibilities however, a Letter of Mutual Understanding will be executed between the Executive Director and Reclamation Management to supplement the MOU and more specifically define roles and responsibilities for this specific work task prior to initiating the work.

Staff Contact:

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Attachments:

None.