

Summary

Introduction

This Environmental Impact Report (EIR) has been prepared to evaluate specific environmental impacts associated with the proposed Santa Clara River Levee Improvements Downstream of Union Pacific Railroad (SCR-3) Project, also referred to herein as the proposed Project. The Ventura County Watershed Protection District (VCWPD) is the Lead Agency for the environmental review of this Project.

The Initial Study prepared by VCWPD (February 2015) indicates that the proposed Project may have significant effects relating to air quality, biological resources, scenic resources, hazards (including liquefaction, hazardous waste, and public health), noise and vibration, transportation and circulation, utilities, and flood control and drainage. Because of these potential effects, an EIR is required to fully evaluate the potential adverse environmental impacts that may result from development of the proposed Project.

This EIR has been prepared in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act of 1970 (CEQA), as amended (Public Resources Code Section 21000 et seq.), and the State CEQA Guidelines for Implementation of CEQA (California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Section 15000 et seq.). This Draft EIR also complies with the County of Ventura's procedures for implementation of CEQA.

The purpose of the EIR is to inform decision makers and the general public of any significant adverse environmental impacts associated with the construction, operations, and maintenance (O&M) of the proposed Project, and to identify feasible mitigation measures and alternatives that may be adopted to reduce or eliminate these impacts. Alternatives to the proposed Project evaluated in this EIR include the No Project Alternative and four design alternatives.

Project Location and Setting

The SCR-3 Project is located in unincorporated Ventura County generally along the southern bank of the Santa Clara River, with components of the Project also located within the City of Oxnard, Ventura County, California. Project activities would extend along a portion of the existing Santa Clara River levee system (SCR-3), which is owned and operated by the VCWPD, generally north of and parallel to the Bailard Landfill, Coastal Landfill, Ventura Regional Sanitation District (VRSD) Flare, the City of Oxnard River Ridge Golf Course and golf maintenance yard, and Santa Clara Landfill, and then continue northeast parallel to N. Ventura Road, 40 feet northeast of the Union Pacific Rail Road (UPRR) crossing. Flood protection from this point to the Highway 101 crossing would be addressed by The Village Specific Plan development (Tentative Tract No. 5745 development project on the existing Wagon Wheel site) (see Figure 2-1, Project Location).

The Santa Clara River is one of the largest river systems (and the largest free flowing) in southern California. It flows from the headwater at Pacifico Mountain in the San Gabriel Mountains approximately 84 miles to the Pacific Ocean between the Ventura Harbor and McGrath State Beach. Over the last several decades, a series of large flow events on the Santa Clara River have resulted in damage to the Santa Clara River levee system. SCR-3 has been damaged on multiple occasions in association with

Summary

high flows ranging from 81,400 to 136,000 cubic feet per second (cfs). During the 34-year period beginning 1978 and ending 2012, the VCWPD has expended approximately \$7.5 million in flood damage repair work specifically for the SCR-3 levee system.

The currently effective Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) one percent annual chance (formerly known as 100-year) peak flow for SCR-3 was established at 161,000 cfs in 1985 (Wood Rodgers, 2013). In its existing configuration, SCR-3 does not meet the federally mandated levee certification regulations found in the Code of Federal Regulations (44 CFR §65.10), and therefore is not currently certified. Since 2009 the VCWPD has been actively working to evaluate SCR-3 certification deficiencies and develop an improvement plan to both provide the required flood protection and meet regulatory requirements.

Overview of the Proposed Project

The VCWPD proposes to implement structural improvements to the existing SCR-3 levee to enable it to withstand a one percent annual chance flood event (a.k.a. 100-year flood event) and thereby achieve compliance with FEMA levee certification requirements.

Between the Bailard Landfill located in Oxnard, California, and North Ventura Road (Reaches 1-3), two options are considered under the proposed Project. Option 1A (Full Levee System) adds fill material and riprap along approximately 8,875 feet to raise the existing levee, with one tie-in to the Bailard Landfill. Option 1B (Minimum Levee System), which is the preferred option, adds fill material along approximately 3,575 feet of the existing levee, with tie-ins to Bailard, Coastal, and Santa Clara Landfills. The existing River Ridge Golf Course swale would also be filled in under Option 1B.

In Reach 4, a 968-foot long floodwall would be constructed on the river side of North Ventura Road with a visible height of six feet. A flood gate would be installed across N. Ventura Road. A four- to six-foot high floodwall would be constructed on the south side of N. Ventura Road for approximately 888 feet, then transition to a 40-foot-long earthen embankment abutting and perpendicular to the existing Union Pacific Railroad (UPRR) embankment. A similar 40-foot-long earthen embankment would be constructed on UPRR land northeast of the railroad embankment to tie into the flood protection structure to be constructed by The Village development (a.k.a. Wagon Wheel).

Alternatives to the Proposed Project

CEQA (State CEQA Guidelines §15126.6(a)) requires that an EIR consider a reasonable range of alternatives to a proposed project, or to the location of the project, that could feasibly attain most of the basic objectives of the project and avoid or lessen any of the significant effects of the project. Comparative analysis of the impacts of these alternatives is also required. The alternatives to the proposed Project addressed in this EIR are:

- Alternative 1 – Reaches 1-3: Levee System with Landfill Tie-ins and Golf Course Protection
- Alternative 2 – Reach 4: River Side Floodwall
- Alternative 3 – Reach 4: River Side/Land Side Floodwall Extending up El Rio Drain
- Alternative 4 – Reach 4: East Slope Lining of the UPRR Embankment
- Alternative 5 – No Project Alternative

These alternatives are described in EIR Chapter 4 (Alternatives), with a comparison of the alternatives provided in Table 4-1 (Comparison of Alternatives to the Proposed Project). Additionally, the CEQA environmentally superior alternative is identified in EIR Section 4.6.

Areas of Known Controversy

State CEQA Guidelines Section 15123(b)(2) requires that an EIR contain a summary of the areas of controversy known to the Lead Agency, including issues raised by agencies and the public. Some issues of concern were expressed during the pre-scoping and scoping process, which are detailed in EIR Table 1-1 (Pre-Scoping Comments Summary) and Table 1-2 (Scoping Comments Summary). However, issues of concern do not necessarily represent areas of controversy, but instead generally indicate topics that may need to be investigated and evaluated. Controversial issues tend to be contentious and subject to disagreement and dispute.

Some members of the public have expressed doubt over the need for the Project and do not seem convinced that there is a significant flood hazard in the area. Some questioned the accuracy of the flood mapping and wondered why the area is considered as flood hazard area when it was not mapped that way in the past. Others have expressed the opinion that building levees and floodwalls is not the correct approach for addressing flooding hazards and that a more comprehensive watershed management approach is needed to reduce flooding along the lower Santa Clara River. The proposed floodwall in Reach 4 has also generated some concern, due to its potential effect on local views and its location relative to homes along N. Ventura Road. Some concern has been expressed that the floodwall would attract graffiti and would act as a barrier to wildlife movement.

Issues to be Resolved

State CEQA Guidelines Section 15123(b)(2) require that an EIR present issues to be resolved by the Lead Agency, including the choice among alternatives and whether or how to mitigate significant effects. Regarding the proposed Project, County decision makers will need to not only decide whether to approve the Project, but will also need to decide which of the proposed options for Reaches 1-3 (Option 1A or Option 1B) should be approved. There are also several alternatives examined in the EIR that may warrant consideration. For example, the proposed Project assumes that The Village development on the Wagon Wheel site will implement appropriate measures to provide flood protection immediately upstream of Reach 4, between the UPRR bridge and Highway 101. If that does not happen, decision makers will need to consider approval of either Alternative 3 (Reach 4: River Side/Land Side Floodwall Extending Up El Rio Drain) or Alternative 4 (Reach 4: East Slope Lining of the UPRR Embankment). The alignment for the floodwall in Reach 4 is another consideration for decision makers with a choice between having portions of the floodwall on each side of N. Ventura Road to minimize its height, as described for the proposed Project, versus an alignment exclusively on the river side of the road as described for Alternative 2.

Decision makers will also need to decide whether the mitigation measures recommended in this EIR are appropriate and feasible for addressing significant impacts. If so, the measures will need to be adopted as conditions of approval.

The EIR identifies certain significant and unavoidable impacts that cannot be effectively reduced to a less-than-significant level. To approve the Project with such impacts, decision makers will need to adopt

Summary

a Statement of Overriding Considerations describing the reason(s) for approving the Project despite these impacts.

Summary of Project Impacts

A summary of the direct and indirect environmental impacts associated with implementation of the SCR-3 Project, mitigation measures included to avoid or lessen the severity of potentially significant impacts, and residual impacts, is provided in Table ES-1 (Summary of Project Impacts, Mitigation Measures, and Significance Conclusions), below.

Table ES-1. Summary of Project Impacts, Mitigation Measures, and Significance Conclusions		
Impacts	Mitigation Measures	Significance Conclusion
Air Quality		
Impact AQ-1: Project construction could violate or substantially contribute to existing or projected violations of applicable air quality standards.	AQ-3a: Fugitive Dust Control. AQ-3b: Off-road Equipment Emissions Control. AQ-3c: On-road Equipment Emissions Control.	Class II
Impact AQ-2: Project O&M could violate or substantially contribute to existing or projected violations of applicable air quality standards.	None required.	Class III
Impact AQ-3: Project construction could result in a cumulatively considerable net increase in non-attainment pollutants.	AQ-3a: Fugitive Dust Control. AQ-3b: Off-road Equipment Emissions Control. AQ-3c: On-road Equipment Emissions Control.	Class II
Impact AQ-4: Project O&M could result in a cumulatively considerable net increase in non-attainment pollutants.	None required.	Class III
Impact AQ-5: Project construction and O&M could expose the public to substantial pollutant concentrations.	None required.	Class III
Impact AQ-6: Project construction and O&M could cause localized nuisance odors.	None required.	Class III
Impact AQ-7: Project construction could cause an increase in the incidence of Valley Fever infections.	AQ-3a: Fugitive Dust Control.	Class II
Impact AQ-8: Project O&M could cause an increase in the incidence of Valley Fever infections.	None required.	Class III
Biological Resources		
Impact BIO-1: The Project would result in temporary and permanent losses of native vegetation.	BIO-1a: Implement a Worker Environmental Education Program. BIO-1b: Implement Best Management Practices. BIO-1c: Compensation for Temporary Impacts to Sensitive Vegetation Communities. BIO-1d: Compensation for Permanent Impacts to Sensitive Vegetation Communities. BIO-1e: Implement Biological Construction Monitoring.	Class II
Impact BIO-2: The Project would cause the loss of foraging habitat for wildlife.	N/A	Class III
Impact BIO-3: The Project would result in disturbance to nesting birds or raptors.	BIO-1a: Implement a Worker Environmental Education Program. BIO-1b: Implement Best Management Practices. BIO-1c: Compensation for Temporary Impacts to Sensitive Vegetation Communities. BIO-1d: Compensation for Permanent Impacts to Sensitive Vegetation Communities. BIO-1e: Implement Biological Construction Monitoring. BIO-3: Conduct Pre-construction Surveys for Nesting and Breeding Birds and Implement Avoidance Measures. NV-1a: Movable Construction Noise Barriers.	Class II

Summary

Table ES-1. Summary of Project Impacts, Mitigation Measures, and Significance Conclusions		
Impacts	Mitigation Measures	Significance Conclusion
	NV-1b: Monitor Noise Levels.	
Impact BIO-4: The Project would result in disturbance to wildlife in adjacent habitat.	BIO-1a: Implement a Worker Environmental Education Program. BIO-1b: Implement Best Management Practices. BIO-1c: Compensation for Temporary Impacts to Sensitive Vegetation Communities. BIO-1d: Compensation for Permanent Impacts to Sensitive Vegetation Communities BIO-1e: Implement Biological Construction Monitoring. BIO-3: Conduct Pre-construction Surveys for Nesting and Breeding Birds and Implement Avoidance Measures. NV-1a: Movable Construction Noise Barriers. NV-1b: Monitor Noise Levels.	Class II
Impact BIO-5: The Project could disturb nesting southwestern willow flycatchers, least Bell's vireos, or their habitat.	BIO-1a: Implement a Worker Environmental Education Program. BIO-1b: Implement Best Management Practices. BIO-1c: Compensation for Temporary Impacts to Sensitive Vegetation Communities. BIO-1d: Compensation for Permanent Impacts to Sensitive Vegetation Communities. BIO-1e: Implement Biological Construction Monitoring. BIO-3: Conduct Pre-construction Surveys for Nesting and Breeding Birds and Implement Avoidance Measures. BIO-5: Conduct Protocol Surveys for Least Bell's Vireo and Southwestern Willow Flycatcher and Avoid Occupied Habitat. NV-1a: Movable Construction Noise Barriers. NV-1b: Monitor Noise Levels.	Class II
Impact BIO-6: The Project could result in the loss of sensitive Lancetooth, Timema, and Shoulderband Snails or Monarch Butterfly.	BIO-1a: Implement a Worker Environmental Education Program. BIO-1b: Implement Best Management Practices. BIO-1c: Compensation for Temporary Impacts to Sensitive Vegetation Communities. BIO-1d: Compensation for Permanent Impacts to Sensitive Vegetation Communities. BIO-1e: Implement Biological Construction Monitoring. NV-1a: Movable Construction Noise Barriers. NV-1b: Monitor Noise Levels.	Class II
Impact BIO-7: The Project could result in mortality or injury to southwestern pond turtles or a disruption of nesting habitat.	BIO-1a: Implement a Worker Environmental Education Program. BIO-1b: Implement Best Management Practices. BIO-1c: Compensation for Temporary Impacts to Sensitive Vegetation Communities. BIO-1d: Compensation for Permanent Impacts to Sensitive Vegetation Communities. BIO-1e: Implement Biological Construction Monitoring. BIO-7: Conduct Surveys for Southwestern Pond Turtle and Implement Monitoring, Avoidance, and Minimization Measures.	Class II

Table ES-1. Summary of Project Impacts, Mitigation Measures, and Significance Conclusions		
Impacts	Mitigation Measures	Significance Conclusion
Impact BIO-8: The Project could result in injury or mortality for two-striped garter snakes and south coast garter snake.	BIO-1a: Implement a Worker Environmental Education Program. BIO-1b: Implement Best Management Practices (BMPs). BIO-1c: Compensation for Temporary Impacts to Sensitive Vegetation Communities. BIO-1d: Compensation for Permanent Impacts to Sensitive Vegetation Communities. BIO-1e: Implement Biological Construction Monitoring. BIO-8: Conduct Surveys for Two-Striped Garter Snakes and Implement Monitoring, Avoidance, and Minimization Measures.	Class II
Impact BIO-9: The Project could result in injury or mortality of amphibian and reptile species designated as California Species of Special Concern and/or Ventura County Locally Important Species.	BIO-1a: Implement a Worker Environmental Education Program. BIO-1b: Implement Best Management Practices. BIO-1c: Compensation for Temporary Impacts to Sensitive Vegetation Communities. BIO-1d: Compensation for Permanent Impacts to Sensitive Vegetation Communities. BIO-1e: Implement Biological Construction Monitoring. BIO-9: Conduct Surveys for Terrestrial Herpetofauna and Implement Monitoring, Avoidance, and Minimization Measures.	Class II
Impact BIO-10: The Project could disturb nesting or migrant California Species of Special Concern, CDFW Special Animals or California Fully Protected bird species.	BIO-1a: Implement a Worker Environmental Education Program. BIO-1b: Implement Best Management Practices. BIO-1c: Compensation for Temporary Impacts to Sensitive Vegetation Communities. BIO-1d: Compensation for Permanent Impacts to Sensitive Vegetation Communities. BIO-1e: Implement Biological Construction Monitoring. BIO-3: Conduct Pre-construction Surveys for Nesting and Breeding Birds and Implement Avoidance Measures. BIO-5: Conduct Protocol Surveys for Least Bell's Vireo and Southwestern Willow Flycatcher and Avoid Occupied Habitat. NV-1a: Movable Construction Noise Barriers. NV-1b: Monitor Noise Levels.	Class II
Impact BIO-11: The Project could result in mortality of, and loss of habitat for, special-status bat species.	BIO-1a: Implement a Worker Environmental Education Program. BIO-1b: Implement Best Management Practices. BIO-1c: Compensation for Temporary Impacts to Sensitive Vegetation Communities. BIO-1d: Compensation for Permanent Impacts to Sensitive Vegetation Communities. BIO-1e: Implement Biological Construction Monitoring. BIO-11: Survey for Maternity Colonies or Hibernaculum for Roosting Bats. NV-1a: Movable Construction Noise Barriers. NV-1b: Monitor Noise Levels.	Class II

Summary

Table ES-1. Summary of Project Impacts, Mitigation Measures, and Significance Conclusions		
Impacts	Mitigation Measures	Significance Conclusion
Impact BIO-12: The Project could result in mortality of, and loss of habitat for, special-status mammals.	BIO-1a: Implement a Worker Environmental Education Program. BIO-1b: Implement Best Management Practices. BIO-1c: Compensation for Temporary Impacts to Sensitive Vegetation Communities. BIO-1d: Compensation for Permanent Impacts to Sensitive Vegetation Communities. BIO-1e: Implement Biological Construction Monitoring. NV-1a: Movable Construction Noise Barriers. NV-1b: Monitor Noise Levels.	Class II
Impact BIO-13: The Project could result in mortality of listed or special-status fish.	BIO-1a: Implement a Worker Environmental Education Program. BIO-1b: Implement Best Management Practices. BIO-1e: Implement Biological Construction Monitoring.	Class II
Impact BIO-14: The SCR-3 Project could disturb endangered, threatened, proposed, or other special-status plant species or their habitat.	BIO-1a: Implement a Worker Environmental Education Program. BIO-1b: Implement Best Management Practices. BIO-1c: Compensation for Temporary Impacts to Sensitive Vegetation Communities. BIO-1d: Compensation for Permanent Impacts to Sensitive Vegetation Communities. BIO-1e: Implement Biological Construction Monitoring. BIO-14: Conduct Pre-construction Surveys for State and federally Threatened, Endangered, Proposed, Petitioned, Candidate, and Special-status plants and Avoid Any Located Occurrences of Listed Plants or Perform Other Conservation Strategy.	Class II
Impact BIO-15: The Project would interfere with established wildlife migratory corridors.	None required.	Class III
Impact BIO-16: The Project result in the loss of jurisdictional waters and/or wetland habitats.	BIO-1a: Implement a Worker Environmental Education Program. BIO-1b: Implement Best Management Practices. BIO-1c: Compensation for Temporary Impacts to Sensitive Vegetation Communities. BIO-1d: Compensation for Permanent Impacts to Sensitive Vegetation Communities BIO-1e: Implement Biological Construction Monitoring.	Class II
Scenic Resources		
Impact SR-1: Construction and O&M activities in the Project area would be visible from public viewing locations.	None required.	Class III
Impact SR-2: Implementation of Reach 4 would alter scenic resources in the Project area by introducing new structures and resulting in the removal of native habitat.	No feasible mitigation is available.	Class I
Impact SR-3: Implementation of the Reach 4 floodwall could result in increased graffiti that would degrade the overall view of the surrounding scenic resources.	SR-1: Graffiti Avoidance.	Class II

Table ES-1. Summary of Project Impacts, Mitigation Measures, and Significance Conclusions		
Impacts	Mitigation Measures	Significance Conclusion
Impact SR-4: Implementation of Reach 4 would obstruct the viewshed of the Santa Clara River in the Project area by introducing new structures and resulting in the removal of native habitat.	No feasible mitigation is available.	Class I
Hazards		
Impact HAZ-1: The Project may be subject to liquefaction-related damage.	None required.	Class III
Impact HAZ-2: Hazardous waste may be encountered at landfill tie-ins and retaining wall footing excavation.	HAZ-2: Pre-Construction Testing for Landfill Waste, Landfill Gas, and Groundwater.	Class II
Impact HAZ-3: Existing gas recovery pipelines in the work areas could result in public health effects to workers and possibly the public if a line is damaged during construction.	HAZ-3: Coordination to Protect, Remove, or Relocate Landfill Gas Pipelines.	Class II
Noise and Vibration		
Impact NV-1: Project construction could result in noise levels that would disturb sensitive noise receptors, particularly near Reach 4.	NV-1a: Movable Construction Noise Barriers. NV-1b: Monitor Noise Levels.	Class I (Reach 4 only)
Impact NV-2: O&M activities would result in increased noise levels affecting sensitive noise receptors.	None required.	Class III
Impact NV-3: Project construction could result in vibration levels that affect nearby buildings.	No mitigation measures are required.	Class III
Impact NV-4: Project construction could result in vibration levels that are annoying to nearby residents.	NV-4: Community Notification.	Class I (Reach 4 only)
Impact NV-5: O&M activities would result in temporary increases in local vibration levels.	None required.	Class III
Transportation and Circulation		
Impact TC-1: Traffic generated during Project construction would affect the ICU values and LOS at the study area intersections.	None required.	Class III
Impact TC-2: Traffic generated during Project construction would affect the volume/capacity ratios and LOS on the study area roadway segments.	TC-2: Restrict Project Traffic from Using Highway 101 at Victoria Avenue during Peak Hours.	Class II
Impact TC-3: Project construction would result in physical disruptions to traffic flow on the roadways adjacent to the construction zones, such as temporary roadway and/or lane closures.	None required.	Class III
Impact TC-4: Project construction would result in temporary traffic impacts at the locations on Ventura Road and Victoria Avenue where the construction vehicles would be entering and exiting these roadways.	None required.	Class III

Summary

Table ES-1. Summary of Project Impacts, Mitigation Measures, and Significance Conclusions		
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Impact TC-5: O&M of the Project would result in an increase in site-generated traffic volumes.	None required.	Class III
Impact TC-6: Flooding would periodically result in a closure of Ventura Road.	None required.	Class IV
Utilities		
Impact U-1: Construction of the Project could accidentally damage buried utilities resulting in service disruption.	HAZ-3: Coordination to Protect, Remove, or Relocate Landfill Gas Pipelines.	Class II
Flood Control and Drainage		
Impact FC-1: The Project may result in an increase in the base flood elevation for areas across from or downstream of the proposed levee improvements.	None required.	Class III
Cultural Resources		
Potential to encounter subsurface cultural resource remains during construction. (See the Initial Study in Appendix A.)	CUL-1: Unanticipated Discovery of Archaeological or Historic Resources. CUL-2: Unanticipated Discovery of Human Remains.	Class II
Daytime Glare		
Nighttime lighting during construction may affect motorists and residences. (See the Initial Study in Appendix A.)	DG-1: Shield Nighttime Lighting.	Class II
Recreation		
Filling the drainage swale would temporarily disrupt recreation activities at the River Ridge Golf Course (Option 1B only). (See the Initial Study in Appendix A.)	REC-1: Coordination with River Ridge Golf Course to Minimize Disruptions.	Class II

Class I: Significant impact; cannot be mitigated to a level that is not significant. A Class I impact is a significant adverse effect that cannot be mitigated below a level of significance through the application of feasible mitigation measures. Class I impacts are significant and unavoidable.

Class II: Significant impact; can be mitigated to a level that is not significant. A Class II impact is a significant adverse effect that can be reduced to a less-than-significant level through the application of feasible mitigation measures presented in this EIR/EIS.

Class III: Adverse; less than significant. A Class III impact is a minor change or effect on the environment that does not meet or exceed the criteria established to gauge significance.

Class IV: Beneficial impact. A Class IV impact represents a beneficial effect that would result from project implementation.