

1. Introduction

1.1 Project Overview

The Ventura County Watershed Protection District (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 Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) levee certification requirements, as identified in 44 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Section 65.10.

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).

The Project would provide flood protection to properties in the City of Oxnard along the SCR-3 levee that would otherwise require flood insurance under the National Flood Insurance Program.

1.2 Environmental Review Process

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) requires that an environmental review be conducted for activities directly undertaken by a government agency (State CEQA Guidelines §15002(b)). CEQA applies to all California government agencies at all levels, including local agencies, regional agencies, State agencies, boards, and commissions. An environmental impact report (EIR) is an informational document required by CEQA when substantial evidence exists that a project may have a significant physical effect on the environment. The EIR is intended to provide information to decision makers, agency staff, and the public about (1) the potential environmental impacts of a project, (2) ways in which the significant effects of a project might be minimized or avoided, and (3) alternatives to the project that could reduce or avoid the significant impacts associated with the project.

The VCWPD is the Lead Agency responsible for compliance with CEQA. This EIR has been prepared by the VCWPD in compliance with the State CEQA Guidelines. This EIR will also be used by other agencies in their decision-making processes. Responsible Agencies include any public agency other than the Lead

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Agency that have discretionary approval power over the project. Trustee Agencies are those State agencies that have jurisdiction by law over natural resources held in trust for the people of the State of California. Additionally, Reviewing Agencies include those agencies that do not have discretionary power over the project, but are expected to review the EIR for adequacy and accuracy.

The EIR discloses the environmental impacts expected to result from the construction and operation of the proposed Project and mitigation measures, which if adopted by the VCWPD or other responsible agencies, could avoid or minimize significant environmental effects. In accordance with the State CEQA Guidelines, this EIR also evaluates alternatives (including the No Project Alternative) to the proposed Project that could avoid or minimize the significant environmental effects. Potential alternatives to the proposed Project that were considered by the Lead Agency are described in Chapter 4 of this EIR, and of those a reasonable range of feasible alternatives were selected for analysis. Impacts of the alternatives are compared to the proposed Project, and the Environmentally Superior Alternative is also identified in Chapter 4.

1.2.1 Pre-Scoping Process

The VCWPD held a pre-scoping meeting on June 4, 2014, at the Marriot Residence Inn at the River Ridge Golf Course in Oxnard, California. The purpose of the meeting was to provide the public an opportunity to learn about the SCR-3 Project and the various alternatives under consideration by the VCWPD. The VCWPD presented the alternatives, including a high-level analysis of the attributes of each alternative and potential environmental effects. The cost and financing of the various alternatives was also discussed. The VCWPD solicited comments and input from the public to better identify the public’s concerns regarding the SCR-3 Project, and to help in selecting a design that would best meet the Project objectives while meeting the community’s needs.

Comments were received at the pre-scoping meeting and throughout the 30-day period following the meeting. These comments are summarized in Table 1-1, along with information on where each is addressed within either the Initial Study or this EIR.

Table 1-1. Pre-Scoping Comments Summary		
Resource/Issue Area	Topic/Comment Summary	Where Addressed
Project Objectives, Alternatives	Alternatives should focus only on protecting residences to be consistent with stated Project goals.	EIR Sections 2.4 and 4
Alternatives	Alternatives should consider watershed management solutions (e.g., natural floodplain attenuation, removal of existing vegetation from riverbed to increase flood capacity, upstream stormwater detention, low-impact development techniques).	EIR Section 4
Biological Resources	Project should preserve riparian habitat.	EIR Section 3.2
Biological Resources	Project design should prevent rodent burrows to avoid the need for rodent control.	EIR Section 3.2
Biological Resources, Water Resources, Cultural Resources, Recreation	Analysis should consider impacts on water resources, sensitive wildlife habitat, cultural resources, recreation, and future growth inducement.	EIR Sections 3.2 and 5.3; Initial Study Sections C.2, C.8, and C.35
Scenic Resources	Project should avoid barriers that block views of the Santa Clara River.	EIR Section 3.3
Scenic Resources, Flood Control	Project should avoid use of concrete floodwalls.	EIR Sections 3.3 and 3.8
Flood Control, Hydraulic Hazards	Hydrology analysis should include modeling of peak flow reduction.	EIR Section 3.8; Initial Study Section C.17

Resource/Issue Area	Topic/Comment Summary	Where Addressed
Flood Control, Hydraulic Hazards	Clarify the analysis used in determining the 100-year flood zone.	EIR Section 3.8; Initial Study Section C.17
Law Enforcement	Project should avoid siting floodwalls on the north side of Ventura Road, which is currently a site for illegal activities.	Initial Study Section C.32
Law Enforcement; Scenic Resources	Project should include mitigation to remove future graffiti from proposed floodwalls.	EIR Section 3.3; Initial Study Section C.32
Recreation	Project should be consistent with the Nature Conservancy's Public Access Vision Plan for the Santa Clara River Parkway.	Initial Study Section C.35
Recreation	Project design should accommodate the future Santa Clara River Trail Master Plan.	Initial Study Section C.35
Financing	Concerns regarding the Project's financial burden on homeowners.	Not addressed. CEQA does not consider financial or economic factors except as they relate to project feasibility or physical effects.

1.2.2 Scoping Process

The VCWPD circulated a Notice of Preparation (NOP) and an Initial Study for the Project on February 25, 2015, beginning a 30-day comment period (February 26, 2015, through March 27, 2015). Additionally, a scoping meeting was held on March 4, 2015, at the Marriot Residence Inn at the River Ridge Golf Course in Oxnard, California. The purpose of the meeting was to request assistance from the public in identifying the scope and content of the environmental information that should be addressed in the EIR. The VCWPD presented the proposed Project and the alternatives that had been considered to date and would be discussed in the EIR (see Chapter 4). The results of the Initial Study analysis were also presented, which indicate that the proposed Project may result in adverse impacts to air quality, biological resources, scenic resources, liquefaction, hazardous waste, noise and vibration, public health, transportation and circulation, utilities, and flood control/drainage. These topics are addressed in this EIR in Sections 3.1 through 3.8.

Comments were received at the scoping meeting and throughout the 30-day comment period. These comments are summarized in Table 1-2, along with information on where each is addressed within either the Initial Study or this EIR.

Resource/Issue Area	Topic/Comment Summary	Where Addressed
Project Description	Project Description should identify all staging areas and access routes to construction and staging areas.	EIR Section 2.6
Air Quality	Ventura County APCD requests an analysis of reactive organic compound and nitrogen oxide emissions from all project-related motor vehicles and construction equipment. Also evaluate the potential for a cumulatively considerable net increase of any criteria pollutant.	EIR Section 3.1
Biological Resources	CDFW is concerned with potential impacts on native riparian habitat, sensitive species, and wetland resources. Mitigation is recommended to conserve riparian habitat adjacent to the Project.	EIR Section 3.2
Biological Resources	CDFW requests that the analysis include a complete assessment of flora and fauna within the Project area.	EIR Section 3.2
Biological Resources	CDFW is concerned with the use of rodent control methods such as rodenticide.	EIR Section 3.2

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Resource/Issue Area	Topic/Comment Summary	Where Addressed
Biological Resources	In order for CDFW to issue a Lake and Streambed Alteration Agreement for the Project, the analysis must fully identify impacts to the stream or riparian resources, and include vegetation buffers as appropriate.	EIR Section 3.2
Biological Resources	Project should avoid use of floodwalls that are a barrier to wildlife movement.	EIR Section 3.2
Biological Resources	The analysis should consider indirect impacts to biological resources from lighting and noise, adjacent land uses, and other cumulative projects.	EIR Section 3.2
Scenic Resources, Recreation	Project should incorporate the Santa Clara River Parkway Plan.	EIR Section 3.3; Initial Study Section C.35
Hazards	Analysis should discuss hazards associated with construction.	EIR Section 3.4; Initial Study Sections C.10 through C.20
Hazards	Analysis should include impacts to Project from a natural disaster.	EIR Section 3.4; Initial Study Sections C.10 through C.20
Noise and Vibration	Concern with damage to homes from equipment vibrations during construction.	EIR Section 3.5
Transportation and Circulation	Caltrans requests a traffic study to analyze Project impacts on the northbound/southbound US-101 and on/off ramps at Oxnard Boulevard.	EIR Section 3.6
Transportation and Circulation	Project should include a multi-use path (i.e., bike and pedestrian) within the river corridor to avoid safety risks from vehicles outside of the corridor.	EIR Section 2.5 and 3.6
Water Resources	Project should consider Ventura County General Plan goals for restoring groundwater resources through the use of peak flow detention basins.	Initial Study Section C.2; EIR Section 4
Water Resources	Project should consider State Water Quality Control Board policy for zero trash discharges to river, estuary, and ocean waters.	Initial Study Section C.2
Flood Control, Alternatives	CDFW recommends that the Project reclaim natural floodplain function in areas that are feasible.	EIR Sections 3.8 and 4
Cultural Resources	Concern with Project impacts to cultural resources within floodplain.	Initial Study Section C.8
Hazardous Materials/Waste	Ventura County Environmental Health Division concerned with impacts to adjacent landfills.	EIR Section 3.4; Initial Study Section C.20
Waste Treatment/Disposal	Project is subject to Ventura County Integrated Waste Management Division requirements for recyclable construction materials, dirt/soil, and green materials.	Initial Study Section C.29
Law Enforcement; Scenic Resources	Concern that new floodwalls would facilitate illegal activity in the Santa Clara River area. Mitigation needed to control graffiti.	Initial Study Sections C.6 and C.32
Recreation	The Project should include additional recreational access to the Santa Clara River area.	Initial Study Section C.35
Coastal Access	Concerns regarding environmental justice impacts from limited coastal access.	Not addressed. The Project does not directly or indirectly affect coastal access.

The VCWPD has endeavored to address a broad range of issues, resources, and topics in the EIR, including concerns raised during the pre-scoping and scoping periods. However, not all comments received are addressed for various reasons. Some comments did not pertain to the Project and, therefore, have not been addressed. Examples include comments on other projects or on actions by

government agencies that are not relevant to the proposed Project. Some comments have not been addressed because they were not substantive, meaning that they did not present information that is meaningful to the environmental analysis. Examples of non-substantive comments include comments expressing opposition to or support for the proposed Project, comments expressing disagreement with the engineering design basis or adopted public policies, or comments that are vague or open ended. Such non-substantive comments are not required to be addressed in the EIR.

1.3 Document Organization

This EIR is organized as follows:

Executive Summary. Presents an overview of the proposed Project, its significant effects, measures recommended to reduce impacts, and alternatives.

Section 1.0 (Introduction). Provides an overview of the proposed Project, the environmental review process, and the contents of the EIR.

Section 2.0 (Project Description). Includes a detailed description of the proposed Project, including background on the need for the Project, Project objectives, and permits and approvals that would be required to implement the proposed Project.

Section 3.0 (Environmental Setting and Impact Analysis). Contains a description of the existing conditions in the Project area, as well as a comprehensive assessment of impacts and mitigation measures for the proposed Project for each of the environmental topics determined to be potentially significant in the Initial Study. Each topic is addressed in a separate subsection, as follows:

- 3.1 Air Quality
- 3.2 Biological Resources
- 3.3 Scenic Resources
- 3.4 Hazards (includes liquefaction, hazardous waste, and public health)
- 3.5 Noise and Vibration
- 3.6 Transportation and Circulation
- 3.7 Utilities
- 3.8 Flood Control and Drainage

Section 4.0 (Alternatives). Presents the alternatives considered but eliminated, and those alternatives selected for full analysis in the EIR. Selected alternatives are evaluated and a comparison of alternatives to the proposed Project is provided. The Environmentally Superior Alternative is identified.

Section 5.0 (Other Required CEQA Topics). Those topics that were found, based on the Initial Study analysis, not to require detailed analysis in the EIR because the impacts would not be significant are summarized. Unavoidable significant adverse effects of the proposed Project are also summarized. A discussion of additional CEQA considerations is provided, including growth-inducing impacts, significant irreversible environmental changes, and energy conservation.

Section 6.0 (Organizations/Persons Consulted and EIR Preparers). All persons and organizations contributing to the preparation of the EIR are listed.

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Section 7.0 (References). Lists documents used as a basis of information for the EIR.

Section 8.0 (Glossary and Acronyms). Provides a list of commonly used terms and acronyms, including definitions.

Appendices. There are a number of appendices to this EIR, including the following:

- A. Initial Study
- B. Biological Resources Appendices
 - B.1 Least Bell’s Vireo Protocol Survey and Territory Mapping, and Southwestern Willow Flycatcher Protocol Survey
 - B.2 Summary of Surveys Conducted in the Study Area
 - B.3 Wildlife Observed in the Study Area
 - B.4 Plant Species Observed in the Study Area
 - B.5 Plant Species Rejected but Considered for Occurrence
 - B.6 Special-status Plant and Wildlife Descriptions
 - B.7 Jurisdictional Delineation
- C. Air Pollutant Emissions Calculations
- D. Noise and Vibration Alternatives Analysis
- E. Santa Clara River (SCR-3) Unsteady Flow Hydraulic Analysis
- F. SCR-3 Alternatives Analysis Supplementary Evaluation
- G. Ventura County Watershed Protection District Routine Operations & Maintenance Program – Environmental Best Management Practices and Permit Conditions Summary

1.4 Availability of the Draft EIR

The Draft EIR is subject to a 45-day public review period starting from the date of the Notice of Availability. Copies of the Draft EIR have been sent to the State Clearinghouse, Responsible Agencies, and agencies that commented on the NOP. Owners of property in the vicinity of the proposed Project, along with interested parties that have requested notice, have been notified regarding the availability of the Draft EIR.

The Draft EIR can be accessed on the VCWPD website at: www.vclevees.com.

Hard copies are also available for review at the following locations:

Ventura County Watershed Protection District
800 South Victoria Avenue
Ventura, CA 93009

Ventura County Clerk & Recorder Office
800 South Victoria Avenue
Ventura, CA 93009

Oxnard Main Public Library
251 South A Street
Oxnard, CA 93030
(805) 385-7500

South Branch Oxnard Library
4300 Saviers Road
Oxnard, CA 93033
(805) 385-8129

Albert H. Soliz Library
2820 Jourdan Street
Oxnard, CA 93036
(805) 485-4515

Colonia Branch Oxnard Library
1500 Camino del Sol #26
Oxnard, CA 93030
(805) 385-8108

Interested individuals, organizations, responsible and trustee agencies are encouraged to provide written comments during the 45-day public review period to:

Attention: Angela Bonfiglio Allen
Ventura County Watershed Protection District
800 South Victoria Avenue
Ventura, CA 93009-1600

OR Email: Angela.Bonfiglio@ventura.org

Agency responses should include the name of a contact person within the commenting agency.

Please note that all comments received become part of the public record for the Project.