
Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board

August 7, 2014

File: Environmental Doc Review
Los Angeles County

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COMMENTS ON NOTICE OF COMPLETION AND AVAILABILITY OF A DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT FOR THE LOS ANGELES COUNTY GENERAL PLAN UPDATE, LOS ANGELES COUNTY, STATE CLEARINGHOUSE NO. 2011081042

The California Regional Water Quality Control Board, Lahontan Region (Water Board) staff received the Notice of Completion of a Draft Environmental Impact Report (Draft EIR) for the above-referenced plan (Plan) on July 2, 2014. The Draft EIR was prepared by Los Angeles County (County) and submitted in compliance with provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The General Plan will update the County's existing plan as its guide for the growth and development in the unincorporated areas of the County up to the year 2035. Water Board staff, acting as a responsible agency, is providing these comments to specify the scope and content of the environmental information germane to our statutory responsibilities pursuant to CEQA Guidelines, California Code of Regulations (CCR), title 14, section 15096. We encourage the County to take this opportunity to integrate urban development and sustainable practices and incorporate into the Plan strategies that promote watershed management, support "Low Impact Development" (LID), reduce the effects of hydromodification, and encourage recycled water uses. However, based on the projected population increases for the Antelope Valley, the Draft EIR does not adequately account for increases in the quantity of water required to sustain this growth, nor does it adequately address potential future degradation of water quality from anthropogenic sources such as industrial facilities, agriculture, and wastewater plants.

AUTHORITY

All groundwater and surface waters are considered waters of the State. Surface waters include streams, lakes, ponds, and wetlands, and may be ephemeral, intermittent, or perennial. All waters of the State are protected under California law. State law assigns responsibility for protection of water quality in the Lahontan Region to the Lahontan

Water Board. Some waters of the State are also waters of the U.S. The Federal Clean Water Act (CWA) provides additional protection for those waters of the State that are also waters of the U.S.

The *Water Quality Control Plan for the Lahontan Region* (Basin Plan) contains policies that the Water Board uses with other laws and regulations to protect the quality of waters of the State within the Lahontan Region. The Basin Plan sets forth water quality standards for surface water and groundwater of the Region, which include designated beneficial uses as well as narrative and numerical objectives which must be maintained or attained to protect those uses. The Basin Plan can be accessed via the Water Board's web site at

http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/lahontan/water_issues/programs/basin_plan/references.shtml.

INTEGRATING URBAN DEVELOPMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY

The General Plan is the County's long-term blueprint for development in general, and the Housing Element is the County's specific plan to meet the existing and projected housing needs of all economic segments of the community. In the high desert, the quantity and quality of water is an integral component needed for development, especially in the Antelope Valley. To that end, we encourage the County to incorporate into the Plan strategies that promote watershed management, address existing impacts, support LID, avoid and minimize the effects of hydromodification, and encourage recycled water uses.

A Watershed Approach

Healthy watersheds are sustainable. Watersheds supply drinking water, provide for recreational uses, sustain agriculture, provide natural flood control, and support ecosystems. Watershed processes include the movement of water (i.e. infiltration and surface runoff), the transport of sediment, and the delivery of organic material to surface waters. These processes create and sustain the streams, lakes, wetlands, and other receiving waters of our region. The watershed approach for managing water resource quality and quantity is a collaborative process that focuses public and private efforts on the highest priority problems within a drainage basin.

Beneficial Uses

The unincorporated areas of the County within the Lahontan Region include five surface water hydrologic areas and one groundwater basin: Neenach, Lancaster, Buttes, Rock Creek, and small portions of the El Mirage hydrologic areas and the Antelope Valley groundwater basin (Basin No. 6-44). The hydrologic areas have designated beneficial uses that include municipal and domestic supply (MUN), agricultural supply (AGR), groundwater recharge (GWR), freshwater replenishment (FRSH), water contact recreation (REC-1), non-contact water recreation (REC-2), warm freshwater habitat (WARM), rare, threatened, or endangered species (RARE), wildlife habitat (WLD), peak attenuation and flood storage (FLD), and water quality enhancement (WQE). The beneficial uses of the Antelope Valley groundwater basin include MUN, AGR, industrial service supply (IND), and FRSH. Water Board staff request that the Plan identify these hydrologic areas and the Antelope Valley groundwater basin, their beneficial uses, and

describe in more detail how the County will protect these beneficial uses and sustain or improve water quality in the basin in the coming years.

Increased Potential for Groundwater Quality Degradation

Water supply and groundwater quality are critical issues for future growth in the Antelope Valley. The Plan states that population is expected to grow 31.2% in the unincorporated areas between the present time and 2035; this increase in population will certainly require additional water supply as well as increased wastewater effluent from the wastewater plants at Palmdale and Lancaster, operated by the Los Angeles County Sanitation District (LACSD), and being discharged or recharged within the Antelope Valley. Historical discharges from the Palmdale plant are responsible for significant degradation of groundwater quality in the Antelope Valley groundwater basin due to nitrate (Lahontan Water Board, 2003)¹. The Plan acknowledges issues of arsenic (Chapter 5-9), but does not mention nitrate or total dissolved solids (TDS) impacts, and does not discuss potential future water quality impacts from increased discharges from LACSD. As issues of increased sources of salts and nutrients have been of concern in our region, we request that this section of the Plan be expanded to discuss the potential for future impacts from continued or increased discharges from present and future sources. We also request additional discussion of what mitigation measures must be taken to preserve or improve existing water quality, in light of the projected population growth in the Antelope Valley.

The Plan should also discuss additional constituents of concern (COCs) as identified in the Draft Antelope Valley Salt and Nutrient Management Plan (SNMP) (see <http://www.avwaterplan.org/>). These COCs include boron, chloride, fluoride, nitrate, and TDS. The Plan does not discuss how increased population growth will affect these existing impacts, nor does it discuss mitigation measures for anticipated increases in discharge of these COCs. We request that this section be expanded to address these potential future impacts and to discuss the remaining assimilative capacities and mitigation measures that will be taken to preserve or improve existing groundwater quality.

The Antelope Valley Integrated Regional Water Management Plan (AVIRWMP) was prepared by a collaborative group of stakeholders, including the County and LACSD, to address both water quantity and water quality within the Antelope Valley. The AVIRWMP has been developed to sustain water quantity (i.e. imported water, stormwater recharge, recycled water uses, etc.), to manage salts and nutrients, and to maintain the quality of surface waters and groundwater within the Antelope Valley. The County is encouraged to continue to play an active stakeholder role in the development of these plans and to incorporate the implementation strategies into their sustainability Plan. We recommend that the water supply and water quality management goals and issues discussed in the AVIRWMP be incorporated into the County's Plan.

¹ Lahontan Regional Board, 2003. *California Regional Water Quality Control Board, Lahontan Region; Cleanup and Abatement Order No.R6V-2003-056, WDID NO. 6B190107069, Requiring Los Angeles County Sanitation District No. 20 Palmdale Water Reclamation Plant and the City of Los Angeles World Airports to Cleanup and Abate Waste Discharges to the Ground Waters of the Antelope Hydrologic Unit.*

Low Impact Development Strategies

The Plan (Chapter 5-9) states that the County has developed its own Low Impact Development (LID) Standards Manual to comply with the requirements of the National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Municipal Separate Stormwater Sewer System (MS4) permit for coastal watersheds. However, Water Board staff recommend that the LID Standards Manual should not be limited to only coastal watershed regions, but should be expanded to protect all waters of the State within the County.

We understand that LID development practices that would maintain aquatic values could also reduce local infrastructure requirements and maintenance costs, and could benefit air quality, open space, and habitat. Vegetated areas for stormwater management and infiltration onsite are valuable in LID and may enhance the aesthetics of the property. We appreciate the priority and importance of LID that the County has put forth in their Plan, and we request that a copy be added as appendix to the Draft EIR.

Stormwater Management

Because increased runoff from developed areas is a key variable driving a number of adverse effects, attention to maintaining the pre-development hydrograph will prevent or minimize many problems and will limit the need for other analyses and mitigation. However, traditional methods for managing urban stormwater may not adequately protect the environment, as they tend to treat symptoms instead of causes. Such practices have led to channelization and stream armoring that permanently alter stream habitat, hydrology, and aesthetics that may result in overall degradation of a watershed. Stormwater control measures that are compatible with LID are preferred over more traditional measures. Examples include the use of bioretention swales, pervious pavement, and vegetated infiltration basins, all of which can effectively treat post-construction stormwater runoff, help sustain watershed processes, protect receiving waters, and maintain healthy watersheds in the face of urbanization. Any particular one of these control measures may not be suitable, effective, or even feasible on every site, but the right combination, in the right places, can successfully achieve these goals. We encourage the County to establish guidelines for implementing specific stormwater control measures into the Plan. Additional information regarding LID and sustainable stormwater management can be accessed online at http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/low_impact_development/.

Hydromodification

Hydromodification is the alteration of the natural flow of water through a landscape (i.e. lining channels, flow diversions, culvert installations, armoring, etc.). Disturbing and compacting soils, changing or removing the vegetation cover, increasing impervious surfaces, and altering drainage patterns limit the natural hydrologic cycle processes of absorption, infiltration, and evapotranspiration, and increases the volume and frequency of runoff and sediment transport. Hydromodification results in stream channel instability, degraded water quality, changes in groundwater recharge processes, and aquatic habitat impacts. Hydromodification also can result in disconnecting a stream

channel from its floodplain. Floodplain areas provide natural recharge, attenuate flood flows, provide habitat, and filter pollutants from urban runoff. Floodplain areas also store and release sediment, one of the essential processes to maintain the health of the watershed.

We encourage the County to identify existing sources of hydromodification and to develop mitigation measures to minimize those impacts, as well as establish guidelines that will help to avoid hydromodification from future projects. The guidelines should include maintaining natural drainage paths of Amargosa Creek, Anaverde Creek, Little Rock Wash, Big Rock Wash, and other ephemeral streams within the planning area and establishing buffers and setback requirements to protect channels and floodplain areas from encroaching development. Information regarding hydromodification can be accessed online at

http://www.swrcb.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/stormwater/hydromodification.shtml.

Recycled Water Uses

The State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board) adopted the recycled Water Policy on February 3, 2009, and amended the policy on January 22, 2013. The purpose of the policy is to promote sustainable local water supplies by increasing the use of recycled water from municipal wastewater sources in a manner that implements state and federal water quality laws. The Recycled Water Policy establishes goals and mandates for recycled water use throughout the State. Incentives for implementing recycled water projects include grant opportunities and priority funding. The County is encouraged to consider the use of recycled water as an implementation strategy in their Plan. Current and planned future recycled water projects should be identified and evaluated in the Draft EIR.

PERMITTING REQUIREMENTS

A number of activities associated with Plan implementation projects may have the potential to impact waters of the State and, therefore, may require permits issued by either the State Water Board or Lahontan Water Board. The required permits may include:

1. Land disturbance of more than 1 acre may require a CWA, section 402(p) stormwater permit, including a National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) General Construction Stormwater Permit, Water Quality Order (WQO) 2009-0009-DWQ, obtained from the State Water Board, or an individual stormwater permit obtained from the Lahontan Water Board;
2. New industrial operations which qualify under CWA, section 402(p) and which discharge their stormwater off-site to a water of the US, are required to obtain a permit under the Industrial General Permit program, 2014-0057-DWQ; and
3. Streambed alteration and/or discharge of fill material to a surface water, including water diversions, may require a CWA, section 401 water quality certification for impacts to federal waters (waters of the U.S.), or dredge and fill WDRs for impacts to non-federal waters, both issued by the Lahontan Water Board.

Some waters of the State are "isolated" from waters of the U.S. Determinations of the jurisdictional extent of the waters of the U.S. are made by the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). Projects that have the potential to impact surface waters will require the appropriate jurisdictional delineations. These delineations must be verified by USACE and are necessary to discern if the proposed surface water impacts will be regulated under section 401 of the CWA or through dredge and fill WDRs issued by the Water Board.

We request that the Draft EIR recognize the potential permits that may be required, as outlined above, and identify the specific activities that may trigger these permitting actions in the appropriate sections of the environmental document. Information regarding these permits, including application forms, can be downloaded from our web site at <http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/lahontan/>.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Draft EIR. If you have any questions regarding this letter, please contact me at (760) 241-7391 (tbrowne@waterboards.ca.gov) or Patrice Copeland, Senior Engineering Geologist, at (760) 241-7404 (pcopeland@waterboards.ca.gov).



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