

Frequently Asked Questions Regarding Water Quality Issues in the Los Osos Community

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Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board



Is the Andre Site with STEP/STEG collection a preferable project?

The Andre site (along with several others) was evaluated in the project EIR, which concluded that the Tri-W site best met project, community and regulatory goals. Furthermore, the Andre site is extremely limited by recorded easements and building restrictions, which would make its use infeasible. Regarding treatment plant siting, several commenters have asked the Regional Board to “move the sewer” (which we assume actually refers to building the treatment plant at some other site). The Regional Board did not make the siting decision, as it has no authority to do so. The CSD evaluated siting options, selected the Tri-W site, designed the plant, and is preparing for construction bidding. Collection system alternatives, including STEP/STEG (septic tank effluent pumped/septic tank effluent gravity) systems were also evaluated during the project development and EIR process. Due to greater expense, traffic impacts and capacity issues, STEP/STEG systems are typically limited to projects with severe site constraints demanding such alternatives. In addition, costs associated with tank replacement due to uncertainties of tank integrity, add to the expense of STEP/STEG systems. No cost effective, feasible alternative project has been proposed.

Have the Project’s purpose and goals changed in regards to affordability, environmental justice, energy and safe basin yield?

Ironically, socio-economic impacts and affordability are issues raised by some project opponents, which have at every opportunity, pursued actions to delay the project and add to its expense. From its earliest inception (three decades ago) the Los Osos community sewer has received some opposing comments due to costs, and millions of dollars of cost have been added to the project due to litigation and delays. However, economic impacts, affordability and cost-effective alternatives have all been addressed in the EIR, project development and State Revolving Fund

process. Project opponents litigated in federal court regarding environmental justice. Both federal (trial and appellate) courts and state superior court have ruled in favor of the Los Osos CSD project. Regarding safe basin yield, long-range water management planning (summarized in the community’s Water Master Plan) depends upon restoring shallow ground water quality for domestic use. The wastewater project is specifically designed to meet that goal. Continued existing practices (drawing supply from deeper zone and discharging via septic systems to shallow zone) will result in increased degradation of the shallow zone by sewage and the deeper zone by seawater intrusion. The contention that the proposed project does not meet energy sustainability goals is inconsistent with the suggested alternative (STEP/STEG), which consumes considerably more energy transporting and treating waste.

Have there been Project changes that require a New EIR?

The Los Osos CSD has made minor project changes since adoption of the EIR, which are addressed in an Addendum to the EIR. CEQA calls for preparation of a new EIR only if project changes would cause new significant environmental effects or increase the severity of previously identified effects. No such significant changes have been made to the Project.

Is the Project consistent with the Coastal Act, Local Coastal Program and other applicable policies?

San Luis Obispo County issued its certification of consistency with the Local Coastal Plan for the wastewater project in April 2004. The California Coastal Commission approved the Coastal Development Permit for the project in August 2004, documenting its findings of consistency with the Coastal Act and Local Coastal Program. Los Osos CSD has successfully defended the wastewater project through each challenge, appeal and litigation concluded to date (and there have been many).

Will there be discharge of effluent or ground water to Morro Bay?

During project construction, ground water will undoubtedly be intercepted by excavation and trenching. Such ground water will be discharged in a variety of methods including (but not limited to) landscape irrigation, dust control, leachfields, Los Osos Creek and Morro Bay. Actions will be taken to minimize discharges to Morro Bay. Discharge of construction dewatering is authorized and regulated by the State Water Resources Control Board's Statewide Construction Storm Water Permit. At some future date, shallow ground water may be harvested as part of basin-wide ground water management. The need for harvesting is not certain, and is based on a worst-case scenario in conservative ground water modeling. Such harvested ground water will be beneficially used and/or disposed according to its quality. If discharge to Los Osos Creek or Morro Bay is planned for harvested ground water, such discharge may be authorized under this Region's Low Threat NPDES Permit, subject to meeting the permit criteria. Even if water is harvested, discharges to surface water may be unnecessary if other uses are available, such as recycling. The quality of shallow ground water if/when harvesting is needed, will be significantly improved because it will no longer be in direct/near contact with septic tank discharges and effluent will have received tertiary treatment. Note that harvesting (if it is ever necessary) is a short-term issue. The long-term goal for shallow ground water is to restore it to a quality appropriate for municipal/domestic use. Harvesting would then be unnecessary since the shallow aquifer would be pumped and sold by water purveyors. Also, as a matter of perspective, shallow ground water currently discharges to Los Osos Creek and Morro Bay through the community storm drainage system and as seepage directly to the Bay. Discharge of effluent from the proposed CSD wastewater project to surface waters is expressly prohibited in WDR Order No. R3-2003-0007 (which regulates wastewater discharges).

Will the Los Osos CSD Wastewater Project do more harm than good and result in water quality degradation?

This contention is similar to arguments made by Cal Cities Water Company in its challenge of Waste Discharger Requirements (WDRs) adopted by the Regional Board. The Los Osos CSD's wastewater project is specifically designed to protect and restore water quality. Contention that collecting, treating and disinfecting sewage prior to discharge in a similar-to-existing manner of disposal, will somehow degrade ground water is contrary to basic scientific theory. To date, no scientifically supportable information has been submitted to indicate any other conclusion. The community wastewater project and associated WDRs have been upheld by the State Water Resources Control Board and a ruling of the San Luis Obispo Superior Court.

Summary

We believe that the community, through its locally elected Los Osos Community Services District, has been working hard to develop a technically sound and viable wastewater project. This project was developed after lengthy and comprehensive evaluation of wastewater technologies and alternatives. We encourage all community members to participate in development of the project to assure the result is a source of pride for the community.

For More Information

If you have questions, please contact:

Sorrel Marks, Project Manager at 549-3695 or Gerhardt Hubner, Southern Permitting Supervisor at 542-4647



About the Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board: Located in San Luis Obispo, we're part of the California Environmental Protection Agency (Cal/EPA). Our mission is to preserve, enhance, and restore the quality of the Central Coast Region's water resources for the benefit of present and future generations. You can contact us by telephone at (805)-549-3147. Visit us on the web at: www.swrcb.ca.gov/rwqcb3/WMI/Index.html