



State Water Resources Control Board

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Winston H. Hickox
*Secretary for
Environmental
Protection*

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Gray Davis
Governor

NOTICE OF PREPARATION OF DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT

and

REQUEST FOR PUBLIC COMMENTS

**as to the
Proposed Scope of the
Draft Environmental Impact Report for
Water Right Application 30166 by
El Sur Ranch for Appropriation of Water from the
Big Sur River Subterranean Stream**

**Public Scoping Meetings
October 23, 2002
3:00 pm and 7:00 pm
Monterey, California**

To: All Interested Persons

As the state lead agency under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), the State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB), Division of Water Rights (Division) will direct the preparation of a Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) that will review the environmental effects associated with the issuance of a water rights permit for appropriation of water from the Big Sur River subterranean stream to the El Sur Ranch. The Division is particularly interested in potential permit terms or conditions that will protect public trust resources if the project is approved and a permit is issued. The EIR will be used to determine the permit terms and conditions necessary to protect public trust resources. As provided for under Section 15083 of the CEQA Guidelines, the SWRCB is initiating early public consultation, also referred to as scoping. Scoping is the process used to identify issues, concerns, significant effects, mitigation measures, and alternatives associated with a proposed project. As part of this process, the SWRCB will hold two public scoping meetings and solicit written comments.

The public scoping period is for thirty days. Division staff will accept written comments on the proposed scope and content of the Draft EIR that are received or postmarked by close of business November 6, 2002. Please send any comments to:

**Kyriacos C. Kyriacou
State Water Resources Control Board
Division of Water Rights
P.O Box 2000
Sacramento CA 95812-2000**

The Division will hold two public scoping meetings to receive oral comments from the public, trustee and responsible agencies. The purpose is to ensure the public has an opportunity to provide input regarding the EIR process. Meeting details are as follows:

Afternoon Scoping Meeting

Date: Wednesday, October 23, 2002
Time: 3:00 pm to 5:00 pm
Location: California State Parks
Monterey District Office
2211 Garden Road
Monterey, California 93940

Directions:

From Hwy 1 / Salinas area: Take Highway 68 toward Monterey. At Olmstead Road turn right toward the Monterey Airport. One block further is Garden Road, turn left. Continue to 2211 Garden Road on your right.

From north of Seaside/Monterey going South on Highway 1: Take the Casa Verde exit. At the stop sign, turn left onto Casa Verde, proceed through the Fremont Blvd. intersection until you reach Fairgrounds Road. Turn right at Fairgrounds Road, go one block and turn left at Garden Road. Proceed to 2211 Garden Road which is on the left side past CDF.

From Carmel/South Monterey area going North on Highway 1: Either take Highway 68 East toward Salinas until you get to the turn for the Monterey Airport at Olmstead Road, turn left, then turn left again at Garden Road and Proceed to 2211 Garden Road on your right; OR take Mark Thomas drive to Garden Road, turn right onto Garden Road and proceed to 2211 Garden Road on your left.

Evening Scoping Meeting

Date: Wednesday, October 23, 2002
Time: 7:00 pm to 9:00 pm
Location: Multi-Agency Facilities Building
South of Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park
Big Sur, California

Directions:

Take Highway 1 South--26.5 miles south of Carmel, turn left at the Big Sur Station (look for sign on Highway 1). The facility is located 1/2 mile south of Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park. The conference room is located inside the multi-agency facilities building.

PROJECT OVERVIEW AND BACKGROUND

The El Sur Ranch (Ranch) is located just north of the Andrew Molera State Park, south of the City of Monterey, on the Big Sur Coast in Monterey County. A project location map is presented in **Enclosure 1**. An irrigation system for the Ranch, engineered in the 1950s, is used to provide water to roughly 290 acres of pasture by flood irrigation methods. This irrigation system is served by two wells, and water has been continuously put to beneficial use for irrigation of the 290 acres since construction of the irrigation system. The well sites are located near the mouth of the Big Sur River on land once owned by the Ranch. The former Ranch land was subsequently deeded to California Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) in 1974 and became part of Andrew Molera State Park. The Ranch's "Old Well" was constructed in the mid-1950s. The Ranch's "New Well" was constructed in 1985 under terms of an easement with the DPR. Water from the two wells is pumped up to the Ranch through two mains that join into a single main prior to continuing to the upper pastures. A series of laterals and sub-laterals provide water to checks where it is then distributed to the pasture.

In 1992, in response to a complaint filed by DPR with the Division, a field investigation was undertaken. The results of the investigations were documented in a letter issued by the Division. The investigation concluded that the water pumped from the two wells for use on the Ranch was underflow from the Big Sur River, rather than percolating groundwater, as was previously assumed, and was therefore a diversion of flow from the Big Sur River that is subject to the SWRCB's jurisdiction. The 1992 letter also documented the Ranch's riparian right to irrigate 90 acres. However, because much of the water pumped by the Ranch wells is used in a location not authorized under this riparian right, the Division determined that an additional appropriative right was required to allow for continued beneficial use of the water.

In 1992 the Ranch filed Application 30166 with the Division to appropriate 1,800 acre-feet per year of Big Sur River underflow (at a maximum rate not to exceed 5.84 cubic feet per second). The water rights application was protested by a number of persons based on the possible effects of the diversion on the flow of the Big Sur River and the possibility of impacts to riparian vegetation, steelhead, and other aquatic organisms.

Issues related to the hydraulic continuity between the Ranch wells and the Big Sur River were addressed in a hydrologic study completed in 1998 by Jones and Stokes under the direction of the Division. The purpose and objectives of this investigation were to characterize the hydrologic regime and determine the extent to which irrigation pumping from the Ranch's wells influences surface flows, depth, and water quality of the Big Sur River, the estuary, or groundwater levels in the "Creamery Meadow" immediately south of the river. The effect of pumping on fisheries, riparian resources, or other terrestrial species was not evaluated.

The Division will serve as the lead agency for the project described above pursuant to CEQA. In response to protests to the water right application, the SWRCB has determined that an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) will be prepared to address potential environmental impacts that may arise from issuance of the water right, including impacts on public trust resources such as riparian vegetation, steelhead, and other aquatic organisms. The EIR shall disclose the significant environmental effects of issuing the water right permit for the Ranch, describe ways to minimize those effects, and also describe alternatives to the proposed project.

PROPOSED PROJECT ALTERNATIVES

Detailed project alternatives will be identified and evaluated during development of the EIR. Alternatives will include:

1. No Project Alternative. This alternative involves continued pumping under the riparian right to irrigate 90 acres.
2. Proposed Project. This alternative involves diversion and irrigation as proposed in the water right permit application.
3. Reduced Intensity Alternative. The alternative involves diversion and irrigation of some lesser amount as needed to minimize or avoid environmental impacts and protect public trust resources.

POTENTIAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

Issuance of the permit could result in the following environmental effects:

1. Land use impacts on other agricultural uses and/or nearby residences in the project vicinity, potential growth-inducing impacts, and potential conflicts with existing and proposed land use plans and policies of Monterey County as contained in the current or revised General Plan, the Big Sur Area Plan, and the Coastal Implementation Plan;
2. Impacts arising from erosion or loss of soil as a result of water use and application pursuant to the water right permit;
3. Impacts to water quality and/or quantity (including changes to aquifer water levels, groundwater quality, downgradient surface water resources that may receive groundwater influent, drainage patterns and resulting erosion/siltation) and associated beneficial uses, water quality standards, and existing water rights.
4. Short-term, long-term, and cumulative impacts to sensitive biological resources, including vegetative communities and special-status species.

The Division considers the legal baseline for this project to be pre-project or pre-CEQA conditions, whichever is later. In the case of El Sur Ranch, the baseline should be the pre-project conditions in 1975. However, due to the lack of 1975 data, the change in the morphology of the

lagoon due to the storm in the late 1990's, and the conclusion of the 1999 study which confirmed underflow, the Draft EIR baseline will be current conditions at the time of this NOP. Field surveys are to be conducted to support this definition of a baseline.

Surveys to characterize the habitats and species which may be present in the project location, are to be conducted. In evaluating direct and indirect effects of the project action, the SWRCB will limit its examination to changes in the existing physical conditions in the affected area as they exist at the time that this notice of preparation is published (CEQA Guidelines 15126.2). The project is not expected to have any significant impacts in the following areas, when compared to the baseline or existing conditions, and as such, these areas do not require analysis in an EIR:

- Aesthetics
- Noise
- Air quality/odor/health risk assessment
- Traffic, transportation and circulation
- Population or housing
- Cultural resources
- Hazards and hazardous materials
- Geology or mineral resources
- Recreation
- Public services or utilities

REQUEST FOR INFORMATION

Federal, state and local resource agencies, other governmental entities, Indian tribes, environmental and other non-governmental organizations, and individuals are requested to identify and submit any information that they believe pertinent to the analysis of the project-specific and/or cumulative effects of the proposed El Sur project. This information should be submitted at either the scoping meetings or during the written comment period as noted above, or as otherwise allowed under CEQA. Types of information requested include, but are not limited to:

- information, data, or professional opinions that may contribute to identifying and defining the scope of important environmental and developmental issues;
- identification of, and information from, any other similar analysis or study, whether completed, in progress, or planned, that is relevant to the proposed water rights permit;
- information and quantitative data that will aid in the characterization of the existing physical, chemical, biological, cultural, recreation, and socioeconomic environments;
- information on resources that may be cumulatively affected; and
- information on existing and reasonably foreseeable developmental or resource protection and enhancement projects in the vicinity of the project that are likely to affect the same resources as the project.

Should you have any questions, please contact Kyriacos Kyriacou of my staff at (916) 341-5347.

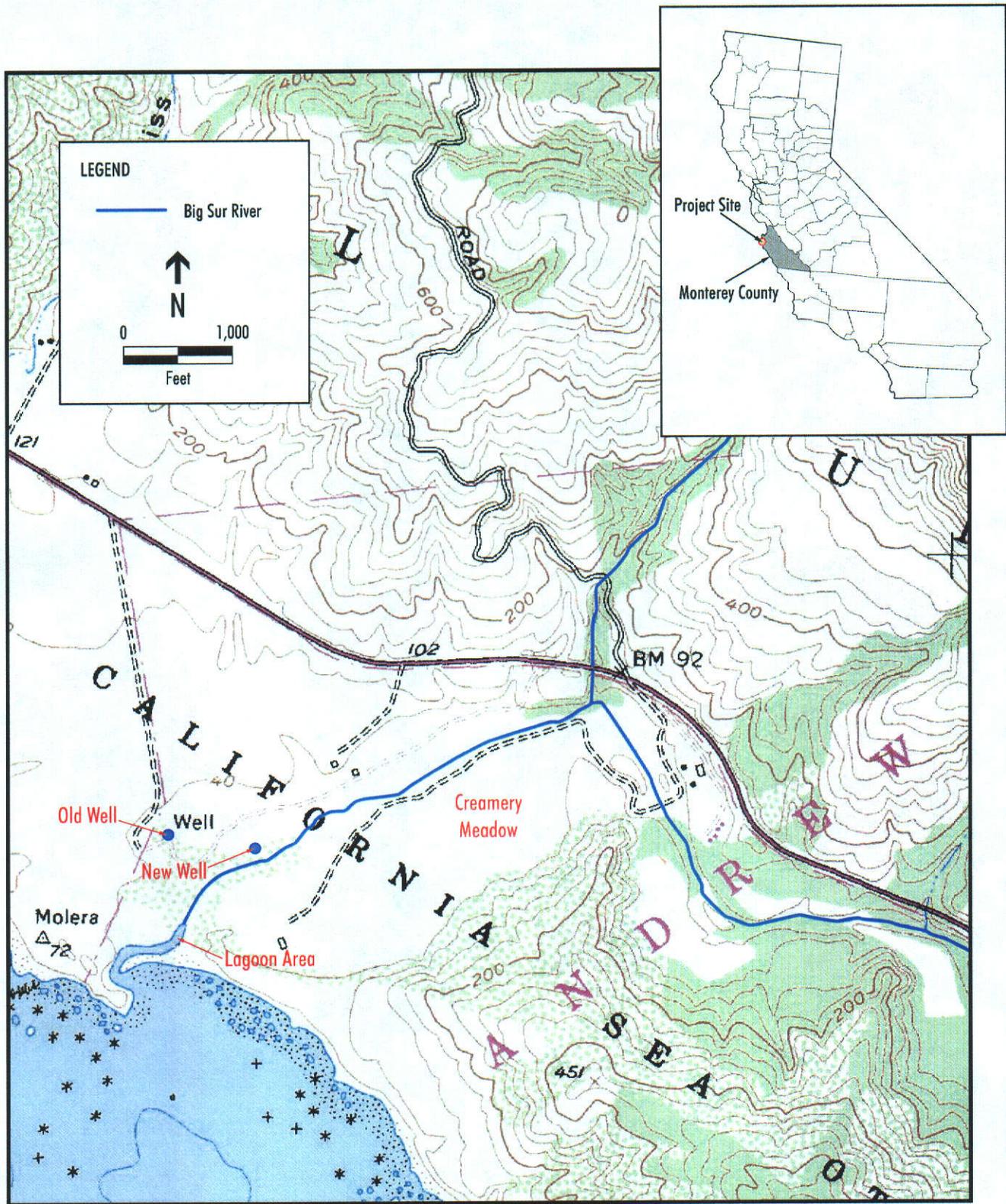
Sincerely,

Nick Wilcox, Chief
Bay Delta Unit

Date: October 1, 2002

Enclosures

cc: Distribution List



SOURCE: USGS, 1956; and Environmental Science Associates, 2002

El Sur EIR / 202448 ■

Attachment 1
Site and Vicinity