Notice of Exemption

Fee Exempt per Government Code Section 6103

To: Office of Planning and Research
P.O. Box 3044, Room 113
Sacramento, CA 95812-3044

From: Dept. of Water Resources
San Luis Field Division 31770
Gonzaga Rd. Gustine, CA 95322

Lead Agency:California Department of Water Resources

Project Title: Routine Maintenance in Little Panoche Creek Downstream of Detention Dam

Project Location City & County: Fresno County

Project Location – Specific: The project is located immediately downstream of the Little Panoche Creek Detention Dam and Reservoir. The project area is approximately 19.5 miles southwest of the City of Firebaugh and 18.5 miles south of the City of Los Banos (Universal Transverse Mercator coordinates 696777.54 meters east, 4073195.68 meters north in Zone 10S).

Description of Nature, Purpose, and Beneficiaries of Project: The approximately 3.25-acre project area is directly downstream of the Little Panoche Creek Reservoir and Little Panoche Creek Detention Dam (Dam). The Dam is located in the 825-acre Little Panoche Creek Wildlife Area.

The Dam is a joint-use facility owned by the United States Bureau of Reclamation and is operated and maintained by the Department of Water Resources (DWR). The 151-foot high, 1,440-foot long earthen dam retains floodwaters of Little Panoche Creek (creek) and has the capacity to spill at 13,270 cubic feet per second. When the Dam was constructed, the creek channel in the project area was channelized and contoured. The creek averages 88 feet in width; the creek only flows below the Dam during winter flooding or when water is released.

The Dam acts as a sediment trap and prevents flooding of the California Aqueduct /San Luis Canal and land downstream of the Dam. Sediment accumulates in and downstream of the spillway chute. Over time, vegetation growth and sediment buildup in the creek inhibits proper flow. The vegetation and sediment accumulation at, and downstream of the discharge structure, is extensive enough to prevent inspections during flood releases and routine inspections of the channel banks for stability and seepage.

The project consists of routine maintenance in the creek; without maintenance, Dam failure could occur and the San Luis Canal and surrounding areas would be subject to material and economic damage. This project will manage water and sediment flow downstream of the Dam's concrete spillway and outlet works.

Annual maintenance will be conducted by DWR's San Luis Field Division and will include removal of vegetation and sediment from the discharge structure, the creek, and the Dam face. This work will be conducted annually depending on the rate of vegetation growth and sediment deposition.

Vegetation and sediment will be removed from the approximatly 290-foot area between the discharge structure and the energy dissipater, and in the approximately 310-foot area downstream of the energy dissipater, extending to an existing road that crosses the creek. Vegetation and sediment removal will begin at the downstream end of the project area and will move upstream in the channel towards the discharge structure. All excavated material will be placed in a designated spoil area. Herbicide would be applied, as needed, according to manufacturer specifications.

An existing road will be used for all work. An existing ramp, and the road that crosses the creek, will be used as access ramps for entry into the channel. Before work begins, the access road or ramps may need to be mowed to allow safe access to the project sites. It may also be necessary to grade the access route if uneven ground makes it unsafe to operate large equipment. Approximately 2,250 cubic yards of gravel may be added to the access road.

Riprap currently in the channel downstream of both the discharge structure and the energy dissipater will be evaluated to determine if it needs to be removed to facilitate sediment excavation. If the riprap is removed, it will be temporarily placed adjacent to the channel. Once sediment is removed and the area is returned to design specifications, the riprap will be replaced. If additional riprap is needed, it would be transported from existing San Luis Field Division supplies. Approximately 176 cubic yards of new gravel will be placed around the discharge structure and concrete baffle.

Mechanical methods will be used to remove the vegetation around the detention ponds, but vegetation will be removed by hand in the remaining areas of the creek, where possible. An estimated 450 cubic yards of excess sediment will be removed from the detention ponds during riprap and vegetation removal.

All work will be performed annually, as needed. The work will protect the integrity of the Dam. State Water Project and Central Valley Project Contractors will benefit.

Exempt/Suspend Status:

☐ Ministerial (§21080[b][1]; 15268)

☐ Declared Emergency (Proclamation of a State of Emergency Due to Drought)

☐ Emergency Project (Public Resources Code §21080[b][4]; California Code of Regulations §15269[c])

☒ Categorical Exemption: 15301 (Existing Facilities)

☐ Statutory Exemptions:

Reasons Why Project Is Exempt: Sediment and vegetation removal will occur in the existing discharge structure, the Dam face, and in portions of Little Panoche Creek to restore the facilities and portions of the creek to design capacities. The project will restore desgned flow downstream of the Dam, which will protect its integrity. The project will not increase the designed capacities or use of the creek or facilities.

Name of Public Agency Approving Project: Department of Water Resources

Contact Person: Irma Clevenger **Telephone**:(209) 827-5123

Signature: Valerie Clevenger **Date**: 9/30/2020 **Title**: Utility Crafts Superintendent

☒Signed by Lead Agency

☐Signed by Applicant