

Notice of Preparation and Public Scoping Meeting for the Lower Deer Creek Flood and Ecosystem Improvement Project, Phase 1

NOTICE

Pursuant to Section 15082(a) of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), notice is hereby given that the California Department of Water Resources (DWR) will be the lead CEQA agency in preparing an environmental impact report (EIR) for the Lower Deer Creek Flood Ecosystem Improvement Project, Phase I (proposed project).

PURPOSE OF THE NOTICE OF PREPARATION

The purpose of this Notice of Preparation (NOP) is to notify responsible and trustee agencies, federal agencies involved in approving or funding the project, and interested parties that an EIR will be prepared. The NOP also serves to solicit input from federal, State, regional, and local agencies, and interested organizations and individuals, about the content and scope of the EIR. The location, description, and potential environmental impacts of the proposed project are presented below. An initial study has not been prepared because DWR has already determined that the proposed project could have a significant effect on the environment.

PROJECT LOCATION

Deer Creek is located at the north end of the Sacramento Valley in southeastern Tehama County (see Attachment 1). The proposed project would be located along the lower 8 miles of Deer Creek, including its confluence with the Sacramento River.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers completed a flood control project on the lower 8 miles of Deer Creek in 1949 with a design capacity of 21,000 cfs plus 3 feet of freeboard (vertical distance from water surface to levee crown). Since then, periodic flooding has occurred because of levee failures and overtopping. Deer Creek supports wild populations of Chinook salmon and steelhead and is one of only three streams in the Central Valley that supports a viable, wild population of the federally threatened spring-run Chinook salmon. The existing flood control project relies on confining flood flows between levees set close to the channel margin, which has reduced habitat quality for spring-run Chinook salmon and other salmonids. The capacity of the channel is maintained through sediment removal and vegetation clearing. The floodplain does not convey flood flows unless levees overtop or fail. Diminished floodplain function, disturbance of riparian vegetation, and alteration of the channel has degraded aquatic and riparian habitat diversity and complexity in lower Deer Creek.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The proposed project seeks to improve flood protection, ecosystem function, and salmonid habitat along lower Deer Creek within the context of a working landscape. The proposed project directly addresses damaging flooding that impacts farmland and infrastructure every five to ten years, and degraded habitat - a limiting factor for Chinook salmon and steelhead populations in lower Deer Creek.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The proposed project includes a variety of design measures, including levee setbacks, bank stabilization, flood easements, bridge improvements, diversion structure improvements, and levee improvements (see Attachment 2). Upstream of Red Bridge, setback and raised levees are proposed to improve flood protection. Downstream from Red Bridge to the Stanford-Vina Ranch Irrigation Company (SVRIC) Diversion Dam, bridge and levee improvements, coupled with levee setbacks, floodplain lowering, and flood easements, are proposed to convey higher flows and large wood through the bridge and to allow some natural channel migration and increased floodplain inundation and function. South of the SVRIC Diversion Dam, the dam access road would be improved and a canal cutoff structure installed to improve flood protection. Downstream of the dam to Highway 99, removal of non-U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) levees and berms is proposed to widen the floodway to allow greater flow conveyance, channel migration, and natural development of instream habitat. Improvements to USACE levees and installation of bank protection are also proposed just upstream of Highway 99 to maintain flood protection. Further downstream, levee improvements and a new levee are proposed to protect valuable existing pasture and infrastructure, and an easement is proposed to allow channel migration at the downstream end of the creek. In China Slough, grading, vegetation management, and culvert improvement are proposed to enhance conveyance through the slough.

POTENTIAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

The EIR will evaluate the potential environmental impacts associated with implementation of the proposed project and will identify feasible measures that can be implemented to avoid, minimize, rectify, reduce, or compensate for those impacts. The EIR will discuss alternatives to the proposed project, including the No Project Alternative. The EIR will assess short-term construction impacts as well as longer-term direct, indirect, and cumulative effects. Based on a preliminary analysis of the proposed project, the following resource areas will be evaluated in the EIR:

Aesthetics. Temporary changes in scenic views or visual character during construction.

Agriculture and Forest Resources. Temporary conversion of Prime Farmland in some areas of proposed access roads or staging areas; potential conversion of designated farmland in spoil areas; permanent conversion of Prime Farmland in areas of proposed levee setbacks.

Air Quality. Temporary increases in pollutant emissions during construction.

Biological Resources – Aquatic. Temporary and permanent effects on special-status fish species and their habitats, including beneficial effects, associated with construction activities.

Biological Resources – Terrestrial. Temporary and permanent alteration of habitat, including habitat for special-status terrestrial species, associated with construction activities.

Cultural and Tribal Cultural Resources. Potential disturbance or destruction of known or unknown historic or archaeological resources, including Tribal cultural resources, during construction.

Geology, Soils, and Paleontological Resources. Temporary increases in soil erosion during construction; potential disturbance or destruction of known or unknown paleontological resources during construction.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions. Temporary increases in greenhouse gas emissions associated with construction activities.

Hazards and Hazardous Materials. Potential introduction of soil or water contaminants associated with the use of construction equipment and materials.

Hydrology and Water Quality. Potential flood risks and changes in groundwater recharge; potential increases in sediment loads or pollutants in Deer Creek and downstream Sacramento River.

Land Use and Planning. Potential conflicts with land use plans and zoning designations.

Noise. Temporary increases in noise levels near sensitive receptors during construction.

Transportation. Temporary disruption of traffic or emergency access during construction, including along haul routes.

Utilities and Service Systems. Temporary increase in the need for solid waste disposal associated with structure demolition/alteration during construction.

Other resource and issue areas that will be addressed in the EIR include:

- Energy
- Mineral Resources
- Population and Housing
- Public Services
- Recreation
- Wildfire

SCOPING MEETING

A virtual public scoping meeting will be held to inform interested parties about the proposed project and solicit input from agency representatives, Native American Tribes, interested parties, and the public on the scope and content of the EIR.

The virtual scoping meeting will be held via Zoom on Tuesday, December 15, 2020, at 11:00 a.m. The virtual public meeting can be accessed at:

<https://us04web.zoom.us/j/73286633254?pwd=NzMyaUNzNIU2ODVFQmZzRjRyVzNSQT09>

Meeting ID: 732 8663 3254

Passcode: deercreek

Access is also available by telephone at 669-900-6833 (*Passcode: 777211778*).

COMMENTS

Pursuant to Section 15103 of the CEQA Guidelines, this NOP is being circulated for a 30-day public comment period beginning on December 9, 2020 and ending at 5:00 pm on January 11, 2021. Written or oral comments on the proposed scope and content of the EIR can be provided at the virtual scoping meeting, or written comments can be provided directly to DWR. When submitting written comments, agencies that will need to use the EIR when considering permits or other approvals for the proposed project should:

1. State if they are a responsible or trustee agency for the proposed project, and if so, explain why and note the specific project elements that are subject to their regulatory authority.
2. Identify any significant environmental issues, reasonable alternatives, and mitigation measures they will need to have explored in the draft EIR.
3. Provide the name, email address, and phone number of a contact person.

Before including your name, address, telephone number, e-mail address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, please be aware that your entire comment, including your personal identifying information, may be made publicly available at any time. While you can request in your comment that your personal identifying information be withheld from public review, DWR cannot guarantee that this will be possible.

Written comments on the scope and content of the EIR must be emailed to Amy.Lyons@water.ca.gov or mailed to the address below and received no later than 5:00 p.m. on Monday, January 11, 2021:

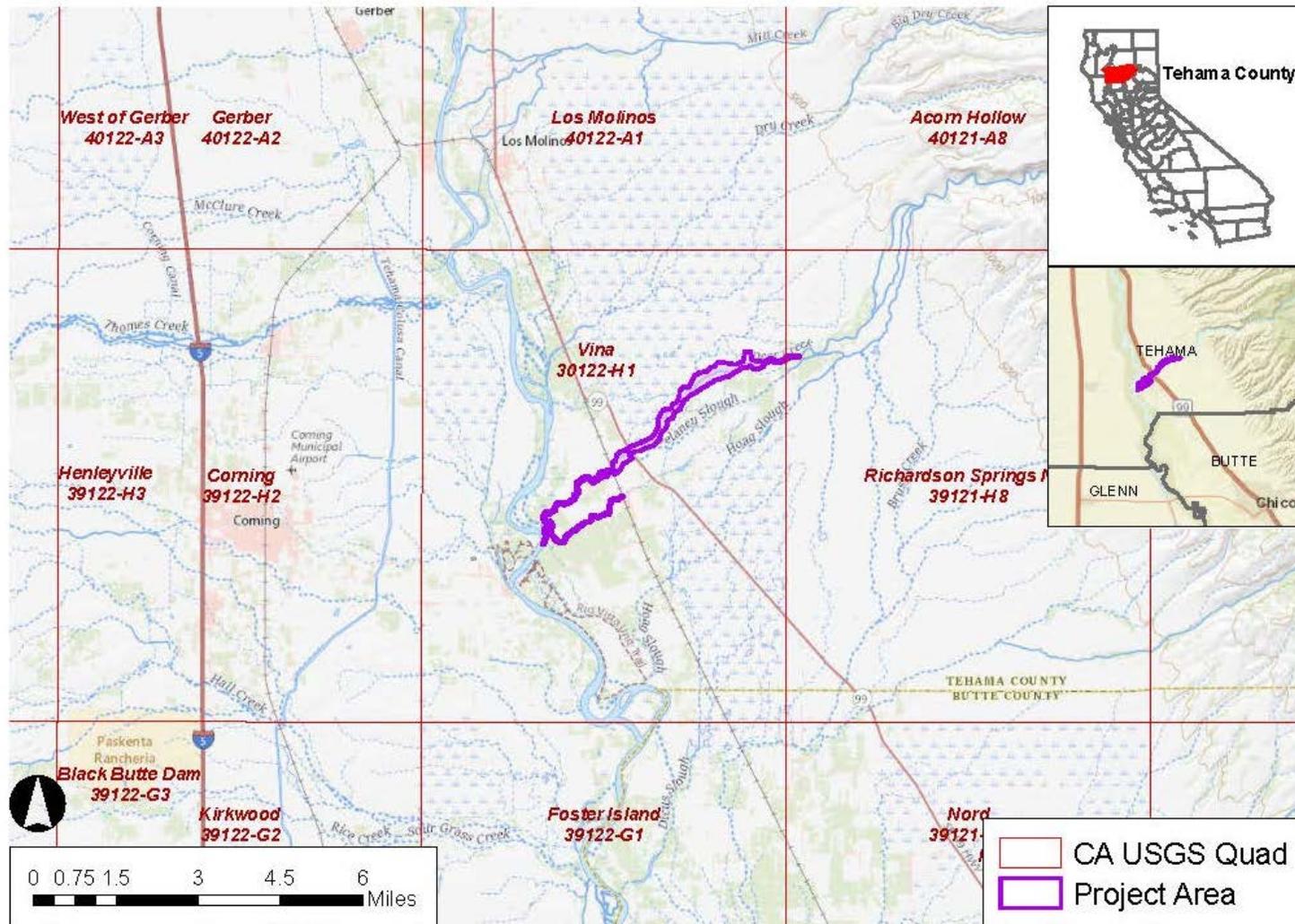
Amy Lyons

California Department of Water Resources
Northern Region Office
2440 Main Street
Red Bluff, CA 96080

All comments received during the public comment period will be considered and addressed in the draft EIR.

DRAFT

Attachment 1



Location Map for Lower Deer Creek Flood and Ecosystem Improvement Project

Attachment 2

