

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

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Governor's Office of Planning & Research

June 17, 2021

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Randall McInvale
United Water Conservation District
1701 Lombard Street, Suite 200
Oxnard, CA 93030

STATE CLEARINGHOUSE

RE: Freeman Diversion Fish Passage Facility
Geotechnical Exploration Project –
Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND)
SCH # 2021050414
GTS # 07-LA-2021-03592
Vic. VEN-126/PM: R7.357

Dear Randall McInvale:

Thank you for including the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) in the environmental review process for the above referenced MND. The United Water Conservation District (District) is proposing the project investigate the geotechnical site characteristics that would inform the final design and construction of the future fish passage facility alignment at the Freeman Diversion facility. The Freeman Diversion facility is located on the Santa Clara River approximately 4 miles southwest of the city center of Santa Paula, and approximately 10 river miles upstream of the Pacific Ocean in Ventura County, California. The proposed geotechnical explorations would occur along the alignment of the future fish passage facility. The Freeman Diversion facility includes a Denil fish ladder that was designed to provide upstream passage for adult steelhead, however, as a result of litigation, the United States District Court for the Central District of California determined the current facility is inadequate. Furthermore, the District is required to analyze alternative fish passage facility designs for eventual replacement, in consultation with the resource agencies and as part of the Freeman Diversion Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan. The District is considering two alternatives for a new fish passage facility: a hardened ramp and a vertical slot. The proposed geotechnical explorations would inform the design and construction of either fish passage facility alternative, and supplement previously collected data. The United Water Conservation District is the Lead Agency under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

The project is located approximately 5,000 feet away from State Route 126 and approximately 2.5 miles away from the State Route 126 and State Route 118 interchange. In addition, according to the MND "Access to the project site area would be via State Route 118 (Los Angeles Avenue) to Southern Pacific Milling Road."

Regarding this project's transportation impacts, Caltrans concurs that the Vehicle Miles Traveled impacts of this project will be less than significant. Regarding this project's biological impacts, Caltrans recommends that all work window restrictions, including those related to steelhead, the nesting bird season, and channel access, be clearly identified and included as part of an Avoidance, Minimization and Mitigation Measure(s) document, to ensure that the contractor is aware of and follows these restrictions.

Randall McInvale
June 17, 2021
Page 2 of 2

Also, any transportation of heavy construction equipment and/or materials which requires use of oversized-transport vehicles on State highways will need a Caltrans transportation permit. Caltrans recommends that the project limit construction traffic to off-peak periods to minimize the potential impact on State facilities. If construction traffic is expected to cause delays on any State facilities, please submit a construction traffic control plan detailing these delays for Caltrans' review.

If you have any questions about these comments, please contact Emily Gibson, the project coordinator, at Emily.Gibson@dot.ca.gov, and refer to GTS # 07-LA-2021-03592.

Sincerely,

Frances Duong

FRANCES DUONG
Acting IGR/CEQA Branch Chief

cc: Scott Morgan, State Clearinghouse