



State of California – Natural Resources Agency
DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE
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GAVIN NEWSOM, Governor
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Governor's Office of Planning & Research

July 13 2021

STATE CLEARINGHOUSE

July 13, 2021

Jo Ann Corey
Environmental Compliance Analyst
Irvine Ranch Water District
15600 San Canyon Avenue
Irvine, CA 92701
Corey@irwd.com

Subject: Comments on the Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration for the Fleming Zone 8 Reservoir and Pump Station Improvements Project (SCH #2021060289)

Dear Ms. Corey:

The Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) has reviewed the above-referenced Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration (IS/MND) for the Fleming Zone 8 Reservoir and Pump Station Improvements Project (Project). The following statements and comments have been prepared pursuant to CDFW's authority as Trustee Agency with jurisdiction over natural resources affected by the project (California Environmental Quality Act [CEQA] Guidelines § 15386) and pursuant to our authority as a Responsible Agency under CEQA Guidelines section 15381 over those aspects of the Project that come under the purview of the California Endangered Species Act (Fish and Game Code § 2050 et seq.) and Fish and Game Code section 1600 et seq. CDFW also administers the Natural Community Conservation Planning (NCCP) program. The Irvine Ranch Water District (IRWD) participates in the NCCP program through its role as a Participating Landowner under the County of Orange Central and Coastal Subregion Natural Community Conservation Plan/Habitat Conservation Plan (NCCP/HCP).

The proposed Project involves the replacement of an existing water storage and conveyance infrastructure at IRWD's Fleming Reservoir and Pump Station facility. The project is located at IRWD's existing site at 7431 Santiago Canyon Road, Silverado, California. The Project site is approximately 500 feet east of the intersection of Santiago Canyon Road and Silverado Canyon Road, in the Santiago Canyon area of unincorporated Orange County. The existing facility is located on a 2.9-acre parcel owned by IRWD. The site is surrounded by Silverado Canyon Road to the north, Santiago Canyon Road to the south, and undeveloped vegetated land to the east and west. Only the eastern half of the site is used by IRWD and is occupied by the existing Fleming Reservoir and Pump Station facility. The western portion of the site is undeveloped. The proposed project would be located on the eastern portion of the site where the past development has occurred. Primary Project activities include: demolition of the existing aboveground 150,000-gallon reservoir, pump station, and associated buildings, construction of an aboveground 1.3 million-gallon concrete reservoir, associated pipelines, new pump station, storage building, and masonry block building, replacement of an existing generator, site improvements to the access road, fencing, retaining walls and swing gates, new landscaping, and installation of new pipelines located in the access road which will extend into an outlet adjacent to an existing storm drain south of Santiago Canyon Road.

Conserving California's Wildlife Since 1870

Jo Ann Corey
Irvine Ranch Water District
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According to the NCCP/HCP, the Project site is located outside of the reserve space and is mapped as urban land. The area immediately surrounding the Project site to the east and west is within a conservation easement. Approximately 67 square feet (0.002 acre) of disturbed coastal sage scrub (CSS) will be impacted. There will also be impacts associated with the installation of the off-site storm drain to the understory of coast live oak woodland (0.003 acre). The impacts to 0.003 acre of coast live oak woodland are within the Reserve and are compatible with the Reserve uses. The Project will take approximately two years to complete, beginning in 2022.

CDFW offers the comments and recommendations below to assist Irvine Ranch Water District in adequately avoiding and minimizing potential Project impacts on biological resources and maintaining consistency with the NCCP/HCP.

1. The IS/MND indicates the potential for NCCP/HCP covered species to occur on or adjacent to the Project site. The NCCP/HCP identifies construction-related minimization measures to assure that development/construction within areas recommended to be authorized for incidental take of CSS be undertaken in a manner that minimizes impacts on the federally threatened coastal California gnatcatcher (*Poliioptila californica californica*) presently using, or in close proximity to, the habitat to be converted. The Project would impact 67 square feet (0.002 acre) of disturbed CSS along the western edge of the Project site. CSS is a covered habitat type in the NCCP/HCP. According to measure three in the NCCP/HCP Construction-Related Minimization Measures, a monitoring biologist must be on site during any clearing of CSS. It is the job of the monitoring biologist to assure that identified bird species will not be directly impacted by brush-clearing and earth-moving equipment in a manner that also allows for construction activities in a timely basis. CDFW recommends having a monitoring biologist present during any clearing of CSS on the Project site.

CDFW appreciates the opportunity to comment on the IS/MND to assist IRWD in identifying and mitigating Project impacts on biological resources and ensuring Project consistency with the requirements of the NCCP/HCP. Questions regarding this letter or further coordination should be directed to Emily Gray, Environmental Scientist, at Emily.Gray@wildlife.ca.gov.

Sincerely,

DocuSigned by:



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David A. Mayer
Environmental Program Manager
South Coast Region

ec: CDFW

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