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**NOTICE OF PREPARATION**  
**Program Environmental Impact Report**  
**for the**  
**Turlock Subbasin Groundwater Sustainability Plan**  
**January 7, 2022**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), the West Turlock Subbasin Groundwater Sustainability Agency (WTS GSA) will be the CEQA Lead Agency and will prepare a Program Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) to analyze resources that may be affected by implementation of the Projects and Management Actions (PMAs) in the Turlock Subbasin Groundwater Sustainability Plan (Turlock Subbasin GSP). The East Turlock Subbasin Groundwater Sustainability Agency (ETS GSA) and the WTS GSA are each responsible to implement the Turlock Subbasin GSP within their jurisdictions and are coordinating under a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA). Pursuant to this MOA, WTS GSA is acting as the Lead Agency on behalf of both GSAs. ETS GSA will also be involved in the preparation of the PEIR and will be a Responsible Agency for the Turlock Subbasin GSP PEIR.

## **BACKGROUND**

In 2014, Governor Brown signed into law the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) to establish a statewide goal for achieving long-term groundwater sustainability through local implementation. Under SGMA, Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSAs) are tasked with developing and implementing locally developed GSPs for all groundwater basins designated as medium or high priority by the Department of Water Resources (DWR). The GSP addresses the Turlock Subbasin located in the northern San Joaquin Valley Groundwater Basin (Groundwater Basin Number 5-22.03). The Turlock Subbasin was designated as a high priority groundwater basin by the DWR with implications under SGMA. A GSP (expected to be adopted in January 2022) has been prepared jointly by the WTS GSA and the ETS GSA, both formed in compliance with California Water Code (CWC) Section 10723.8, and collectively referred to herein as the Turlock Subbasin GSAs.

Per CWC Section 10728.6, CEQA is not required for adoption of a GSP; however, CEQA would apply to potential future projects or management actions (PMAs) called for by the Turlock Subbasin GSP. It was determined that a program-level CEQA document (e.g., PEIR) would streamline the future CEQA process for individual PMAs called for in the Turlock Subbasin GSP in accordance with CEQA Guidelines Section 15168(c) and/or incorporating by reference information from the PEIR.

## **PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

The Turlock Subbasin GSP was developed to achieve the sustainability goals of the Turlock Subbasin by 2042 and to avoid undesirable results over the remainder of the 50-year planning horizon. California Code of Regulations (CCR), Title 23, Section 354.44 requires that a GSP include a description of PMAs that the GSAs have determined will achieve sustainability goals for the basin, as well as requirements for descriptions, including measurable objective benefits. As required by SGMA, multiple PMAs have been identified and considered by the Turlock Subbasin GSAs. Projects are defined as physically constructed (structural) features and management actions are defined as non-structural programs or policies designed to incentivize actions that result in improvements in sustainability.

The Turlock Subbasin GSP presents a variety of projects that utilize water from various sources, including but not limited to surface water, stormwater and reclaimed water, for direct and in-lieu groundwater recharge. Projects can be generally categorized as either urban and municipal or agricultural projects, and incorporate the use of new (e.g., treatment facilities, pipelines) or existing (e.g., canals, pipelines, reservoirs) infrastructure to enhance water supply. The Turlock Subbasin GSP also identifies management actions to be implemented in conjunction with projects. These include: demand reduction strategies, such as voluntary conservation and/or farmland fallowing; pumping management, such as a groundwater extraction reporting program and a groundwater allocation and pumping management program; and, a domestic well mitigation program.

Implementation of the PMAs may necessitate systemwide operational changes related to the storage and delivery of water in the subbasin including changes to surface water diversions and off-season irrigation of farmland. Finally, the Turlock Subbasin GSP outlines a variety of activities in support of implementation, including groundwater monitoring and reporting and outreach.

## **PROJECT AREA**

The GSP area is the Turlock Subbasin that covers 348,160 acres (about 544 square miles) of the larger San Joaquin Valley Groundwater Basin, as defined by DWR (see Figure 1). The San Joaquin Valley Groundwater Basin is defined on the west by the Coast Ranges, on the south by the San Emigdio and Tehachapi mountains, on the east by the Sierra Nevada, and on the north by the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta and Sacramento Valley. The Turlock Subbasin is in the northern portion of the San Joaquin Valley and is bounded on the north by the Tuolumne River, on the south by the Merced River, and on the west by the San Joaquin River. The Turlock Subbasin is hydraulically connected with surrounding subbasins along shared river boundaries. Adjacent subbasins include the Merced Subbasin south of the Merced River, the Delta-Mendota Subbasin west of the San Joaquin River, and the Modesto Subbasin north of the Tuolumne River. The Turlock Subbasin contains irrigation districts, water districts, municipalities, and portions of two counties (Stanislaus and Merced).

## **ENVIRONMENTAL BASELINE**

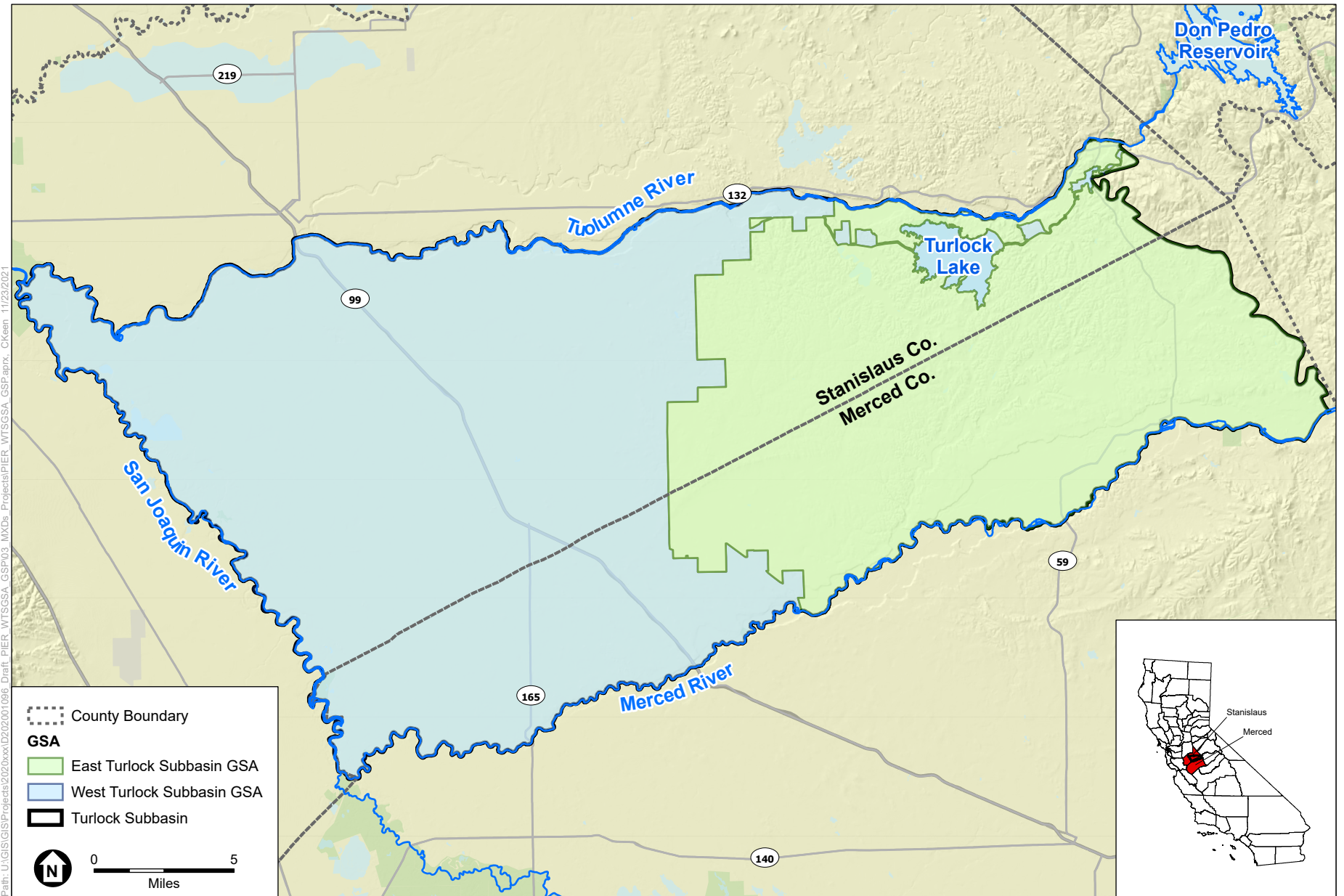
CEQA Guidelines Section 15125 states that an EIR must include a description of the physical environmental conditions in the vicinity of the project, as they exist at the time the NOP is published from local, regional, and state perspectives (existing conditions). The environmental setting will constitute the baseline physical conditions that the Turlock Subbasin GSAs will use to determine whether an impact is significant. In general, the environmental baseline is the same as existing conditions. The required contents of a PEIR are the same as those of a Project EIR (EIR) with PEIRs typically more conceptual with a more general discussion of impacts, alternatives, and mitigation measures.

## **PROJECT ALTERNATIVES**

A reasonable range of potentially feasible program-level project alternatives, in addition to the no project alternative, will be addressed, following the scoping process and will consider the views of agencies and the public.

## **POTENTIAL ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS**

The PEIR will analyze resources that may be affected by implementation of the PMAs identified in the Turlock Subbasin GSP. As described above, many types of PMAs could be implemented under the Turlock Subbasin GSP. Individual project details, such as project sizes, configurations, locations, and operations are not known at this time. Therefore, each resource section will address the potential range of impacts and mitigation measures for the types of PMAs that could be implemented under the Turlock



SOURCE: ESA, 2021.

**Figure 1**  
Regional Location

Subbasin GSP. The PEIR will describe impacts and mitigation measures for construction and operations and maintenance associated with the PMAs covered under the Turlock Subbasin GSP. Construction and operations and maintenance assumptions may be informed by existing studies and/or environmental documents for projects of a similar type as those being considered in the Turlock Subbasin GSP. Resource topics to be considered for analysis in the PEIR include the following:

- aesthetics
- agriculture and forestry resources
- air quality
- biological resources
- cultural resources
- energy
- geology and soils
- greenhouse gas emissions
- hazards and hazardous materials
- hydrology and water quality (surface and groundwater resources)
- land use and planning
- mineral resources
- noise
- population and housing
- public services
- recreation
- transportation
- tribal cultural resources
- utilities/service systems
- wildfire

## SCOPING MEETING

A virtual scoping meeting will be held via remote teleconference on the Zoom platform on **Wednesday, January 26, 2022 at 5:30 PM.**

**Information about the scoping meeting is located in multiple locations on the Turlock Groundwater website at [www.turlockgroundwater.org](http://www.turlockgroundwater.org). Live video and audio of the scoping meeting will be available via the Zoom Virtual Meeting platform. A video recording of the meeting will be posted to [www.turlockgroundwater.org/events](http://www.turlockgroundwater.org/events) as well as the Turlock Groundwater YouTube channel no less than 24 hours following the meeting.**

The scoping meeting will include a brief presentation about the Turlock Subbasin GSP at the beginning of the meeting with time for public comments on the content and scope of the PEIR to follow.

The scoping meeting is being held to receive public and agency input on the scope and content of the PEIR. A quorum of board members from the East Turlock Subbasin GSA, West Turlock Subbasin GSA, as well as each of the GSAs' technical advisory committees may attend, but no votes by any of these governing bodies will be taken at the meeting.

**WRITTEN COMMENTS**

This NOP is being circulated to obtain suggestions and information from interested parties, including responsible and/or trustee agencies and members of the public on the content and scope of issues that may be addressed in the PEIR. Written comments from interested parties are invited to ensure that the full range of issues related to implementation of the Turlock Subbasin GSP is identified early in the CEQA process. Agencies and organizations should provide a contact name and information in their letters. All comments received, including names and addresses, will become part of the official administrative record and may be made available to the public.

In accordance with CEQA Guidelines section 15082(b)(1)(B), within 30 days of receiving the NOP, responsible and trustee agencies shall provide the Turlock Subbasin GSAs with specific detail about the scope and content of the environmental information to be included in the Draft PEIR related to their area of statutory responsibility. Comments from individual respondents, including names and home addresses of respondents, will be made available for public review. You may request the Turlock GSAs withhold your contact information from public disclosure, which will be honored to the extent allowable under California law. If you wish the Turlock Subbasin GSAs to consider withholding this information, you must state this prominently at the beginning of your comments.

Written comments on the scope of the PEIR are due no later than **5:00 pm on Monday, February 7, 2022**. All comments or questions about the environmental review process should be mailed to Turlock Subbasin GSP PEIR Comments, c/o Turlock Irrigation District, PO Box 949, Turlock, CA 95381-0949. Additional information on the Turlock Subbasin GSP can be found on the Turlock Groundwater web page at the link provided above.

Printed Name: Michael I. CookeTitle: WTS GSA TAC ChairSignature: Date: December 21, 2021