

Summary Form for Electronic Document Submittal**Form F**

Lead agencies may include 15 hardcopies of this document when submitting electronic copies of Environmental Impact Reports, Negative Declarations, Mitigated Negative Declarations, or Notices of Preparation to the State Clearinghouse (SCH). The SCH also accepts other summaries, such as EIR Executive Summaries prepared pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15123. Please include one copy of the Notice of Completion Form (NOC) with your submission and attach the summary to each electronic copy of the document.

SCH #: TBD

Project Title: Hunter Ranch - Installation and Operation of up to Five Agricultural Wells and One Support Well

Lead Agency: Stanislaus County Department of Environmental Resources

Contact Name: Walter Ward, Water Resources Manager

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Project Location: Southwest corner of State Highway 4 and Milton Road in Stanislaus County
City *County*

Project Description (Proposed actions, location, and/or consequences).

See next page for project description.

Identify the project's significant or potentially significant effects and briefly describe any proposed mitigation measures that would reduce or avoid that effect.

The Mitigated Negative Declaration determination is based in part on a Program Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) adopted for the Stanislaus County Discretionary Well Permitting Program, dated June 11, 2018. Impacts to multiple impact areas were determined to be less than significant on a program level based in the PEIR and additional impacts were deemed less than significant based on the Initial Study completed for this project. The mitigation measures (MMs) proposed for this project align with the MMs prescribed in the PEIR.

See Attachment 1 for Mitigation Measures.

Description of Project: The Project includes converting and operating two existing 400- and 500-foot-deep test wells as agricultural supply wells, converting and operating one 500-foot-deep test well as a supply well for incidental water needs (e.g., crop spraying, equipment washing), and installing and operating up to three new agricultural supply wells (approximately 400 – 500 feet deep) to support almond orchard activities. Each well will be completed with a small concrete pad at the surface and an electrical line-shaft turbine pump. Electrical service will be extended to each well location. The proposed Project will be implemented in phases. Phase I of the Project will consist of converting and operating the test well for the incidental water needs (<2 acre-feet per year [AFY]) and converting and operating the two existing test wells to supply the water demand of approximately 175 acres of orchard for a period up to approximately 20 years. Phase II will be implemented after a period of Phase I groundwater drawdown monitoring and evaluation to confirm allowable groundwater extraction rates and upon County approval. Phase II will consist of installing and operating up to three additional irrigation wells to supply the water demand for up to an additional 175 acres of orchard for a period up to approximately 20 years. The estimated pumping rates for the Phase II wells will be between 500 and 1,000 AFY. Estimated groundwater extraction will be approximately 683 AFY for Phase I and 1,366 AFY for Phase II. The estimated pumping rate for each well is between 500 and 1,000 gallons per minute.

If applicable, describe any of the project's areas of controversy known to the Lead Agency, including issues raised by agencies and the public.

Agricultural cultivation in the eastern foothills of Stanislaus County, within which the project site is located, is supplied largely by groundwater and has expanded considerably in the last 15 years, increasing local groundwater demand. Concern regarding the potential for declining groundwater levels as a result of agricultural expansion in this area is one of the factors that resulted in the County's adoption of the Groundwater Ordinance (Stanislaus County Code Chapter 9.37) in 2014 that governs the permit being issued for the subject agricultural wells, along with the Water Well Ordinance (Stanislaus County Code Chapter 9.36). The requirements of the Groundwater Ordinance are intended to prevent unreasonable and significant adverse impacts to groundwater supplies and related impacts to surface water, groundwater dependent ecosystems and subsidence. The requirements of the Water Well Ordinance are intended to prevent impacts to the quality of groundwater supply through well construction and location (setbacks from potential sources of contamination) standards.

Provide a list of the responsible or trustee agencies for the project.

If nesting of a protected species is identified near the site, the California Department of Fish & Wildlife would be considered a trustee agency.

Attachment 1
Mitigation Measures

Hunter Ranch - Installation and Operation of up to Five Agricultural Wells and One Support Well
Well Permit Application Nos. 2021-69, 2021-70, 2021-71, 2021-72 + Two Future Well Permit Applications
Stanislaus County, California

| Reference | Mitigation Measure Description |
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| MM BIO-1a | <p>A qualified biologist shall investigate the potential presence or absence of sensitive habitats and wetlands, and special-status plants or wildlife in areas that will be disturbed by well construction or conversion of rangelands to cultivated use that is made possible by the well, prior to well permit approval or project implementation. Documentation could involve any of these tasks:</p> <p>Desktop review of existing site records through the county records and general plan, California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDB), California Native Plant Society (CNPS) inventory, environmental documents and surveys to determine likelihood of occurrence near (within ½ mile) the well site, any rangeland converted SCH to cultivated agricultural use that is supplied by the well, and any related construction areas.</p> <p>Conduct field reconnaissance. A field reconnaissance survey shall be conducted, including a habitat assessment to determine whether suitable conditions exist for special-status species.</p> <p>Determine the need for additional species-specific surveys or wetland delineation. If warranted, coordinate with appropriate agencies (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service [USFWS], California Department of Fish and Wildlife [CDFW], or U.S. Army Corps of Engineers [USACE]) as may be necessary to determine appropriate survey timing and effort.</p> <p>Coordinate with appropriate agencies and the County as may be necessary based on the results of additional species-specific surveys or wetland delineation to identify and implement mitigation measures as necessary to avoid, minimize, or otherwise mitigate potential impacts to special-status species, wetlands or other habitat to a less-than-significant level.</p> |
| MM BIO-1b | <p>The applicant shall endeavor to conduct any drilling, construction work and/or ground-disturbing activities associated with installation of the proposed well or the conversion of rangeland to cultivated agricultural use that will be irrigated using the well during the non-breeding season of any birds and raptors protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (generally September 16 through January 31). If construction activities must be scheduled during the nesting season (generally February 1 to September 15), pre-construction surveys for raptors, migratory birds, and special-status bird species shall be done by a qualified biologist to identify active nests near the site. This shall include a buffer extending out from the construction or disturbance area to a distance of approximately ½ mile. If active nests are found, no drilling construction activities shall occur within 500 feet of the nest until the young have fledged and the nest is no longer active (as determined by the qualified biologist). Survey timing and frequency requirements differ among species; species-specific surveys should follow all timing and frequency requirements of CDFW and USFWS. Consultation with the CDFW and/or USFWS shall occur if required, and may result in additional requirements</p> |

| Reference | Mitigation Measure Description |
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| MM BIO-4 | Evaluate well construction permit applications to assess the potential conflicts with local policies or ordinances that project biological resources and consider mitigation measures for significant effects on the environment on a project-specific basis. |
| MM CUL-1a | For projects with anticipated ground disturbance that would extend beyond previously disturbed soils, a qualified cultural resources professional shall investigate the potential presence of archaeological or historical resources in the vicinity of the well, the well pad, any appurtenant access drives and electrical service lines, and any rangeland tracts converted to cultivated agricultural use that will be irrigated by the well, through a desktop review. The review shall include records at the Central California Information Center (CCIC), records at the University of California Berkeley Museum of Paleontology (UCMP), a Sacred Lands File search at the Native American Heritage Commission, Native American tribal consultation, California Register of Historical Resources (CRHR), and the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). |
| MM CUL-1b | If it is determined through implementation of Mitigation Measure CUL-1a that archaeological, historical or paleontological resources or human remains may be located on a site, or the area is judged to have a high degree of sensitivity relative to these resources, prior to any project-related ground disturbing or construction activities, a qualified archaeologist, historian or paleontologist (as applicable) shall conduct an archaeological/ historical/paleontological resources survey (as applicable). If it is determined that the proposed well is in an area adjacent to or in one of these resources, the well would be relocated and the project reconfigured to avoid substantial changes to the resource. <i>Note: this MM applies to both the Cultural and Geology/Soil resource areas.</i> |
| MM CUL-1c | If the construction staff or others observe previously unidentified archaeological, historical or paleontological resources, or human remains during drilling or other ground-disturbing activities associated with well construction or conversion of rangeland to cultivated agricultural use, they will halt work within a 100-foot radius of the find(s), delineate the area of the find with flagging tape or rope (may also include dirt spoils from the find area), immediately notify the lead agency, and retain a qualified archaeologist, historian or paleontologist (as applicable) to review the observed resources. Construction will halt within the flagged or roped-off area. The archaeologist will assess the resource as soon as possible and determine appropriate next steps in coordination with the lead agency. Such finds will be formally recorded and evaluated. The resource will be protected from further disturbance or looting pending evaluation. |

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| MM WAT-2 | <p>Property owners and water agencies in the area where predicted drawdown exceeds 5 feet will be notified of the existence of the Interference Drawdown Monitoring and Mitigation Program, and will be invited to register any domestic wells in the predicted 5-foot drawdown area and any municipal, industrial, or irrigation wells in the predicted 20-foot drawdown area to participate in the program. To register for the program, well owners will be required to complete a Well Information Questionnaire regarding the construction, use, history and performance of their well, and to allow access for periodic measurement of water levels and assessment of well condition and performance by the County or a neutral third party. If well performance is found to be diminished by more than 20 percent or to be inadequate to meet pre-existing water demand due to interference drawdown, registered participants will be eligible to receive reimbursement for reasonable and customary costs for well replacement, deepening or rehabilitation, or pump lowering as needed to restore adequate well function. The cost of reimbursement shall be borne by the operator of the well causing the interference in proportion to the degree of their contribution to the drawdown that caused the diminished yield.</p> |
| MM WAT-2b | <p>Per Page 5 of the Groundwater Resources Impact Assessment (Initial Study, Attachment 2), the applicant will prepare and implement a Monitoring and Adaptive Management Program during Phase I of the Project. The program will include the following components:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A monitoring plan will be developed and provided to the Stanislaus County DER for review and approval. The plan will describe the procedures to collect and analyze groundwater level monitoring data from two or more monitoring wells during the initial operation of PW-1 and PW-2. Each of the monitoring wells will be fitted with a recording pressure transducer. Drawdown data and groundwater extraction data will be gathered for a period of at least three months after project startup. • The observed drawdown data will be compared to drawdown data simulated using the groundwater flow model developed for the Project and described in Section 4 of the Groundwater Resources Impact Assessment. To this, the actual pumping rates from the initial startup period will be simulated using the model, and the predicted drawdown response at the monitoring well locations will be compared to the observed response. If the observed drawdown is different from the predicted drawdown, the model will be updated as appropriate to match the observed drawdown. The updated model will then be used to assess the allowable groundwater development extraction rate for Phase II of the Project, as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o If the observed drawdown was less than or similar to the originally predicted drawdown, development of Phase II may include up to an additional 175 acres. o If the observed drawdown was greater than the originally predicted drawdown, the updated model will be used to establish an allowable additional pumping volume for Phase II such that the drawdown predicted for expanded Phase II pumping remains less than or similar to the originally predicted drawdown described in Section 4 of the Groundwater Resources Impact Assessment. o The outcome of the analysis will be provided to the Stanislaus County DER for review and approval. |

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| MM WAT-4 | <p>The Site generally slopes toward the south, with several drainages through the proposed orchard blocks to be developed as part of the agricultural activities supported by the Project. The ripping and tilling of proposed orchard blocks that have not been previously tilled may cause siltation off site during these activities, unless tilling and ripping of the soil occurs during the dry season. Less than significant impacts related to siltation of the newly tilled and ripped ground off-site are anticipated if the work occurs during the dry season. A Drainage, Erosion and Sediment Control Plan, as specified under Mitigation Measure WAT-4 is warranted as a Best Management Practice for the agricultural orchard construction (to follow completion of the Project activities) to cover unanticipated rain events, and to address work that may be performed during the wet season.</p> |