Print Form

Notice of Exemption

Appendix E

To: Office of Planning and Research
P.O. Box 3044, Room 113
Sacramento, CA 95812-3044

County Clerk
County of: Sonoma

From: (Public Agency): Valley of the Moon Water District
P.O. Box 280
El Verano, CA 95433-0280
(Address)

Project Title: Park Avenue Well and Verano Avenue Well ASR Projects

Project Applicant: Valley of the Moon Water District

Project Location - Specific:

Park Avenue and Verano Avenue, Sonoma County

Project Location - City: N/A Project Location - County: Sonoma

Description of Nature, Purpose and Beneficiaries of Project:

The proposed projects involve the installation of aquifer storage and recovery equipment to the Park Avenue and Verano Avenue wells, as well as ancillary activities such as the drilling of monitoring wells.

Name of Public Agency Approving Project: Valley of the Moon Water District

Name of Person or Agency Carrying Out Project: Valley of the Moon Water District

Exempt Status: **(check one):**

- ☐ Ministerial (Sec. 21080(b)(1); 15268);
- ☐ Declared Emergency (Sec. 21080(b)(3); 15269(a));
- ☐ Emergency Project (Sec. 21080(b)(4); 15269(b)(c));
- ☒ Categorical Exemption. State type and section number: 15301, 15302
- ☐ Statutory Exemptions. State code number: _____

Reasons why project is exempt:

Project involves minor alterations to and replacement of existing facilities without expanding capacity of those facilities. See attached Environmental Evaluation for more detail.

Lead Agency Contact Person: Matt Fullner Area Code/Telephone/Extension: 707-996-1037

If filed by applicant:

1. Attach certified document of exemption finding.
2. Has a Notice of Exemption been filed by the public agency approving the project? ▪ Yes No

Signature: _____ Date: June 30 2022 Title: General Manager

▪ Signed by Lead Agency Signed by Applicant

Authority cited: Sections 21083 and 21110, Public Resources Code.
Reference: Sections 21108, 21152, and 21152.1, Public Resources Code.

Date Received for filing at OPR: _____

Revised 2011

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Valley of the Moon Water District
Park Avenue and Verano Avenue Wells
Environmental Evaluation for
Class 1 and Class 2 Categorical Exemptions

OVERVIEW

The Valley of the Moon Water District (VOMWD) is a public agency that provides high-quality drinking water to 23,750 people in a 12 square-mile area in the Sonoma Valley, near to the City of Sonoma.

VOMWD contracts with the Sonoma County Water Agency (SCWA) for potable water from the Russian River. To supplement these supplies, VOMWD operates numerous wells throughout their service area. Among these wells are ones located adjacent to Park Avenue and adjacent to Verano Avenue in unincorporated Sonoma County, north of the City of Sonoma.

NEED FOR THE PROPOSED PROJECT

Need for Drought Storage

This project responds to an existing drought emergency for humans and wildlife in the Sonoma Valley. VOMWD relies on SCWA for approximately 80% of the District's potable water. Critically low rainfall over the last three years has resulted in historically low water storage levels in SCWA's two water supply reservoirs, Lake Mendocino and Lake Sonoma, and storage levels continue to decline. The adverse environmental, economic, health, welfare, and social impacts of the drought continue to pose an imminent threat of disaster, and threaten to cause widespread potential harm to people, businesses, agriculture, property, communities, the environment, wildlife, and recreation in the VOMWD service area.

In response to these conditions, on March 5, 2021, the Secretary of the United States Department of Agriculture designated 50 California counties, including Sonoma County, as primary natural disaster areas due to drought. On April 21, 2021, Governor Newsom visited Lake Mendocino and proclaimed a state of emergency in Sonoma and Mendocino counties due to drought conditions in the Russian River Watershed. On June 16, 2021, the General Manager of SCWA

determined that due to drought conditions, an emergency exists that poses a clear and imminent danger, requiring immediate action to prevent or mitigate the loss or impairment of life, health, property, or essential public services, necessitating immediate action. On July 6, 2021 the District enacted Stage 2 of its Water Shortage Contingency Plan (WSCP), which calls for a 20% overall reduction in water use. The Stage 2 of the WSCP was enacted in response to the State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) order requiring SCWA and its water contractors, including VOMWD, to reduce total diversions from the Russian River by 20%.

The drought conditions have persisted in 2022. The storage levels at Lake Mendocino and Lake Sonoma are similar to the levels seen in 2021, and similar reductions in diversions from the Russian River are anticipated. The District therefore remains in Stage 2 of its WSCP.

The Park Avenue Well Aquifer Storage and Recovery (ASR) project, and the Verano Avenue Well ASR project are two of four projects covered under VOMWD's Drought Resiliency Program, which is intended to increase its overall supply reliability and protect and maintain human health and safety by improving the availability of water under current and future drought and emergency conditions. These four projects will allow VOMWD to store up to 141 AFY of excess surface water during wet years in the underlying aquifer for use during dry years or in the event of a supply disruption during an emergency. In dry years, the four projects will have the capacity to provide up to 453 acre-feet per year (AFY) of local groundwater supply, equivalent to 18% of the District's water demand during the period of October 2020 to September 2021.

Sonoma Valley Groundwater Sustainability Plan

California's historic Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) became effective on January 1, 2015, at the height of the state's last drought. SGMA mandated that groundwater resources be sustainably managed through development and implementation of a Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP or Plan) to ensure that groundwater will be available today and into the future for all beneficial users, including flora and fauna, municipal and domestic users, agricultural users, and business users. The Sonoma Valley Groundwater Sustainability Agency (Sonoma Valley GSA) was formed under SGMA to develop and implement this GSP for the Sonoma Valley Groundwater Subbasin (Subbasin) from which VOMWD draws its groundwater.

In December 2021, the Sonoma Valley GSA published the Groundwater Sustainability Plan - Sonoma Valley Groundwater Subbasin (Sonoma Valley Groundwater Sustainability Agency 2021), which includes recommendations for

improving the sustainability of the Subbasin. Among the measures the report recommends to ensure sustainability of groundwater supplies are planning for and implementation of ASR projects.

Park Avenue Well Disrepair

The existing Park Avenue Well has fallen into disrepair, with much of the well lining having collapsed. It currently produces less water (75-85 gallons per minute) than its original design capacity (215 gallons per minute).

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Park Avenue Well ASR Project

As authorized under a separate CEQA NOE (see below), a new well will be drilled at the Park Avenue site to recover the original capacity of the well. The new well will tap into the same aquifer as the existing well. Work will include the abandonment of the original well, construction of a new production well, installation of necessary downhole and above-grade equipment, and required startup testing. The precise location of the new well is not yet known, but it will be located within the parcel currently owned by VOMWD, in areas that are already disturbed near to the existing well. The well will tap into the same aquifer as the existing well[1].

Under this NOE, one or two new monitoring wells will be constructed (depending on whether the existing well can be converted to a monitoring well), a pilot study will be implemented to assess the geochemistry of the aquifer and refine operational parameters for the ASR project. If the subsequent pump testing and water quality evaluations confirm that the new well meets the requirements for implementing ASR, ASR facilities will be added to the new well. Construction would include tapping into the current pipeline which transports water from the well to the VOMWD system, and the construction of piping and above-grade improvements to allow water from the VOMWD system to be injected into the well.

The ASR operations would include injecting treated potable drinking water from the distribution system during wet years and making it available for extraction during drought and emergency conditions. Project implementation would also include the necessary engineering, permitting, construction and startup testing.

[1] This assumes that the existing well cannot be reclaimed, but depending on conditions, the existing well may be rehabilitated or converted to a monitoring well.

This will result in approximately 23 acre feet per year (AFY) of available groundwater recharge. In addition to 79 AFY of native groundwater withdrawals, this will result in approximately 102 AFY of total water supply. This estimate is based on an assumed production rate of 85 gpm for 7.5 months per year, an injection rate of 50 gpm for 4.5 months, 10% injection rate losses, and 20% required well down time.

Verano Avenue Well ASR Project

The Project will retrofit the existing Verano Avenue production well to allow it to be used both for groundwater production, and as an injection well as part of the District's ASR system. The work would include tapping into the pipeline that currently carries water from the well to the VOMWD distribution system, the installation of the necessary downhole and above-grade equipment to convert the well for use as ASR, and construction of a new monitoring well. The ASR operations would include injecting treated potable drinking water from the distribution system during wet years and making it available for extraction during drought and emergency conditions. Project implementation would also include the necessary engineering, permitting, construction and startup testing. This would result in approximately 59 acre feet per year (AFY) of groundwater recharge. An additional approximately 100-110 AFY of native groundwater withdrawals would result in a total of approximately 160-170 AFY of yield.

All work will occur within the parcel currently owned by VOMWD, in areas that are already disturbed.

CEQA History

On January 20, 2022, VOMWD filed a Notice of Exemption (NOE) under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) (California Public Resources Code, Section 21000 et. seq.) for the first phase of work on the Park Avenue well, the drilling of a new well at the existing well site. That NOE was filed with the State Clearinghouse and assigned # 2022010332. This NOE covers only the construction and installation associated with converting the well to accommodate ASR.

Project Construction

Park Avenue Well ASR Project

The construction of the proposed improvements at the Park Avenue well site are expected to take approximately 8 weeks. The construction will require the following equipment: a well pump service rig, small excavation equipment (i.e. a backhoe), small crane, contractor service trucks, baker tanks for treating pump test water, and portable generators.

Verano Avenue Well ASR Project

The construction of the proposed improvements at the Verano Avenue well site are expected to take approximately 8 weeks. The construction will require the following equipment: a well pump service rig, small excavation equipment (i.e. a backhoe), small crane, contractor service trucks, baker tanks for treating pump test water, and portable generators.

Public Outreach

VOMWD will prepare and distribute a letter to residents near the two projects and that are likely to be impacted by construction traffic or noise. The letter will describe the reasons the improvements are needed, the work to be done, and the expected length of construction. The letter, which will be distributed at least 2 weeks prior to the start of construction at each site, will also provide a phone number for neighbors to contact if they have any comments or concerns.

ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

Park Avenue Well ASR Project

The Park Avenue Well site is on a parcel adjacent to Park Avenue between Hemlock Avenue and Chestnut Avenue, owned by VOMWD and currently used as a water supply well. Existing development on the site includes a small wooden structure within which all of the pump facilities are located, a wooden fence around the structure and ancillary facilities, and a gravel driveway. A portion of the parcel behind the well structure is disturbed and used for storage, while the remainder of the parcel is covered with native oaks and other tree and shrub species. Single-family homes are located on either side of the parcel, with native vegetation behind the structure.

Verano Avenue Well ASR Project

The Verano Avenue Well site is on a parcel adjacent to Verano Avenue, between Arnold Drive and Olive Avenue, owned by VOMWD and currently used as a water supply well. Existing development on the site includes a small cinderblock structure, a well head sitting on a concrete pad in front of the cinderblock structure, a monitoring well, and some treatment and storage equipment behind the structure. The parcel is enclosed by a chain link fence covered by privacy slats. A gravel driveway connects the parcel to Verano Avenue.

A single-family home is located to the east of the VOMWD parcel, and an open field abuts the parcel to the west and south.

ENVIRONMENTAL EVALUATION

1. Would the proposed project result in the expansion of capacity or use of the project facilities (Class 1)?

Park Avenue Well ASR Project

The Park Avenue Well ASR project would restore the capacity of the original well, but would not expand its capacity. The project would, however, allow surface water to be stored in the aquifer during times when water is available, and to withdraw that water in times when surface water supplies are reduced or not available.

Verano Avenue Well ASR Project

The Verano Avenue Well ASR project would not expand the capacity of the well, but would allow surface water to be stored in the aquifer during times when water is available, and to withdraw that water in times when surface water supplies are reduced or not available.

2. Does the project involve the replacement or reconstruction of an existing structure on the same site as the structure being replaced or reconstructed (Class 2)?

Park Avenue Well ASR Project

The proposed project would not involve any changes to the existing structure on the site, though it would involve changes to pipes and other ancillary facilities,

including the replacement of the original well with a new well within the fenced area of the parcel.

Verano Avenue Well ASR Project

The proposed project would not involve any changes to the existing structure on the site, though it would involve changes to pipes and other ancillary facilities within the fenced area of the parcel.

3. Would the new structure have substantially the same purpose and capacity as the existing structure?

The new facilities associated with both the Park Avenue Well ASR project and the Verano Avenue Well ASR project would have the same purpose (water supply) as the existing facilities. As explained above under Question 1, neither the Park Avenue Well nor the Verano Avenue Well project would result in the expansion of the capacity of the existing facilities.

4. Does the project require obtaining an environmental permit that could result in physical changes to the environment?

Other than completion of CEQA compliance, neither project would require that any environmental permits be obtained.

5. Is the project visible from an official State Scenic Highway?

The only roadway listed as a State Scenic Highway in the vicinity of the proposed projects is SR 12, which is listed as an “Eligible” facility (Caltrans 2022). Neither project can be seen from SR 12, due to distance, changes in elevation, and the presence of intervening structures and vegetation.

6. Is the project located on a site included on any list compiled pursuant to Government Code § 65962.5 (Cortese List)?

Neither project parcel is contained on the Cortese List as containing a hazardous waste site, per Government Code § 65962.5 (CalEPA 2022).

7. Would the project result in a substantial adverse change in the significance of a historic resource?

Neither project parcel contains a significant historic resource. Neither would either project result in changes to the structures present on the site. All construction on each site would be within the already disturbed portions of the site.

8. Is there evidence of the potential for the project to contribute to a significant cumulative impact?

There is no evidence that either project would contribute to a significant cumulative impact.

9. Is there evidence of a reasonable possibility of a significant environmental impact due to unusual circumstances?

There is no evidence that either project site or the surrounding areas presents any unusual circumstances. Therefore, neither site would result in a significant environmental impact due to unusual circumstances.

Conclusion

Based on information contained in the administrative record, including the answers provided to Questions 1-9 above, VOMWD finds that the project is eligible for both a Class 1 Categorical Exemption covering minor alterations to existing facilities (Section 15301), and a Class 2 Categorical Exemption covering the replacement or reconstruction of existing facilities (Section 15302). VOMWD further finds that the project fits within the parameters established in CEQA Guidelines Section 15302, and none of the exceptions to this exemption defined in Section 15300.2 apply.

References

California Department of Transportation (Caltrans). 2022. Scenic Highways website. Accessed by Craig Stevens on June 20, 2022 at: https://dot.ca.gov/programs/design/lap-landscape-architecture-and-community-livability/lap-liv-i-scenic-highways.

California Environmental Protection Agency (CalEPA). 2022. Cortese List Data Resources website. Accessed by Craig Stevens on June 20, 2022 at: https://calepa.ca.gov/SiteCleanup/CorteseList/.

Sonoma Groundwater Sustainability Agency. 2021. Groundwater Sustainability Plan – Sonoma Valley Groundwater Subbasin. December. Accessed by Craig Stevens on May 31, 2022 at: https://sonomavalleygroundwater.org/gsp/.