

**NOTICE OF PREPARATION
AND
NOTICE OF PUBLIC SCOPING MEETING
REPLENISH BIG BEAR PROGRAM**

TO: California Office of Planning and Research
Responsible AND Trustee Agencies AND Federal Agencies
Other Interested Parties

SUBJECT: Notice of Preparation of a Draft Environmental Impact Report and Notice of Public Scoping Meeting

PROJECT: Replenish Big Bear Program

LEAD AGENCY: Big Bear Area Regional Wastewater Agency (BBARWA)

Date: November 30, 2022

NOTICE OF PREPARATION:

The Big Bear Area Regional Wastewater Agency (BBARWA) will serve as the Lead Agency and will prepare an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the proposed Replenish Big Bear Program (Project or Program). BBARWA is seeking input from the general public, public agencies, and interested parties regarding the scope and content of the environmental information that should be analyzed in the EIR, including input regarding any topics or specific issues that are germane to a particular agency's statutory responsibilities in connection with the proposed Program. A short description of the Replenish Big Bear Program, as well as the location and potential environmental effects, are discussed below. A detailed project description is provided as an attachment to this Notice of Preparation (NOP). In accordance with Section 15060(d) of the State CEQA Guidelines, BBARWA has determined that an EIR will be prepared to address all the standard issues identified in the Standard Environmental Assessment Form/Initial Study. Thus, no Initial Study accompanies this NOP in accordance with Section 15060(d) of the State CEQA Guidelines.

PROJECT ENTITLEMENT: BBARWA is preparing the Replenish Big Bear Program as the Lead Agency, together with the following cooperating agencies: City of Big Bear Lake Department of Water and Power (BBLDWP), Big Bear City Community Services District (BCCSD), and Big Bear Municipal Water District (BBMWD). These agencies, in addition to BBARWA, make up the Project Team. Other responsible agencies include the California Department of Water Resources (DWR), the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), San Bernardino County, City of Big Bear Lake, Santa Ana Regional Water Quality Control Board (SARWQCB), Colorado River Basin Regional Water Quality Control Board (CRRWQCB), United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACOE), San Bernardino County Flood Control District, and Big Bear City Airport as responsible agencies.

The proposed project has been awarded a grant for the project from the United States Bureau of Reclamation (BOR). The proposed project may seek grants or loans from other federal agencies, such as the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Thus, the EIR will also be prepared to meet National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) standards to enable BOR and the EPA to process this project under a separate NEPA documentation process.

If the BBARWA Governing Board approves and certifies the Replenish Big Bear Program EIR, the remaining entities that make up the Project Team and CEQA Responsible Agencies will utilize the Draft

EIR as CEQA Responsible Agencies. The Project Team can then issue contracts to begin the construction of facilities associated with the Replenish Big Bear Program.

PROJECT LOCATION: The Big Bear Valley is located in the San Bernardino Mountains of San Bernardino County, California. The area includes approximately 135 square miles within a 12-mile long valley surrounded by mountain ridges and rugged slopes. Land surface elevations range from 6,000 to 9,900 ft and the area is entirely surrounded by the San Bernardino National Forest. The proposed project is located within the SGMA - Bear Valley Basin (8-009). Big Bear Lake and Baldwin Lake are located in the Basin.

The project will span just east of Big Bear Lake to the Wastewater Treatment Plant (WWTP) at Baldwin Lake and then south to Shay Pond, and southeast of Big Bear Lake to the Ski Resort / Golf Course Pond and Sand Canyon Recharge Area. Each of these elements are discussed in further detail below. The project is located within several USGS 7.5-minute topographic maps, including the following: Big Bear City, CA; Big Bear Lake, CA Moonridge, CA; and, San Geronio, CA. The central point for this project is the BBARWA WWTP, for which the geographic coordinates of the proposed project are 34.268906°, -116.815575°, which is located in Section 7, Township 2 North, Range 2 East of the Big Bear City, CA USGS 7.5-minute topographic map.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION: Replenish Big Bear includes permitting, design, and construction of full advanced treatment facility upgrades at the existing BBARWA WWTP, more than 7 miles of pipeline for product water and RO brine minimization, three pump stations, a groundwater recharge facility, and up to four monitoring wells. **Figure 1**, below, shows the project.

The Program is currently estimated to produce approximately 1,950 acre-feet per year (AFY) of high-quality purified water, and may produce up to 2,210 AFY by 2040 through operation of a high-recovery brine minimization technology. Piloting will be conducted to confirm the feasibility of the higher yield estimates. For the purposes of this document, 2,210 AFY is used to be conservative in evaluating environmental impacts. The Shay Pond discharge will replace potable water currently discharged to the water body to maintain the water flow through the pond. Up to 80 AFY of purified water will be sent to Shay Pond, and any remaining purified water will be sent to the Stanfield Marsh Wildlife and Waterfowl Preserve (Stanfield Marsh), a tributary of Big Bear Lake (Lake). The objectives of the Project remain the same and include the following uses and benefits:

- Purified water will be discharged to Shay Pond to sustain habitat for the federally listed Unarmored Threespined Stickleback fish, which is currently sustained using potable groundwater;
- Purified water will be discharged to the Stanfield Marsh, providing a consistent water source to sustain habitat and increase educational opportunities for the community and visitors;
- Purified water will flow through Stanfield Marsh and provide new inflow to the Lake to increase inflows and Lake level, enhance recreational opportunities and aquatic habitat, and support water quality improvements;
- When needed, purified water stored in the Lake will be pumped to Sand Canyon to recharge the groundwater basin to strengthen the sustainability of the groundwater basin;
- Purified water stored in the Lake for can be used for golf course irrigation and dust control by the Big Bear Mountain Resorts (Resorts) in the summer;
- During wet periods, excess purified water stored in the Lake could be stored locally as snow, providing flexibility to further enhance winter recreation, reduce spills from Big Bear Lake, augment spring runoff and increase groundwater recharge. This activity is not currently planned to be implemented as part of the Program, but the Program provides the flexibility to adapt if more extreme hydrologic conditions occur in the future; and,
- Additional inflow may enable BBMWd to modify their current Big Bear Lake management strategy to minimize spills and optimize releases to enable additional water to be captured downstream for recharge of the San Bernardino Basin, rather than discharged to the ocean.

For redundancy purposes, BBARWA is also seeking to maintain its current discharge location in Lucerne Valley, where undisinfected secondary effluent is currently conveyed to irrigate crops used for livestock feed.

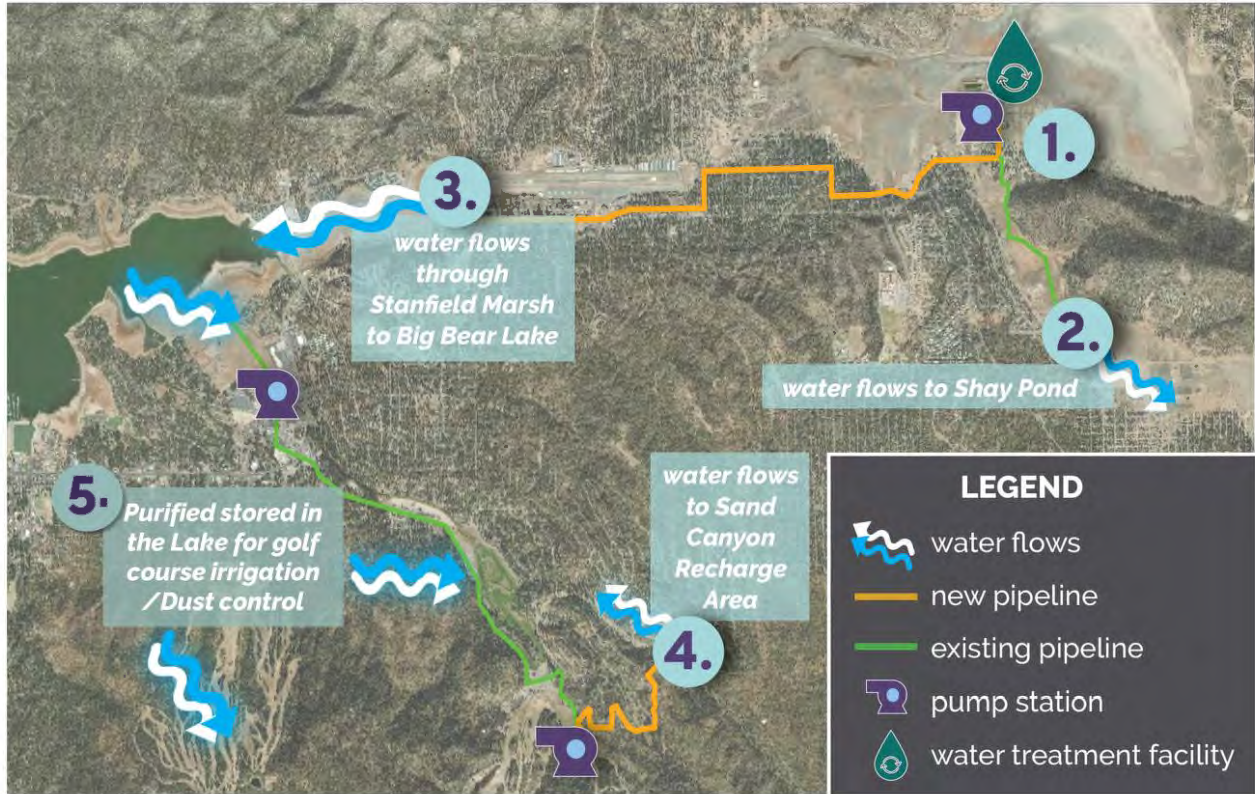


Figure 1. Replenish Big Bear Program Overview

The following environmental issues will be analyzed in the EIR: aesthetics, agriculture and forestry resources, air quality, biological resources, cultural resources, energy, geology/soils, greenhouse gas emissions/climate change, hazards and hazardous materials, hydrology/water quality, land use/planning, mineral resources, noise, population/housing, public services, recreation, transportation, tribal cultural resources, utilities/service systems, and wildfire.

SCOPING MEETING: Two public scoping meetings will be held to receive verbal public comments and suggestions on the environmental issues associated with implementation of the Replenish Big Bear Program that will be addressed in the EIR. These meetings will be identical in nature and will enable two meetings for each of the community areas within which the Program would be installed. These meetings will include a brief presentation providing an overview of the scope and facilities proposed for the Replenish Big Bear Program and will provide an overview of the CEQA process itself. After the presentation, oral comments will be accepted. Written comment cards will be made available for those who wish to submit comments in writing at the scoping meeting. The scoping meetings will be open to the public and held at the following locations and at the following times:

City of Big Bear Lake, Department of Water and Power
 41972 Garstin Drive
 Big Bear Lake, CA 92315
 From **6:00 PM to 7:00 PM** on **January 5, 2023**

Big Bear Area Regional Wastewater Agency
 121 Palomino Drive
 Big Bear City, CA 92314
 From **6:00 PM to 7:00 PM** on **January 10, 2023**

In the event that more time is needed to receive public comment on the Program at either or both of the scoping meetings, additional time shall be considered.

COMMENT PERIOD: Pursuant to State CEQA Guidelines (Cal Code Regs., Title 14 para. 15000 *et seq.*) Section 15082(a), any response and/or comments must be submitted to this office (address provided below) as soon as possible, but **not later than forty-five (45) days** after the date upon this Notice. The Notice of Preparation comment period begins on November 30, 2022 and ends on January 17, 2023.

A copy of the NOP and attached Project Description are available electronically at the following web address: <https://www.replenishbigbear.com/documents>.

Please send your written responses to this Notice, including any comments you may have on this project, by 5:00 PM on January 17, 2023 via regular mail or e-mail to:

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