



State Water Resources Control Board

January 12, 2024

Governor's Office of Planning & Research

City of Fowler
Attn: Amy Wilson
400 E. Main Street, Suite 300
Visalia, CA 93291

Jan 16 2024
STATE CLEARINGHOUSE

CITY OF FOWLER (CITY), INITIAL STUDY (IS)/MITIGATED NEGATIVE DECLARATION (MND) FOR THE WELL 9 PROJECT (PROJECT); STATE CLEARINGHOUSE # 2023120334

Dear Ms. Amy Wilson:

Thank you for the opportunity to review the IS/MND for the proposed Project. The State Water Resources Control Board, Division of Drinking Water (State Water Board, DDW) is responsible for issuing water supply permits pursuant to the Safe Drinking Water Act. This Project is within the jurisdiction of the State Water Board, DDW's Fresno District. DDW Fresno District issues domestic water supply permit amendments to the public water systems serviced with a new or modified source of domestic water supply or new domestic water system components pursuant to Waterworks Standards (Title 22 CCR chapter 16 et. seq.). A public water system requires a water supply permit amendment when changes are made to a domestic water supply source, storage, or treatment and for the operation of new water system components- as specified in the Waterworks Standards. The City will need to apply for a water supply permit amendment for this Project.

The State Water Board, DDW, as a responsible agency under California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), has the following comments on the City's IS/MND:

- The IS/MND states the City can pump an additional 6.8 million gallons per day from their current wells (PDF 61). And as a result, adequate groundwater resources are available to meet long-term demands (PDF 61). However, increased pumping in a critically overdrafted basin may cause potentially significant environmental impacts or contribute to a cumulative impact.
 - Define the current CEQA baseline: how much water is pumped in an average year?
 - Please identify the City's sustainable yield for groundwater extraction, the City's current water demand, and if there will be sufficient water to serve the population of Fowler now and for the life of the well during normal, dry, and multiple dry years.

E. JOAQUIN ESQUIVEL, CHAIR | ERIC OPPENHEIMER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

- If the new well will increase the amount of water that will be pumped compared to the CEQA baseline, please indicate how basin impacts will be monitored and what minimization or mitigation measures will be implemented to mitigate impacts over the City's sustainable yield. [Please note: "If there is substantial evidence, in light of the whole record before the lead agency, that the project may have a significant effect on the environment, an environmental impact report shall be prepared," California Public Resources Code, division 13 environmental quality, chapter 2.6 general, section 21080 (d).]
- Please also explain if the Project will comply with the Sustainable Groundwater Management Plan approved by DWR on August 4, 2023.
- The IS/MND indicates that the Project is intended to supplement the City's water supplies and would not result in direct or indirect population growth beyond what is planned for in the General Plan (PDF page 85). And so concludes, the Project would not result in significant cumulative impacts and all potential impacts would be reduced to less than significant through mitigation measures and regulatory requirements (PDF page 85)
 - Under Water Supply and Distribution in the General Plan, the General Plan does not identify a sustainable water supply allocation based on population growth, but instead requires the preparation of a Water System Master Plan to identify an adequate supply of water to meet future demands (PDF page 100). Please provide support that the groundwater basin has an adequate supply of water for water that will be pumped over the CEQA baseline, through the Water System Master Plan or other groundwater basin planning documents or discuss cumulative impacts to the basin.
 - No mitigation measures were specified in the document for the groundwater. Please indicate what mitigation measures are being referred to in this statement or remove the reference.
- The Project will install multiple impervious surfaces on a site that is currently pervious. Please discuss the stormwater infrastructure that will be installed to control runoff.
- The Project designs include possible connection of a Granulated Activated Carbon (GAC) treatment system (PDF page 16). Please include a discussion on the possible operational impacts of the GAC treatment system in the event it is installed. Be sure to discuss spent GAC disposal, backwash discharge, and discharge permits.
- The IS/MND indicates there are no water discharge activities associated with the well (PDF page 61), however discharges occur in the development, construction, and operation of groundwater wells. Please update the CEQA document to reflect this.

When the CEQA review process is completed, please forward the following items with your permit application to the State Water Board, DDW Fresno District Office at DWPDIST23@waterboards.ca.gov:

- Copy of the IS/MND with all comment letters received and the lead agency responses as appropriate.
- Copy of the Resolution or Board Minutes adopting the IS/MND, and
- Copy of the date stamped Notice of Determination filed at the Fresno County Clerk's Office and the Governor's Office of Planning and Research, State Clearinghouse.

Please contact Lori Schmitz of the State Water Board at (916) 449-5285 or Lori.Schmitz@waterboards.ca.gov, if you have any questions regarding this comment letter.

Sincerely,

Lori Schmitz

Lori Schmitz
Environmental Scientist
Division of Financial Assistance
Special Project Review Unit
1001 I Street, 16th floor
Sacramento, CA 95814

Cc:

Office of Planning and Research, State Clearinghouse

Sudarshan Poudyal
Associate Sanitary Engineer
Fresno District

Tricia Wathen
Acting District Engineer
Fresno District