

DATE: December 20, 2023

TO: State Clearinghouse; Responsible and Trustee Agencies; and Other Interested Parties

SUBJECT: Notice of Preparation of an Environmental Impact Report

PROJECT: Sandridge Irrigation Pipeline Extension Project

LEAD AGENCY: Stratford Public Utility District
19681 Railroad Street
Stratford, CA 93266

The Stratford Public Utility District (SPUD) intends to prepare an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the Sandridge Irrigation Pipeline Extension Project (proposed project). The proposed project encompasses a 3.7-mile pipeline that would convey irrigation water and connect to and from existing Sandridge Partners LP (Sandridge) water distribution systems within Kings County, California. SPUD is the Lead Agency under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). SPUD invites written comments on the scope of the environmental analysis and identification of potential environmental issues to be included in the EIR.

Notice of Preparation: This Notice of Preparation (NOP) has been sent to the Office of Planning and Research, responsible and trustee agencies, other public agencies, and interested members of the public to inform them that SPUD is preparing an EIR to analyze the proposed project and to solicit information that will be helpful in the environmental review process. This notice includes a description of the proposed project and information regarding how to provide comments to SPUD.

Comment Period: SPUD is requesting input from responsible and trustee agencies, other public agencies, and interested members of the public regarding the scope and content of the environmental information to be included in the EIR. Responsible and trustee agency responses should provide specific detail about the scope and content of the environmental information related to the responsible or trustee agency's area of statutory responsibility that they believe should be included in the EIR and other pertinent information consistent with CEQA Guidelines Section 15082(b).

State law mandates that responses must be sent at the earliest possible date but postmarked within 30 days from this notice. The CEQA Guidelines state that if a responsible or trustee agency fails to respond (with comments or a well-justified request for additional time) SPUD may presume that none of those entities have a response to make. The 30-day public review period for this NOP extends from **Wednesday, December 20, 2023**, to **Friday, January 19, 2024**. Please provide any written comments (either by mail or electronically) no later than **5:00 pm on January 19, 2024**. Please direct all comments to the following address:

Stratford Public Utility District, 19681 Railroad Street, Stratford, CA 93266
Email: stratfordpud@gmail.com

Document Availability. This NOP is available for review on the Office of Planning and Research's State Clearinghouse website, at the Kings County Clerk's office, at the Stratford Post Office at 20340 Main Street, Stratford, CA 93266, and at the SPUD office at 19681 Railroad Street, Stratford, CA 93266.

Project Location: The proposed project is located in northwest Kings County, California. The

proposed pipeline begins approximately 2 miles south of the City of Lemoore, in the vicinity of Java Avenue directly west of Highway 41, and includes pipeline sections connecting to existing ditches that run south for approximately 2 miles before crossing Highway 41 near King Avenue. The pipeline runs east for approximately 450 feet before turning south along 20th Avenue for approximately 1 mile, eventually crossing Laurel Avenue. It then runs south along Stratford Canal for about 0.5 mile before turning west and running along Lincoln Avenue for approximately 280 feet. Subsequently, it turns south, running along 20th Avenue for about 0.25 mile, and further west along an existing canal for around 0.5 mile, where it turns southwest and crosses the Tulare Lake Canal. It continues south for approximately 700 feet before turning west for approximately 0.4 mile, crossing the Kings River, and terminating at Blakely Canal (**Figure 1**).

Project Description: The proposed project encompasses a 3.7-mile irrigation water pipeline that would connect to and from existing Sandridge water distribution systems. The project includes segments that are both constructed (approximately 3.2 miles) and yet to be constructed (approximately 0.5 mile); these segments collectively comprise the proposed project (approximately 3.7 total miles of pipeline). Construction of the pipeline originally began in 2021 and required a 320-foot easement across SPUD's property, which SPUD granted in October 2021. Construction activities were put on hold after a legal challenge to SPUD's grant of the easement was filed by the Tulare Lake Canal Company alleging that SPUD failed to comply with CEQA. TLCC obtained a temporary restraining order preventing further project construction and use in March 2022, which remains in place pending resolution of the CEQA litigation.

Sandridge currently sources its irrigation water via Sandridge-owned wells located north of Stratford, as well as surface water. These irrigation water supplies are primarily conveyed through canals, as well as existing pipelines located to the east of the project site. The proposed pipeline would convey water from northern to eastern and southwestern areas near Stratford and vice versa, as needed, within Kings County. The primary goal of the proposed project is to reduce evaporative water losses compared to the current water conveyance methods, thereby improving irrigation efficiency on Sandridge's agricultural lands.

New construction would involve the installation of a 48-inch diameter high-density polyethylene (HDPE) pipeline approximately 200 feet across the Tulare Lake Canal, owned by Tulare Lake Canal Company (TLCC) and accessed on Sandridge-owned land with a 120-foot right-of-way held by TLCC, and the reconstruction of approximately 0.5 mile of existing canal on Sandridge-owned land and replacement of this section with the HDPE pipeline. The pipeline would have an approximately 10-foot disturbance area on either side for construction activities and would have a total disturbance area of approximately 1.3 acres.

The previously constructed sections encompass approximately 2.4 miles of 48-inch diameter HDPE pipeline between Highway 41 and the north side of the Tulare Lake Canal, as well as approximately 0.8 mile of 48-inch diameter HDPE pipeline from the south side of the Tulare Lake Canal to Blakely Canal. It is estimated that the installation of these pipeline sections disturbed a 10-foot area on either side, with a total disturbance area of approximately 7.7 acres.

Operation of the proposed project would involve the transport of groundwater and surface water supplies from existing Sandridge sources located north of Stratford to irrigate Sandridge-owned farmlands within Kings County, with residual tailwater discharged into Blakely Canal. During flood events, the pipeline would transport water in the opposite direction, from Blakely Canal to the north, in order to efficiently facilitate the utilization of flood waters.

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, and that

generally the lead agency should describe the physical environmental conditions as they exist at the time the NOP is published from a local and regional perspective (existing conditions). Where necessary to provide the most accurate picture practically possible of the project's impacts (for example, for the proposed project, the previously constructed sections), a lead agency may define existing conditions by referencing historic conditions, supported with substantial evidence. The environmental setting will constitute the baseline physical conditions that SPUD, the Lead Agency, will use to determine if an impact is significant.

In general, the environmental baseline is the same as the existing on-the-ground conditions when environmental review begins. Some segments of the pipeline alignment were constructed between the Summer of 2021 and March 2022. No change in the baseline condition has occurred since the issuance of the temporary restraining order in March 2022; therefore, the EIR will use an environmental baseline date of December 20, 2023 (i.e., the date the NOP is published).

Project Alternatives: In preparing the EIR, SPUD will consider a reasonable range of project alternatives, including the no project alternative, as well as others that may be identified in comments received in response to this NOP.

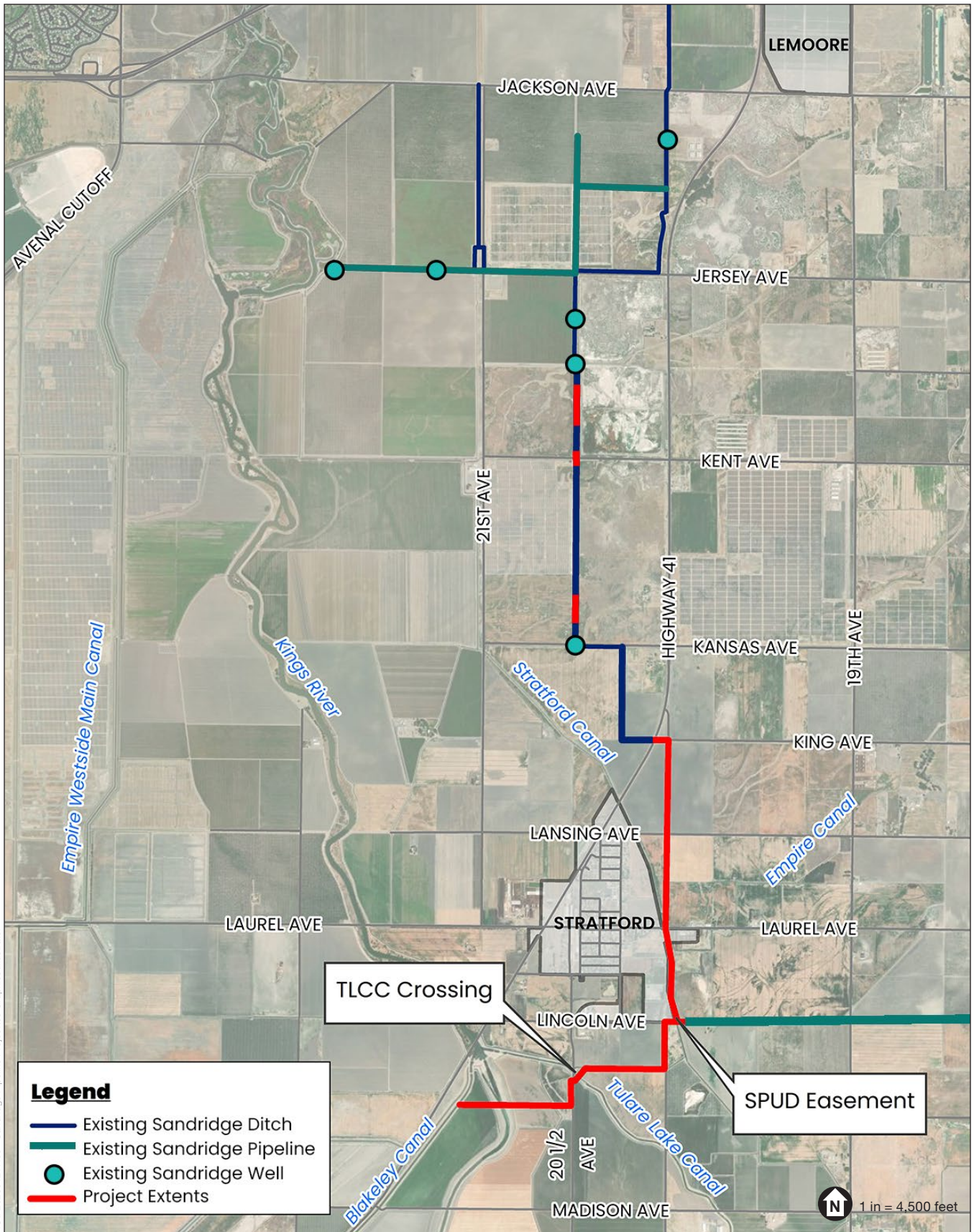
Environmental Effects and Scope of the EIR: The EIR will analyze potentially significant impacts that may result from implementation of the proposed project.

Pursuant to section 15063(a) of the CEQA Guidelines, an Initial Study has not been prepared for the proposed project. The EIR will evaluate the resource areas that may have impacts from the proposed project, including:

- Air Quality/Greenhouse Gas Emissions
- Biological Resources
- Cultural Resources
- Hydrology and Water Quality
- Transportation
- Tribal Cultural Resources
- Cumulative Impacts

Environmental resource areas that are anticipated to have no impact or less-than-significant impacts (without mitigation) from the proposed project will be addressed briefly in the EIR, including:

- Aesthetics
- Agriculture and Forestry
- Energy
- Geology and Soils
- Hazards and Hazardous Materials
- Land Use and Planning
- Mineral Resources
- Noise
- Population and Housing
- Public Services
- Recreation
- Utilities and Service Systems
- Wildfire



Sandridge Irrigation Pipeline Extension Project

Figure 1
Project Location