

# 1. INTRODUCTION

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## 1.1 PURPOSE OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT

This Draft Subsequent Environmental Impact Report (SEIR) has been prepared to provide an assessment of the potential environmental consequences associated with construction and operation of the proposed City of Hollister Reclaimed Water Project. The Reclaimed Water Project is a component of the City of Hollister Domestic Wastewater Systems Improvement Project (DWSI). This SEIR provides a project specific analysis of the proposed reclamation alternatives, and is tiered from the 2006 DWSI and Recycled Water Facility Project (RWP) EIR (2006 EIR) (SCH# 2006012149), which was certified by the City of Hollister in October 2006.

This SEIR was prepared in compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), which requires that all State and local governmental agencies consider the environmental consequences of projects over which they have discretionary authority. See California Code of Regulations (CCR), Title 14, Div. 6, Ch. 3 (State CEQA Guidelines). The City of Hollister (City) is the lead agency for the Reclaimed Water Project.

This document evaluates impacts identified as significant or potentially significant by community members, agencies, and the City and its consultants. The SEIR provides information regarding the environmental effects of the project alternatives. The SEIR process is used for the following purposes:

- To give elected officials and the community the opportunity to provide input for the decision-making process;
- To provide agencies with information necessary to determine if they have jurisdiction over some aspect of the project, and if so, to identify project permitting requirements;
- To assist the community in understanding the expected project-related environmental effects and how elected decision makers plan to respond to and mitigate these effects; and
- To develop mitigation measures which reduce or eliminate the potential for environmental, public health, and safety impacts from the proposed project.

## 1.2 PROJECT SUMMARY

The proposed project consists of developing reclaimed water uses to beneficially reuse tertiary treated wastewater from the City of Hollister Domestic Wastewater Treatment Plant (DWTP). Five sites are identified for potential use. These sites consist of the Hollister Municipal Airport, Brookhollow Ranch, Pacific Sod Farm, San Juan Oaks Golf Club, and the proposed Riverside Park. Under the proposed project, one or more of these sites comprising a total of 200-350 acres would be supplied with reclaimed water.

### 1.3 TIERING OF THE SEIR

In accordance with CEQA Guidelines Section 15152, this Subsequent EIR is tiered from the 2006 EIR prepared for the DWSI and RWF Projects. The 2006 EIR is available for public review online at <http://hollister.ca.gov>, and at the following address during normal business hours (8 am to 5 pm), Monday through Thursday:

City of Hollister Engineering Department  
375 Fifth St.  
Hollister, California 95023

“Tiering” refers to using the analysis of general environmental matters in broad program or planning level (first tier) EIRs with subsequent focused environmental review documents for individual projects that implement the program (second tier). The project level environmental review document incorporates by reference the broader discussions of the first tier environmental document, and concentrates on project-specific issues. CEQA guidelines encourage the use of tiered environmental documents to reduce delays and excessive paperwork in the environmental review process. This is accomplished by eliminating repetitive analysis of issues that have been adequately addressed in first tier EIRs and incorporating those analyses by reference. General discussions from first tier EIRs may be referenced in subsequent documents; however, reiterating previously identified impacts and mitigation measures is unnecessary.

According to CEQA guidelines Section 15168, when used with a Subsequent EIR, a Program EIR can:

1. Provide the basis in an initial study for determining whether the later activity may have any significant effects;
2. Be incorporated by reference to deal with regional influences, secondary effects, cumulative impacts, broad alternatives, and other factors that deal with the program as a whole; and
3. Focus an EIR on a subsequent project to permit discussion solely of new effects which had not been considered before.

### 1.4 RELATIONSHIP OF THIS SEIR TO THE 2006 EIR

The City of Hollister certified an EIR for the DWSI and RWF Projects in October of 2006. The 2006 EIR addressed the construction of improvements to the DWTP, including an MBR facility and seasonal storage reservoir, as well as increased effluent disposal options, consisting of the use of sprayfields, and the eventual use of recycled water for agricultural and urban irrigation. Specifically, the 2006 EIR provided a project-level assessment of sprayfields at the Hollister Municipal Airport and the San Juan Oaks Golf Club, and a program-level assessment of sprayfields at the Pacific Sod Farm and the eastern Flint Hills. It should be noted that the 2006 EIR used the term “sprayfields” to describe a variety of water reclamation projects including agricultural irrigation, landscape irrigation, and typical sprayfields. This SEIR refers to various use applications generally as “reclaimed water irrigation projects.”

In October 2006, the City of Hollister approved the construction of the MBR facility and seasonal storage reservoir at the DWTP. The new MBR facility is expected to be operational in 2008. However, when the City approved the DWTP improvements, it deferred approval of sprayfield development until additional

CEQA review was completed for potential reclaimed water irrigation sites. This SEIR expands the project-specific analysis to the five reclamation irrigation sites identified in the project description.

Applicable mitigation measures required by the 2006 EIR have been incorporated into the Reclaimed Water Project and are considered a component of the project description for which this SEIR has been prepared. Relevant mitigation measures are identified in **Appendix C** of this SEIR.

## 1.5 SCOPE, ISSUES AND CONCERNS

### 1.5.1 REGIONAL RECYCLED WATER PROJECT

On February 28, 2007, the City released a Notice of Preparation (NOP) for this SEIR (**Appendix A**). In the NOP the City identified that this SEIR would address the Hollister Sprayfield Project as well as the Regional Recycled Water Project (RWP). The RWP is an ongoing planning effort undertaken by the San Benito County Water District (Water District) in association with the Water Resources Association of San Benito County (WRASBC), an inter-agency organization that includes the City of Hollister, the City of San Juan Bautista, the Water District, and the Sunnyslope County Water District. The RWP was analyzed on a programmatic level in the 2006 EIR, and it was intended that this SEIR provide additional review of the RWP. However, in a comment letter submitted by the Water District, which is the principal agency planning the RWP, it was suggested that the City, County, and Water District should review the RWP before proceeding. Subsequent discussions revealed that the Water District is currently in the process of reviewing plans for the RWP to address the long-term distribution of recycled water. As a result, and in consultation with the Water District, the City determined that it would not be appropriate to conduct further analysis of the RWP at this time. Accordingly, the proposed project considered in this SEIR consists solely of the Hollister Reclaimed Water Project.

### 1.5.2 SCOPE OF THE SEIR

The scope of issues addressed in this SEIR is based on comments received in response to the NOP and input received during a public scoping hearing held on March 15, 2007 at the Veterans' Memorial Building in Hollister. The comment letters and a transcript of the public scoping hearing are provided in **Appendix A**. Issues raised by commenters are summarized in the following section.

The scope of issues that are addressed in this SEIR is also based on an Initial Study completed for the proposed project. The Initial Study was prepared to provide a preliminary analysis of the proposed project and to focus the SEIR on potentially significant impacts and issues not adequately analyzed within the 2006 EIR. The Initial Study is included as **Appendix B**.

Based on the Initial Study and scoping comments received, the following issues were identified to be addressed in this SEIR:

- Land Use and Planning
- Water Resources
- Agricultural Resources
- Geology and Soils

- Biological Resources
- Cultural Resources
- Hazards & Hazardous Materials
- Air Quality

For the topic areas listed below, the Initial Study concluded that the existing analysis in the 2006 EIR was sufficient and these topics are not further evaluated in this SEIR.

- Aesthetics
- Noise
- Population and Housing
- Public Services
- Recreation
- Utilities and Service Systems
- Traffic

### 1.5.3 ISSUES AND CONCERNS RAISED IN THE SCOPING PROCESS

Listed below is a summary of key issues raised by agencies and individuals in written and verbal comments during the scoping period for the proposed project. The issues identified below are divided by topic area, and are followed by an explanation *in italics* of where the issues are addressed in this SEIR.

#### Regional Recycled Water Project

The Water District noted that plans for the RWP should be reviewed prior to proceeding with the SEIR. The Water District indicated that recent issues including food safety, affordability of demineralizing the City's water system, and high groundwater need to be addressed in the planning of the RWP.

*Please see Section 1.5.1 above. While the City intended to address the RWP in this EIR, the Water District has indicated that plans for the RWP are currently being reviewed. The RWP was addressed on a programmatic level in the 2006 EIR; and at this time no further or more specific plans have been developed. As a result, the City determined that it would not be appropriate to conduct further environmental review of the RWP at this time. Section 3.2.4 of the Project Description describes the relationship of the RWP with the Hollister Sprayfield Project.*

San Benito County (County) and San Benito County Farm Bureau (Farm Bureau) made several comments specific to the planning of the RWP. The County stated that the phasing out of sprayfields depends on the Water District developing a market for recycled water and the construction of necessary distribution infrastructure. The County requested that assurances be included in the plan to ensure complete phasing out of the sprayfields occurs by 2015. The County also requested that the RWP include an evaluation of a strategy to blend Central Valley Project (CVP) water with local well water to achieve established water quality standards. The Farm Bureau emphasized the importance high-quality agriculture water and requested that the SEIR evaluate the feasibility of developing a market for low salt

recycled water, the cost effectiveness of for construction of a demineralization plant, and the cost effectiveness of a recycled water delivery system separate from the existing CVP pipeline network. The Farm Bureau also requested that the SEIR investigate grant opportunities for CVP users that reduce dependency on CVP water.

*As noted, because the Water District is currently reviewing the RWP plans for recycled water distribution, the City has determined that it would not be appropriate to conduct further environmental review of the RWP at this time. Because the County and Farm Bureau's comments are directed toward the Water District's planning of the RWP, the comments are not directly addressed in this EIR. Section 3.1 of the Project Description describes the phasing of sprayfields and Section 3.2.4 of the Project Description describes the relationship of the RWP with the Hollister Sprayfield Project. Blending of recycled water to achieve established water quality standards is discussed in Section 3.2.3 of the Project Description.*

## Reclamation

The Water District requested that the SEIR define the relationship between effluent disposal quantities and application area acreage. The Water District suggested that the estimation of disposal area requirements take into account potential failure or underperformance of a application area or percolation pond.

*Section 3.3.4 of the Project Description describes the assumptions used to estimate the disposal capacities of specific reclamation sites. Section 3.4 describes the City's criterion for adequate capacity.*

The Water District indicated that only sites with willing landowners be evaluated in the SEIR, and that the SEIR evaluate the consistency of the sites with the Hollister Urban Area Water and Wastewater Master Plan Governance Committee's approved "Criteria for Disposal Area." The County and the Farm Bureau requested that the SEIR address the decision-making criteria that will be used to identify the selected sprayfield site(s).

*Section 6.4.1 of the Alternatives Section describes the evaluation of the application sites according to the Governance Committee's approved Criteria for Disposal Area, which address the willingness of landowners. Section 6.0 identifies the selection of the preferred reclamation site(s) according to the City's objectives.*

The County noted the intention of the City, Water District and County to phase out sprayfield use by 2015. However, the County also suggested that the SEIR address the potential groundwater impacts should the sprayfields not be phased out by 2015.

*Section 3.3.1 of the Project Description described the project timeline and phasing. Section 4.2 – Water Resources provides an analysis of groundwater impacts from reclamation.*

The County required that the SEIR evaluate at least one reclamation site located in the arid eastern portion of the County.

*Section 6.4.2 of the Alternatives Chapter evaluates two potential reclamation sites located in the eastern portion of the County that were identified by the County.*

The Farm Bureau requested that the SEIR address alternative technologies for the disposal of treated effluent.

*Section 6.2 of the Alternatives Chapter discusses the consideration of alternative disposal methods. As discussed therein, alternative disposal methods were fully analyzed within the 2006 EIR, and no further analysis is warranted within this SEIR.*

### **Percolation of Treated Wastewater at the Domestic and Industrial Wastewater Treatment Plants**

The Water District noted that the City has committed to limiting the amount of wastewater percolated at the DWTP and IWTP to current levels, and requested that the EIR define the current levels. The Water District also indicated that the SEIR should address substantial differences between the percolation assumptions and analysis used in the 2006 EIR and those used in this EIR.

*Please see Section 3.3.4 – Water Balance, which defines the existing percolation at the DWTP and IWTP. Section 4.2 – Water Resources provides a comparison of the percolation assumptions used in this EIR and the 2006 EIR.*

### **Groundwater and Soil Impacts**

The Water District suggested that the SEIR address the impact of reclamation irrigation on groundwater quality including total dissolved solids (TDS), Sodium, Chloride, Boron and e-coli. The Farm Bureau and the State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) requested that the EIR evaluate the groundwater impacts at specific reclamation sites and the cost of rehabilitating sprayfield sites to their original condition.

*Section 4.2 – Water Resources provides an analysis of groundwater impacts from the Reclaimed Water Project. Section 3.4.2 of the Project Description describes the management of soil conditions at reclamation sites. Section 4.3 – Agricultural and Soil Resources discusses potential impacts to soil quality from irrigation with reclaimed water.*

### **Impacts to the San Benito River**

The SWRCB requested that the SEIR discuss the beneficial users of the San Benito River and the potential impact of the proposed reclamation use on the San Benito River and to the beneficial uses of the river.

*Section 4.2 – Water Resources provides an analysis of potential impacts from reclamation on surface waters.*

## **Air Quality Impacts**

The Monterey Bay Unified Air Pollution Control District (MBUAPCD) suggested that the SEIR quantify and address the emissions from the proposed project including operational emissions, construction emissions, and emissions of odors and air toxic contaminants. The MBUAPCD suggested that mitigation measures be identified for any significant impacts on air quality, and that the MBUAPCD be contacted for permits that may be needed for pumps.

*Section 4.7 – Air Quality provides an analysis of potential air quality impacts from the construction and operation of the proposed reclamation projects and identifies mitigation measures to reduce potential impacts. Section 4.7 also discusses the permitting requirements of the MBUAPCD.*

## **Transportation**

The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) noted that impacts to cultural and biological resources located in State's right-of-way should be avoided or mitigated. Caltrans also indicated that development of the northern Brookhollow Ranch sprayfield site could conflict with one of the possible routes for a new east-west transportation route. In subsequent conversations, Caltrans staff indicated that they would coordinate with the City and District when plans for the east-west route have been further refined; however, at this time, they do not anticipate any conflicts with the proposed facilities.

*Potential impacts to biological and cultural resources are addressed in Section 4.5 – Biological Resources and Section 4.6 – Cultural Resources. Section 3.3.4 of the Project Description describes the location of the Brookhollow Ranch reclamation site.*

Ms. Ruth Erickson identified several concerns regarding the development of reclamation irrigation at the Hollister Municipal Airport. Ms. Erickson suggested that the SEIR address potential impacts to roadways, airport taxiways and runways. Ms. Erickson requested that the Caltrans Aeronautics Division and the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) be identified as responsible agencies. Ms. Erickson raised concerns that the development of reclamation irrigation at the airport would attract wildlife to the airport area, creating safety and maintenance issues. Ms. Erickson referenced a report by the Caltrans Aeronautics Division that in turn referenced FAA guidelines that recommend that agricultural operations be restricted from the Runway Object Free Area due to concerns or providing bird and animal habitat.

*Section 3.7 of the Project Description identifies Caltrans and the FAA as responsible agencies. Potential impacts to airport operations are discussed in Section 4.7 – Public Health and Safety.*

## Impacts to Biological Resources

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) recommended that the SEIR describe the plant and animal species occurring in the project area and identify potential impacts to federally listed species, designated critical habitat, and ecosystems.

*Section 4.5 – Biological Resources identifies biological resources located in the project area and potential project-related impacts to these resources.*

## 1.6 ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW PROCESS

### 1.6.1 DRAFT SEIR AND PUBLIC REVIEW

This document constitutes the Draft SEIR and is being circulated to the public, local, state and federal agencies, and other known interested parties that may wish to review and comment on the report. Publication of this Draft SEIR marks the beginning of a 45-day public review period. The public can review this information online at <http://hollister.ca.gov> and at the City's Engineering Department during normal business hours (8 am to 5 pm). Please address written comments or questions concerning the Draft SEIR to:

City of Hollister  
c/o: Steve Wittry, Engineering Manager  
375 Fifth St.  
Hollister, California 95023  
(831) 636-4340  
(831) 636-4349 fax  
[steve.wittry@hollister.ca.gov](mailto:steve.wittry@hollister.ca.gov)

### 1.6.2 FINAL SEIR AND SEIR CERTIFICATION

Written comments received in response to the Draft SEIR will be addressed in a Response to Comments addendum document, which together with any revisions to the Draft SEIR text, will constitute the Final SEIR. Taken together, the Draft and Final SEIR constitute the complete SEIR for the proposed project. The City will then review the proposed project, the SEIR, and public testimony to decide whether to certify the SEIR and approve the proposed project.

### 1.6.3 MITIGATION MONITORING AND REPORTING PLAN

Section 21081.6 of the State Public Resources Code requires lead agencies to "adopt a reporting and monitoring program for the changes to the project or conditions of project approval, adopted in order to mitigate or avoid significant effects on the environment." The Mitigation Monitoring Program (MMRP) is not required to be included in this Draft SEIR; however, mitigation measures have been clearly identified and presented in language that will facilitate the creation of the MMRP. Any mitigation measures adopted by the City as conditions of approval for the proposed project will be included in the MMRP to verify compliance. The MMRP will also identify the party responsible for implementing and monitoring each mitigation measure.

## 1.7 ORGANIZATION OF THE REPORT

The contents of this EIR are consistent with requirements identified in Article 9 of the State CEQA Guidelines, and include the following:

**Chapter 1.0, Introduction**, describes the purpose and type of this SEIR, the scope, areas of interest or concerns, and the organization of this SEIR.

**Chapter 2.0, Executive Summary**, provides a brief overview of the proposed project and a summary of impacts and mitigation measures identified in this SEIR. This section also summarizes the known areas of controversy and the selection of sprayfield sites.

**Chapter 3.0, Project Description**, provides a detailed description of the proposed project. This section includes a discussion of regional water resource planning efforts, project objectives, and permitting requirements. Also included is a detailed discussion of alternatives reclamation sites, selection criteria used to determine the sites, and alternative sites eliminated from detailed consideration.

**Chapter 4.0, Environmental Setting, Impacts, and Mitigation Measures**, includes a description of the regulations relevant to the proposed project, a description of environmental resources within the region and project area, a discussion of environmental consequences of the proposed project (i.e., potential environmental impacts), and a discussion of measures to mitigate the effect of adverse impacts. This section provides an analysis of five alternative sites.

**Chapter 5.0, CEQA-Required Sections**, includes a discussion of growth inducement, cumulative effects, unavoidable significant impacts, and significant irreversible environmental impacts.

**Chapter 6.0, Project Alternatives**, provides a summary comparison of the environmental impacts of the reclamation site alternatives described in Chapters 4.0 and 5.0. This comparison is used as the basis for determination of the environmentally superior alternative.

**Chapter 7.0, References**, lists sources of information used in the preparation of this SEIR.

**Chapter 8.0, Report Preparation and Persons/Organizations Consulted**, provides a list of agencies and persons consulted prior to and during preparation of the SEIR.

**Chapter 9.0, Acronyms**, provides a list of all the abbreviations used in the SEIR, and also a list of technical terms and definitions.

The **Appendices** consist of the Notice of Preparation and Initial Study for this SEIR, incorporated mitigation measures from the 2006 EIR, and supplemental information that augments the contents of the SEIR.