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**NOTICE OF PREPARATION OF AN
ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT
AND SCOPING MEETING**

TO: Responsible and Trustee Agencies, Organizations, and Interested Parties

FROM: Semitropic Water Storage District
1101 Central Avenue
Wasco, CA 93280-0877

DATE: December 22, 2016

SUBJECT: Notice of Preparation (NOP) of a Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for Semitropic Water Storage District's (District) Tulare Lake Storage and Floodwater Protection Project (Project)

AGENCIES: The Semitropic Water Storage District (District) will be the lead agency under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and will prepare an EIR for the Project identified below. The District requests the views of public agencies as to the scope and content of the environmental information that is germane to the agency's statutory responsibilities in connection with the proposed Project, in accordance with California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Section 15082(b), if the agency will need to use the EIR prepared by the District when considering any permit or other approval for the Project.

ORGANIZATIONS AND INTERESTED PARTIES: The District requests comments and concerns from organizations and interested parties regarding the environmental issues associated with construction, operation and maintenance of the proposed Project.

PROJECT TITLE: Tulare Lake Storage and Floodwater Protection Project

PROJECT LOCATION: Kings County

PROJECT DESCRIPTION: The proposed Project would involve the construction and operation of surface storage and conveyance facilities in the Tulare Lake bed to capture and improve the management of floodwaters from streams tributary to Tulare Lake, which principally include the Kings, Kaweah, and Tule Rivers, and other waters that may become available for storage and management such as State Water Project (SWP) flows. The Project would be constructed on approximately 19,700 acres within or immediately adjacent to the dry lakebed. Water storage would be created by the construction of leveed impoundments (a surface storage reservoir) on up to approximately 12,000 gross acres within the dry lakebed. The reservoir would be formed by constructing levees of approximately six (6) feet, to up to eight (8) feet, in height with a total storage capacity between approximately 15,000 and 30,000 acre-feet, respectively. Available floodwaters would be conveyed to Project facilities through new and existing channels, canals and pipeline facilities, including Empire Weir No. 2, Blakeley Canal, and the Kings River South Fork Canal. Improvements of existing conveyance facilities may also be necessary, and may include the construction of pump stations. Project water would be conveyed, either directly or from storage, into the California Aqueduct (Aqueduct) via a new conveyance facility for delivery to the Semitropic Water Storage District (District), located in Kern County. The new conveyance facility would include facilities consisting of an intake/discharge canal, pumping plant, pipelines between the pumping plant and the Aqueduct, and an intertie (turn-in/turn-out structure) on the east side of the Aqueduct with a

capacity of approximately 1,200 to 2,100 cubic feet per second (cfs). The intertie would also deliver water from the Aqueduct into the leveed storage areas, providing the opportunity to store and manage water in a new south of the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta (SOD) storage facility. Electrical facilities would be constructed to provide power to Project facilities.

The proposed Project is described in further detail in **Attachment A**.

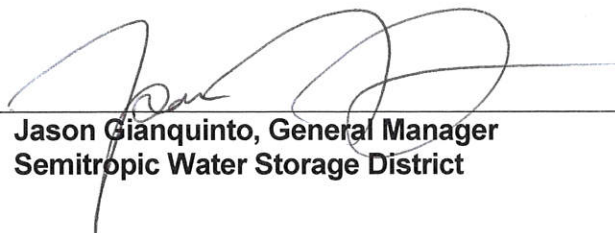
POTENTIAL ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS: The following areas of potentially significant environmental impact will be analyzed in the Draft EIR: Aesthetics, Agricultural and Forestry Resources, Air Quality, Biological Resources, Cultural Resources, Geology/Soils & Seismicity, Greenhouse Gas Emissions, Hazards & Hazardous Materials, Hydrology & Water Quality, Land Use & Planning, Mineral Resources, Noise, Population & Housing, Public Services, Recreation, Transportation & Traffic, and Utilities & Service Systems. Potential cumulative impacts and potential for growth inducement will be addressed. Alternatives, including the No Project Alternative, will be evaluated.

PUBLIC REVIEW PERIOD: This NOP is available for public review and comment pursuant to California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Section 15082(b) for 30 days. The comment period for the NOP begins December 22, 2016 and ends on January 27, 2017. **Written comments on the NOP must be provided to the District no later than 5 p.m. on January 27, 2017.**

RESPONSES AND COMMENTS: Please indicate a contact person for your agency and send your responses and comments to:

Isela Medina
Semitropic Water Storage District
P.O. Box 8043
1101 Central Avenue
Wasco, CA 93280-0877
661-758-5113
or via email at: imedina@semitropic.com

SCOPING MEETING: The District will hold a public scoping meeting on January 12, 2017 from 4:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. at Bravo Farms, 33341 Bernard Drive, Kettleman City, CA 93239. The NOP and future CEQA document(s) will be available for review at the following web address: <http://www.semitropic.com/>



Jason Gianquinto, General Manager
Semitropic Water Storage District

20 DECEMBER 2016

Date

ATTACHMENT A

Draft EIR Schedule

The District is seeking input on the scope and content of environmental information relevant to the proposed Project, including input on environmental issues and alternatives to be addressed in the EIR. The Draft EIR is scheduled for circulation in the Spring of 2017.

Background and Need for Project

The Semitropic Water Storage District is located in north-central Kern County in the San Joaquin Valley, about 20 miles northwest of the City of Bakersfield (Figure 1). The District was organized in 1958 to provide supplemental water for irrigation within its boundaries in response to a long-term decline in groundwater levels.

The District formulated, adopted, and implemented a project in the late 1960s and 1970s to import surface water from the State Water Project (SWP). That project required a long-term water supply contract with the State of California¹ and the construction of a significant irrigation distribution system to divert and deliver the imported water supply.

Restrictions on pumping from the Delta in recent years have significantly and adversely affected the reliability of SWP deliveries. According to DWR's Draft *State Water Project Delivery Capability Report* (2015), the SWP is projected to yield only 62-percent of contracted "Table A" amounts, on average, under existing conditions. The District's contract for SWP water would yield 155,000 acre-feet in a year with a 100-percent allocation. Accordingly, a reduction of 38-percent in the District's SWP allocation equates to almost 59,000 acre-feet less water available in an average year (under current conditions). Reduced SWP deliveries in recent years has led to increased groundwater extractions, causing a decline in groundwater levels in the basin underlying the District's service area.

In response to reduced deliveries from the SWP and declining groundwater levels, the District is proposing development of the Tulare Lake Storage and Floodwater Protection Project (Project). The proposed Project would capture unallocated floodwater from the South Fork of the Kings River and other Tulare Lake tributaries, as well as other available waters such as surplus SWP flows, and either directly deliver or temporarily store captured water for later delivery to the District. Water made available by the Project may be stored in the Stored Water Recovery Unit of the Semitropic Groundwater Bank, an existing operational project located in Kern County. The Groundwater Bank began operation in the early 1990's with an approved storage capacity of at least 1.65 million acre-feet.

There are two mechanisms available to return the stored water to Banking Partners during years of recovery. The first is through SWP entitlement exchanges, whereby the District delivers pumped groundwater to landowners within the District, and, in exchange, leaves SWP entitlement water in the SWP system for return to the Banking Partners. The second method occurs in particularly dry years when not enough SWP entitlement is available to meet the District's contractual commitment to return water to the Banking Partners. Under

¹ The District's contract for the delivery of SWP water is with the Kern County Water Agency, which has a master contract with the State of California Department of Water Resources for the delivery of SWP water to the District and other water districts within Kern County.

this condition, the District extracts groundwater and physically delivers it through pump-back facilities to the California Aqueduct.

The Stored Water Recovery Unit (SWRU) was developed by the District, beginning in the 1990's, to expand the recharge and recovery capacity of the Groundwater Bank. The SWRU has been evaluated under CEQA and approved by the District to include increased banking capacity through the addition of up to 12,000 acres of in-lieu recharge facilities and an additional firm recovery capacity of up to 150,000 acre-feet per year for the recovery of banked groundwater.

Project Objectives

The Project objectives include:

- Improved local water supply reliability from unallocated floodwaters from the South Fork of the Kings River system and other Tulare Lake tributaries.
- Reduced levels of flood impacts in the Tulare Lake basin and along the lower Kings River and upper San Joaquin River.
- Enhanced wildlife habitat and recreational opportunities in Tulare Lake lakebed.
- Improved water conditions within the District.

Project Description

The proposed Project is located within Kings County, as shown in **Figure 1**, and would, in general, consist of the following components:

- Capture and management of unallocated floodwater from the South Fork of the Kings River and other tributaries of Tulare Lake, and other available supplies including SWP flows;
- Direct delivery to the California Aqueduct, or temporary storage of captured water for later delivery to the California Aqueduct, for conveyance to the District in Kern County;
- One surface storage reservoir with multiple interior impoundments and an interior conveyance channel, located within the boundaries of the dry lakebed of Tulare Lake;
- Pumping and other facilities required to transport water into and out of the proposed surface storage reservoir;
- Improvements to existing, local conveyance facilities from the Kings River to convey water to the conveyance infrastructure and/or surface storage impoundment;
- A new conveyance canal from the South Fork Canal to the proposed surface storage reservoir;
- A California Aqueduct conveyance facility (intertie) consisting of an intake/discharge canal, pumping plant, two to three parallel pipelines and a canal between the pumping plant and the Aqueduct, and a turn in/turn out structure to deliver water into and from the California Aqueduct and the storage facilities;
- Electrical facilities to provide power to Project facilities; and
- A maintenance yard to support Project operations.

The Project will be utilized to develop water supply benefits from the South Fork of the Kings River, other tributaries to Tulare Lake, and SWP allocations. Developed supplies from local rivers will be realized only during wet year conditions by capturing what are otherwise considered floods flows, which occurs during an estimated 13 years of the 40-year period of analysis (1976-2015), or about three years out of every ten years for this historical period.

The proposed Project facilities would generally be bounded by Kettleman City to the west, Utica Avenue to the south, Gates-Jones Canal on the east, and Blakeley Canal and Tulare Lake Canal on the north as shown on **Figure 2**.

Storage Facilities

The Tulare Lake Storage Facilities will be created by constructing leveed impoundments within the Tulare Lake bed. The current Project concept includes approximately 19,700 gross acres, of which up to 12,000 acres will be developed into a single storage reservoir, referred to as the Kettleman Reservoir site. The remaining acres will be used for conveyance, support facilities, buffer areas, or remain as open lands. Levee heights for the storage impoundments are expected to range from approximately 6 feet to 8 feet, creating storage capacities of approximately 15,000 to 30,000 acre-feet, respectively. This reservoir site will serve as temporary storage for Kings River floodwaters, Tulare Lake tributary floodwaters or surplus Delta flows that can be regulated to the California Aqueduct for direct beneficial uses in the District or for recharge in the Water Bank. The Tulare Lake Storage Facilities may include the construction of a new conveyance canal from the South Fork Canal to the proposed Kettleman Reservoir, a through conveyance canal within the Kettleman Reservoir with inlet and outlet structures and a lift station, and pumping plants, pipelines, outlets and inter-reservoir structures to facilitate the conveyance of water into and out of the surface storage facilities.

Conveyance Facilities

A new Tulare Lake Intertie will connect the California Aqueduct to the Tulare Lake Storage Facilities. The Kettleman Reservoir will be connected to the existing Blakeley Canal and the new South Fork Canal conveyance facility which will, in turn, be connected to the California Aqueduct via the new intertie. The Tulare Lake Intertie will have a capacity between 1,200 and 2,100 cfs to convey water into or out of the storage facilities. The Intertie will include an intake/discharge canal, a pumping plant (with an estimated lift of approximately 130 feet), two or three pipelines (approximately 6,300 linear feet in length) between the pumping plant and the Aqueduct, and a turn-in/turn-out structure at the Aqueduct. Figure 2 shows the location of existing and proposed facilities.

Floodwaters from the South Fork of the Kings River and its tributaries will be conveyed to the Tulare Lake Storage Facilities through one new canal and additional existing channels and canals in the Kings River and Tulare Lake area. The South Fork Canal will be used to divert water from the South Fork of the Kings River, and a new canal will connect the South Fork Canal to the proposed Kettleman Reservoir. The Blakeley Canal, along the western boundary of Tulare Lake, will provide a connection between the surface storage reservoir and other local conveyances for floodwater. To accommodate diverting Kings River or other floodwater into the storage facilities, improvements may be made to existing conveyance facilities, particularly the Blakeley Canal. Some improvements may also be necessary to relieve any existing, localized constraints which may exist at road crossings and other canal infrastructure.

Electrical Facilities

Electrical facilities to provide electric power to the storage facilities and the conveyance facilities will be required. Service to the facilities will be provided via a connection to Pacific Gas and Electric Company's (PG&E's) existing distribution system. These electrical facilities may include a tie-in to PG&E's distribution system, the construction of substations, and the construction of a network of powerlines located near the facilities it will provide service to.

Additional Project Features

Flood Control. The Project will provide flood reduction benefits to agricultural lands in the Tulare Lake lakebed, communities surrounding Tulare Lake and areas downstream on the North Fork of the Kings River; in particular, from Crescent Weir to Mendota Pool. The capacity to divert between 1,200 and 2,100 cfs of unregulated floodwaters into up to 30,000 acre-feet of storage will reduce the extent and frequency flooding in the Tulare Lake lakebed.

Ecosystem Improvements. The Project has the potential to create seasonal or intermittent shallow open water habitat by creating approximately 12,000 acres of new shallow surface water storage facilities. These facilities could be managed to benefit migratory birds along the Pacific flyway. Resident wildlife would also benefit from the addition of wetlands and shallow water habitat to the region.

Recreation. The Project will incorporate recreational features including wildlife viewing areas.

Figure 1: Regional Map

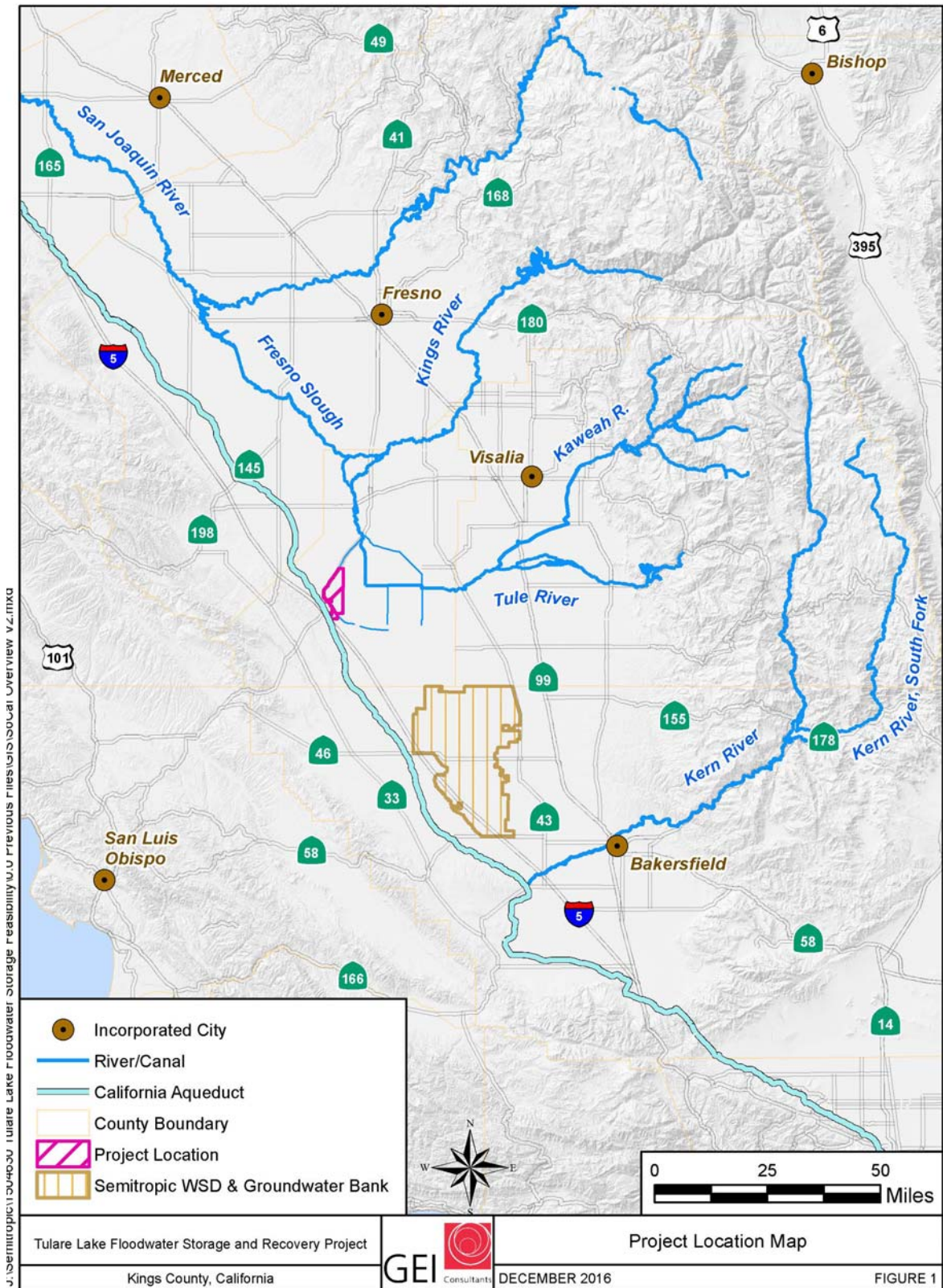


Figure 2: Overview of Proposed Project

