



ONYX RANCH SOUTH FORK VALLEY WATER PROJECT

PUBLIC INFORMATION BRIEFING





KEY ROLES IN ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW PROCESS

- COVID-19 changes to our process
 - We have extended our review process from 45 to 60 days
 - Recording this briefing in-lieu of a large group briefing
- Rosedale Rio Bravo Water Storage District (RRBWSD) was established in 1959 as a California Special District for the purpose of construction and operation of a groundwater recharge project
- Board members are elected by the water users within the RRBWSD service area
- Consistent with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), RRBWSD is the Lead Agency for the preparation of the Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for this proposed project
- CEQA Consultant Team, with technical experts, prepared Draft EIR



PURPOSE OF THIS PRESENTATION

- Review the CEQA process and how you can participate
- Review description of proposed project addressed in the Draft EIR
- Describe alternatives to the proposed project
- Describe how environmental analysis is presented in the Draft EIR



CEQA PROCESS FOR PROPOSED PROJECT

- ✓ Prepared Initial Study and Notice of Preparation (NOP) of a Draft EIR
- ✓ NOP sent to Agencies & Public (30-day Public Review Period) – 2/22/18
- ✓ Conducted Scoping Meetings to receive input – 3/6/18
- ✓ Prepared Technical Studies
- ✓ Prepared Draft EIR with Technical Appendix
- ✓ Posted Notice of Completion (NOC) and Notice Availability (NOA) of Draft EIR at State Clearinghouse & posted NOA with Kern County Clerk - 5/27/20
- ✓ Mailed NOA with USB flash drive of Draft EIR to agencies & the public



CEQA PROCESS (CON'T)

- ✓ Started 60-day public review period for Draft EIR – **5/27/20**
- ✓ Public Information Presentation on RRBWSD websites – **6/14/20**
- Deadline to Submit Written Comments to RRBWSD – **7/27/20**
- Prepare Final EIR including Responses to Comments – August 2020
- RRBWSD Board Hearing to take Public Testimony, consider Proposed Project approval, & consider certification of Final EIR – September 2020
- Post Notice of Determination (NOD) on Final EIR at State Clearinghouse and the Kern County Clerk



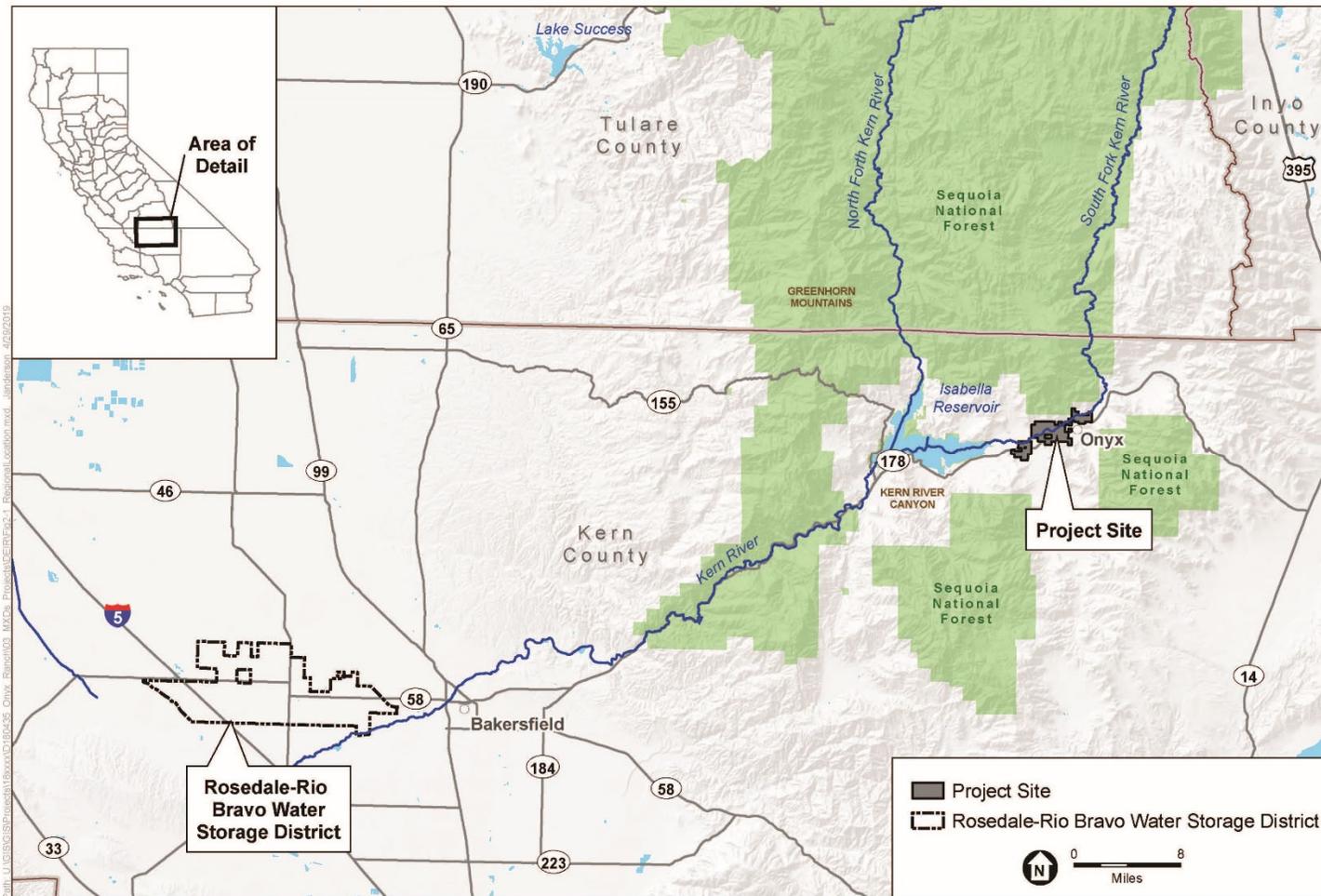
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN REVIEW OF DRAFT EIR

- How can the Draft EIR be viewed?
 - USB flash drives were mailed to agencies, organizations, and individuals
 - On the RRBWSD websites www.rrbwsd.com and www.onyxranch.org
 - At the following libraries:
 - Wofford Heights Branch, 6400B Wofford Blvd, Wofford Heights, CA 93285
 - Kern River Valley Branch, 7054 Lake Isabella Blvd., Lake Isabella, CA 93240
 - Beale Memorial Library, 701 Truxtun Ave., Bakersfield, CA 93301
- Submit written comments on the environmental analysis provided in the Draft EIR by **July 27, 2020** to:
 - Dan Bartel, Assistant General Manager/District Engineer
Rosedale-Rio Bravo Water Storage District
849 Allen Road
Bakersfield, CA 93314
dbartel@rrbwsd.com
Fax: (661) 589-1867



**REVIEW OF PROPOSED PROJECT
ANALYZED IN DRAFT EIR**

ONYX RANCH SOUTH FORK VALLEY WATER PROJECT Regional Location





PROJECT OBJECTIVES

- Maximize the beneficial use of water rights associated with Onyx and Smith Ranches in Kern County
- Reduce dependence upon the imported water from the Sacramento/San Joaquin Delta (Delta) and provide a cost-effective long-term method to replace a portion of RRBWSD's contracted State Water Project (SWP) water supply that has become unreliable due to environmental restrictions in the Delta.
- Allow RRBWSD to utilize water rights associated with the Onyx Ranch and the Smith Ranch to maximize groundwater replenishment in the Kern County Sub-basin within the RRBWSD service area and assist RRBWSD with meeting its sustainability goals under SGMA.
- Increase water flows in the South Fork of the Kern River within existing habitat areas when consistent with water supply objectives.



PROJECT OBJECTIVES (CON'T)

- Incorporate project elements and project characteristics that address potential environmental effects on visual aesthetics, air quality, culture resources, sensitive biological resources.
- Include project elements that avoid:
 - Unreasonably affecting fish, wildlife, or other in-stream beneficial uses.
 - Unreasonably affecting the overall economy or environment of the South Fork Valley as well as the Kern River Valley.
 - Injuring any legal users of the waters of the South Fork of the Kern River.



PROJECT DESCRIPTION

- RRBWSD proposes to redirect the water that would have been diverted for use on the project site to remain in the South Fork of the Kern River and flow downstream to the RRBWSD's service area for irrigation and groundwater recharge.
- On-site irrigated fields would be converted to non-irrigated pastures or return to their native vegetative state.
- RRBWSD would NOT pump groundwater to meet irrigation demand.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION (Land Management)

- Onyx Ranch transition to non-irrigated pasture would be achieved by planting vegetation capable of surviving a natural precipitation regime while also providing grazing forage for cattle.
- No substantial changes to agricultural practices at the Smith Ranch are anticipated with implementation of the proposed project other than a 33 percent reduction in irrigated acres.



PROJECT DESCRIPTION (Land Management)

- Development of up to 12 shallow, low volume wells powered by solar facilities to provide livestock water and improved livestock distribution for more effective use of the available forage.





PROJECT DESCRIPTION (Flow Methodology)

1. Determine the amount of water **available** (paper water) to each of its water rights.
2. Compare the amount available under its water rights to the **typical** irrigation water demand (real water) of the project site.
3. The lessor of these two numbers is the redirected flow remaining in the South Fork.
4. Deduct System Losses
 - Calibrated groundwater/surface model estimated system losses that would need to be deducted from the redirected flows.
 - This is the same model that was used to estimate groundwater impacts associated with the project.
 - For the modeled period 2005-2017, an average of 7,265 AFY of redirected flows results in an average of 6,014 AFY of new water in the Isabella Reservoir. (17% No Injury Factor).
 - 83% of redirected flows would enter Isabella Reservoir
5. Water would be released through the Isabella Dam and flow downstream in the Lower Kern River until the water is diverted at a RRBWSD diversion point.
6. From there, the RRBWSD would deliver the water to recharge basins and channels within and near its service area within the San Joaquin Valley.



HOW ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS IS PRESENTED IN DRAFT EIR



WHAT IS IN THE DRAFT EIR

The Draft EIR includes:

- Detailed description of the proposed project, including actions and approvals needed for project implementation.
- An analysis of the potential project-specific and cumulative environmental impacts of the proposed project.
- Recommended Mitigation Measures to reduce or avoid the significant impacts of the proposed project.
- An analysis of alternatives to the proposed project that avoids or reduces significant impacts.



ENVIRONMENTAL TOPICS ANALYZED IN DRAFT EIR

The Draft EIR addresses the following 13 environmental topics:

Section 3.3 Aesthetics

Section 3.4 Agriculture

Section 3.5 Air Quality

Section 3.6 Biological Resources

Section 3.7 Cultural Resources

Section 3.8 Geology and Soils (*Paleontological Resources*)

Section 3.9 Greenhouse Gas Emissions

Section 3.10 Hazards and Hazardous Materials

Section 3.11 Hydrology and Water Quality (*Groundwater, Flooding*)

Section 3.12 Land Use and Planning

Section 3.13 Population and Employment

Section 3.14 Tribal Cultural Resources

Section 3.15 Utilities, Service Systems, and Energy (*Water Rights*)



HOW ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS IS PRESENTED IN CHAPTER 3 OF DRAFT EIR

Environmental Setting (for project site and cumulative setting)

Regulatory Framework

Impact Analysis and Mitigation Measures

- Thresholds of Significance
- Methodology
- Impact Analysis
 - Project-specific impacts and mitigation measures
 - Potential cumulative impacts
 - Summary of impact analysis



No Impacts or Less than Significant Impacts

The EIR analysis concluded that the proposed project would have *no impact* or a *less than significant impact* to the following environmental topics:

- Aesthetics
- Agriculture
- Air Quality
- *Greenhouse Gas Emissions (Net decrease in GHG emissions)*
- Hazards and Hazardous Materials
- *Hydrology and Water Quality (more groundwater in basin and < 2 Ft of impact in low conditions)*
- Land Use and Planning
- *Population and Employment (loss of 2 ag positions, supports existing recreational businesses)*
- Tribal Cultural Resources
- *Utilities, Service Systems, and Energy (no effect on water supply of others)*



Potential Significant Impacts

The EIR analysis concluded the proposed project would have potential *significant impacts* to the following environmental topics:

- Biological Resources
- Cultural Resources
- Geology and Soils (Paleontological Resources)

With incorporation of mitigation measures, the potential significant impacts for these topics have been *reduced to a less than significant level*.



BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES

The proposed project would reduce or eliminate the flow of irrigation water in most ditches and fields on the project site. As a result, the **Section 3.5 Biological Resources** analysis concluded the proposed project would have a potential *significant impact* to the following biological resources:

- Breeding and foraging habitat for tri-colored blackbird and Kern red-winged blackbird, a sensitive bird species
- Alkali mariposa lily, a sensitive plant species
- Red willow thickets, mulefat thickets, and cattail marsh within the critical habitat for southwestern willow flycatcher and western yellow-billed cuckoo
- A sensitive natural community (Creeping rye grass turfs) and riparian habitats (red willow thickets, mulefat thickets, cattail marsh, and sandbar willow thickets)
- Wildlife movement from riparian habitat loss or decline
- Riparian habitats that may contain federal or State-protected wetlands

See the analysis starting on page 3.6-1 of the Draft EIR for a detailed discussion of the potential significant impacts and the mitigation measures.



BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES (CON'T)

Mitigation Measures BIO-1, BIO-2, BIO-3, and BIO-4 (summarized below) would reduce these potential impacts to a *less than significant level*.

Mitigation Measure BIO-1 - A qualified biologist shall conduct a pre-project assessment of creeping rye grass turf and riparian habitats and post-project monitoring for a 5-year period to define the level of impacts and corresponding mitigation ratios.

Mitigation Measure BIO-2 - A qualified biologist shall conduct a pre-project survey for the tri-colored blackbird in riparian habitats. If the specie is found to be nesting within suitable breeding habitat, an annual survey shall occur for a period of 5-years to define the level of impacts and corresponding mitigation ratios.

Mitigation Measure BIO-3 - A qualified biologist shall conduct a pre-project focused survey within the creeping rye grass turf for the mariposa lily during the blooming season. Based on Mitigation Measure BIO-1, if creeping rye grass turf is declining or reduced, methods shall be implemented to address the loss.

Mitigation Measure BIO-4 - The requirements of Mitigation Measure BIO-1 shall be apply to salt grass flats to protect potential wetlands.



CULTURAL RESOURCES

The **Section 3.7 Cultural Resources** analysis concluded the proposed project would have a *potential significant impact* to:

- A prehistoric lithic scatter located within an irrigated field that is proposed for transition to a non-irrigated pasture.
- An unanticipated discovery of archaeological resources during installation of shallow, low-volume wells.
- Unknown human remains outside of a formal cemetery during installation of shallow, low-volume wells and field conversion.

See the analysis starting on page 3.7-1 of the Draft EIR for a detailed discussion of the potential significant impacts and the mitigation measures.



CULTURAL RESOURCES (CON'T)

Mitigation Measures CUL-1, CUL-2, and CUL-3 (summarized below) would reduce these potential impacts to a *less than significant level*.

Mitigation Measure CUL-1 - A qualified archeologist shall provide oversight for well construction monitoring activities. Prior to siting of shallow, low-volume wells for livestock water in the field where the prehistoric sparse lithic scatter occurs, its location with buffer around the perimeter shall be mapped and avoided during all ground disturbing activity.

Mitigation Measure CUL-2 - An archeological monitor shall monitor ground disturbing activity for construction of the on-site shallow, low-volume wells. In the event of discovery of archaeological materials, contractor shall immediately cease all work activities within 100 feet of the discovery until it is evaluated by the qualified archaeologist, a treatment plan defined, and plan implemented.

Mitigation Measure CUL-3 - If human remains are discovered, all work activities shall cease within 100 feet of the discovery and the Kern County Coroner contacted. If they determine the remains are Native American in origin, the Native American Heritage Commission (NAHC) shall be notified and the NAHC shall designate a Most Likely Descendent (MLD). RRBWSD shall confer with the MLD and the area protected consistent with accepted archeological and cultural practices.



GEOLOGY AND SOILS

The **Section 3.8 Geology and Soils** analysis concluded the proposed project would have a *potential significant impact* to:

- Unknown paleontological resources depending on the depth of drilling activity for Installation of shallow, low-volume wells.

Mitigation Measure GEO-1 (summarized below) would reduce this potential impact to a *less than significant level*.

Mitigation Measure GEO-1 - A qualified paleontologist shall provide oversight for: monitoring of well drilling activities; sediment sampling, collection, and identification; final disposition; and documentation of a final monitoring and mitigation report.

See the analysis starting on page 3.8-1 of the Draft EIR for a detailed discussion of the potential significant impact and the mitigation measure.



ALTERNATIVES TO THE PROPOSED PROJECT



ANALYSIS OF ALTERNATIVES

- Alternatives to the proposed project were reviewed during the planning process for the proposed project.
 - Three alternatives reviewed were rejected from further consideration in the Draft EIR, since they were not feasible and did not meet the project objectives.
 - Two alternatives were selected for more detailed analysis.
- Two Alternatives were analyzed:
 - No Project Alternative
 - 50 Percent Diversion Alternative
- Per CEQA, the 50 Percent Diversion Alternative was selected as the environmentally superior alternative. However, this alternative is not feasible and does not meet all of the project objectives.
- See the analysis starting on page 5.1-1 of the Draft EIR.



**REVIEW OF DRAFT EIR AND
SUBMITTAL OF WRITTEN COMMENTS**



ONYX RANCH SOUTH FORK VALLEY WATER PROJECT

- This presentation will be posted on the websites www.rrbwsd.com and www.onyxranch.org
- Submit written comments on the environmental analysis provided in the Draft EIR by **July 27, 2020** to:

Dan Bartel, Assistant General Manager/District Engineer
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- The date for the RRBWSD Board hearing to consider the proposed project approval, & certification of Final EIR will be posted on the RRBWSD agenda on www.rrbwsd.com

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION