



COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
DEPARTMENT

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December 1, 2014

Brad Hubbard
Bureau of Reclamation
2800 Cottage Way, MP-410
Sacramento, CA 95825
Sent via Email to bhubbard@usbr.gov

Frances Mizuno
San Luis & Delta-Mendota Water Authority
842 6th Street
Los Banos, CA 93635
Sent via Email to frances.mizuno@sldmwa.org

Re: Comments on the Long-Term Water Transfers Draft Environmental Impact
Statement/Environmental Impact Report (EIS/EIR) – Public Draft

Dear Mr. Hubbard and Ms. Mizuno:

This letter is to provide the City of Chico's comments regarding the adequacy of the EIS/EIR analysis of the environmental effects, and mitigation for, water transfers from water agencies in northern California to water agencies south of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta and in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Through its General Plan, it is Chico's policy to oppose regional sales and transfers of local groundwater, including water export contracts, and the EIS/EIR should acknowledge and clearly highlight such inconsistency with a General Plan (CEQA Guidelines § 15125(d)). The Tuscan aquifer is the primary groundwater basin underlying and providing municipal and agricultural water to Chico and its Planning Area. It's for this reason that the City opposes transfers of local groundwater in the long-term interest of a safe and reliable municipal water supply, and to support the regional economy and the environment.

Beyond our opposition to the transfer project as a matter of policy, our specific concerns regarding the EIS/EIR include:

- While 60 days is the legal minimum for public review and comment on a Draft EIS/EIR, it is not an appropriate review time for such an important and voluminous document that attempts to analyze and mitigate the potential impacts of a six county, 10-year water transfer program. We request that the comment period be extended for at least an additional 90 days.
- The Federal Register notice for the EIS/EIR states that “[t]ransfers of CVP supplies and transfers that require use of CVP or SWP facilities are subject to review by Reclamation and/or DWR in accordance with the Central Valley Project Improvement Act of 1992, Reclamation's water transfer guidelines, and California State law. Pursuant to Federal and State law and subject to separate written agreement, Reclamation and DWR would facilitate water transfers involving CVP contract water supplies and CVP and SWP facilities” (emphasis added). CEQA Guidelines Section 15367 and Section 15051 suggest that given the prominent role that DWR plays in the proposed water transfers, it is not proper that SLDMWA is the Lead Agency for the purposes of CEQA. A number of the participating water agencies are State Water Project contractors

regulated by DWR and the conveyance for the project will use SWP facilities under the jurisdiction of DWR.

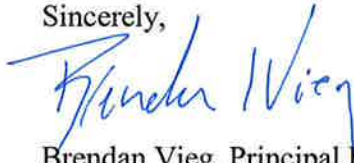
- The project objectives for the EIS/EIR suggest that water shortages are expected due to hydrological conditions, climatic variability, and regulatory requirements. The project's justification therefore is to address unforeseen, short-term water supply challenges. The reality, however, is that the water supply challenges facing the water users south of the Delta are not unforeseen or short-term --- they are simply a created existing condition. The project objectives for the EIS/EIR need to be revised to accurately reflect the project's true purpose --- establishing a long-term water transfer program to address a created and growing water supply reliability challenge south of the Delta.
- The EIS/EIR (Chapter 3) provides an incomplete description of groundwater production, levels, and storage in the Sacramento Valley. In particular, the chapter fails to report on the extensive data and analysis of groundwater conditions in Butte County. The EIS/EIR bases its analysis on a few selected wells, and provides a generalized description of regional groundwater conditions based on those wells. The EIS/EIR fails to acknowledge data available from Butte County's Department of Water and Resource Conservation showing that current groundwater conditions are being impacted beyond routine seasonal fluctuations. In Butte County, Groundwater Basin Management Objective (BMO) alert levels have been reached for a number of wells, which requires specific management responses. The EIS/EIR should use recent and available well data to develop a comprehensive baseline condition for groundwater levels, and use locally adopted BMOs to determine appropriate thresholds of significance and mitigating responses for dropping groundwater levels.
- The EIS/EIR fails to consider the potential impacts of lowered groundwater levels on the City's urban forest. We request that the document be amended to include such discussion and analysis. The EIS/EIR acknowledges that groundwater levels would drop in response to groundwater pumping necessary to replace surface water transferred south of the Delta. The EIS/EIR does not provide any discussion or analysis of the relationship between the health of the City's urban forest and dropping groundwater levels. The environmental and economic benefits of a healthy urban forest are well known, and include habitat for migrating birds and other wildlife; protection from the extreme impacts of climate change; filtering for rainwater and groundwater; carbon storage, which reduces the amount of harmful greenhouse gases; energy savings from its shade canopy; aesthetic benefits; and enhancement of property values.
- The environmental analysis does not adequately account for projected impacts associated with climate change. Reduced snow pack and sustained droughts are identified as key outcomes of climate change in California. Add to this the significant uncertainty regarding stream/aquifer interaction and the multiple dry years experienced by the State. What affect will this have on sensitive aquifer systems in light of the impacts of climate change?
- The EIS/EIR identifies a number of significant impacts requiring mitigation. Many of the significant impacts rely on *Mitigation Measure GW-1: Monitoring Program and Mitigation Plans* for mitigation. The EIS/EIR directs that monitoring programs and mitigation plans spelled out by this measure be developed consistent with the *2013 Draft Technical Information for Preparing Water Transfers Proposals* and the *2014 Addendum* documents prepared by the Bureau of Reclamation and Department of Water Resources. While the EIS/EIR purports that the

monitoring and mitigation plans required by this measure will mitigate groundwater and biological impacts, the protocols, methodology, and emphasis outlined in the measure focus primarily on reducing effects to third party groundwater users. This critical mitigation measure needs to show a clear nexus for how it will reduce environmental impacts to groundwater and biological resources that will be caused by dropping groundwater levels.

Our greatest concern is that water agencies south of the Delta continue to rely upon a transfer-dependent water source that in turn depends on the use of north state groundwater. This proposed long-term water transfer program poses risks which we believe have not been addressed, and would be a precedent for future projects and decisions that could very seriously damage our city's – and our region's – environment, economy, and communities.

Thank you for your consideration of these concerns. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at (530) 879-6806.

Sincerely,



Brendan Vieg, Principal Planner

cc: file