

Notice of Preparation

To: Agencies and Interested Parties

From: San Luis & Delta-Mendota Water Authority

Date: May 14, 2020

Subject: Notice of Preparation of a Draft Environmental Impact Report and Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement for the B.F. Sisk Dam Raise and Reservoir Expansion Project

A joint Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) and Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) is being prepared by the San Luis & Delta-Mendota Water Authority (SLDMWA) and the United States Bureau of Reclamation. SLDMWA will be the Lead Agency for the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and Reclamation will be the Lead Agency for the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). This environmental document is subsequent/supplemental to the Final EIS/EIR entitled B.F. Sisk Dam Safety of Dams (SOD) Modification Project prepared in September 2019 by Reclamation and the California Department of Water Resources (DWR) (SCH# 2009091004).

Purpose of the Notice of Preparation

The purpose of a Notice of Preparation (NOP) is to notify responsible and trustee agencies, Federal agencies involved in approving or funding a project, and interested parties that an EIR will be prepared. (State CEQA Guidelines, 14 CCR Section 15082[a][1]).

The location, description, and potential environmental impacts of the proposed project are presented below. The EIR will also identify potentially feasible mitigation measures, where appropriate and available, and consideration of a reasonable range of alternatives to avoid or substantially reduce the proposed project's significant adverse environmental impacts.

The purposes of this NOP are to:

1. Notify the appropriate parties that an EIR will be prepared for the proposed project;
2. Briefly describe the proposed project and the anticipated content of the EIR;
3. Announce the public scoping meetings to facilitate public input; and
4. Solicit input by June 14, 2020, from Federal, State, regional, and local agencies, and from interested organizations and individuals, about the content and scope of the EIR, including the alternatives to be addressed and the potentially significant environmental impacts.

Project Background

B.F. Sisk Dam, also known as San Luis Dam, forms San Luis Reservoir, located near Santa Nella, California, along Pacheco Pass. Although the dam was constructed and is owned by Reclamation, DWR operates and maintains the dam and the Gianelli Pumping-Generating Plant that pumps water from O'Neill Forebay into San Luis Reservoir for storage and then later releases it back into O'Neill Forebay for delivery to CVP and SWP water users. The California Department of Parks and Recreation manages the recreational resources associated with San Luis Reservoir. San Luis Reservoir serves as an off-stream reservoir for Reclamation's Central Valley Project (CVP) and DWR's State Water Project (SWP). B.F. Sisk Dam is an earth-filled gravity embankment dam with a crest height of 382 feet and an overall length of about 3.5 miles. Completed in 1967, San Luis Reservoir is the largest off-stream reservoir in the United States, with a capacity of 2,041,000 acre-feet (AF).

B.F. Sisk Dam is in a seismically active area, and the Ortigalita Fault underlies the reservoir. Studies and analyses indicate that a major earthquake could result in substantial consequences, although the possibility of dam failure is remote. Reclamation and DWR completed a Corrective Action Study to identify and develop alternatives to reduce seismic risks. The result of that Corrective Action Study was the identification of an alternative to limit the likelihood of overtopping if embankment slumping were to occur during a seismic event. A 12-foot raise in embankment height across the North and South Valley Sections of the dam would reduce the potential for dam failure due to earthquake-induced cracking. Reclamation and DWR released a Final EIS/EIR for the B.F. Sisk SOD Modification Project in September 2019 with anticipated construction scheduled to start in 2021.

Proposed Project

Project Objectives

Decreased water supply reliability caused by a variety of factors affects the ability of water districts and other public water agencies such as the SLDMWA to meet their needs.

The objectives of the proposed project are to optimize the water supply benefits of San Luis Reservoir while avoiding or reducing impacts to the environment and other water users by:

- Increasing the reliability and quantity of yearly allocations to south-of-Delta contractors dependent on San Luis Reservoir - The CVP and SWP's allocation of water is dependent on the state's highly variable hydrology that ranges from wet years with substantial surplus to dry years with supplies unable to satisfy demands. This variable hydrology leads to the carryover of supplies by water users for use in subsequent dry years to insure against shortage. The presence of this carryover supply can limit total south-of-Delta conveyance in subsequent years given reduced storage capacity in San Luis Reservoir. The B.F. Sisk Dam Raise and Reservoir Expansion Project is being evaluated in part to provide expanded capacity in San Luis Reservoir to store water supply divertible under the existing operation requirements for the CVP and SWP in periods when the existing reservoir would otherwise be full and improve annual allocations.

- Increasing the certainty of access to supplies stored by south-of-Delta contractors in San Luis Reservoir in subsequent water years. San Luis Reservoir is relied on by water users to store over multiple years allocated CVP water supplies diverted in wetter years for later use in drier water years and other acquired water. If the CVP storage capacity in San Luis Reservoir fills in a subsequent year before those water users are able to use their carried over CVP and other supplies, it is reallocated to all south-of-Delta CVP water users and lost to the contractor. The B.F. Sisk Dam Raise and Reservoir Expansion Project is being evaluated in part to provide increased certainty for south-of-Delta contractors on the security of carried over CVP and other water stored in San Luis Reservoir.

Project Description

As a connected action to the B.F. Sisk SOD Modification Project, SLDMWA in collaboration with Reclamation seeks to evaluate increasing storage capacity in San Luis Reservoir for the purpose of providing greater water supply reliability for south-of-Delta contractors dependent on San Luis Reservoir. The increased storage capacity would be achieved by an additional 10-foot raise of the B.F. Sisk Dam embankment across the entire dam crest above the level proposed for dam safety purposes. Increased capacity within San Luis Reservoir would, consistent with the project objectives, be used to store water supply divertible under the existing operation requirements for the CVP and SWP in periods when the existing reservoir would otherwise be full. This stored supply would be used to help meet existing demands under the existing contract supplies and would not serve any new demands or establish any new places of use of CVP or SWP project water. The B.F. Sisk Dam Raise and Reservoir Expansion Project would also implement modifications to State Route 152 in areas where the increased water surface elevation in the reservoir would interact with the roadway.

Project Location

The project location includes San Luis Reservoir and its related water infrastructure, Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta, and South-of-Delta CVP and SWP contractors reliant on San Luis Reservoir (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Project Study Area

Environmental Impacts

The EIR will describe the potentially significant direct and reasonably foreseeable indirect environmental impacts of the proposed project. The EIR will also evaluate the cumulative impacts of the project when considered in conjunction with other related past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future projects.

The EIR will include a detailed hydrologic analysis and will focus on potential environmental impacts, including:

- **Water Quality:** The exposure of bare soils, soil and material stockpiles, and the presence of fuels, lubricants, and solid and liquid wastes during construction could cause short-term water quality impacts. Soil disturbance could result in localized surface erosion, minor changes in drainage patterns and changes in erosion rates.
- **Surface Water Supply:** Construction and operation could change the annual supply of water available to the CVP and SWP contractors reliant on San Luis Reservoir.

- **Geology and Soils:** Construction could impact known or previously undiscovered paleontological resources or unique geologic features.
- **Air Quality:** Construction could cause temporary, short-term increases in emissions of criteria pollutants or their precursors.
- **Greenhouse Gas Emissions:** Construction could cause temporary, short-term increases in greenhouse gas emissions, including carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide. Construction and operation could also conflict with an applicable plan, policy, or regulation adopted for the purpose of reducing the emissions of GHGs.
- **Visual Resources:** Construction could create a new source of substantial light or glare, which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area and could damage scenic resources within a State scenic highway corridor.
- **Noise:** Noise generated by construction could expose sensitive receptors to noise levels in excess of standards established in the local general plan or noise ordinance. Construction could also cause an increase in ambient noise levels in the project vicinity above levels existing without the project.
- **Traffic and Transportation:** Traffic during construction could increase traffic hazards and result in inadequate emergency access. Modifications to State Route 152 could also require lane closures and rerouting of traffic to isolate areas under construction.
- **Hazards and Hazardous Materials:** Construction could increase the risk of exposure from hazardous materials to the public and construction workers, interfere with an active remediation site, conflict with activities and operations at airports, interfere with an emergency response plan or emergency evacuation plan, and increase the risk of wildfire within the vicinity of the project area.
- **Terrestrial Resources:** Construction could affect special-status species, riparian habitat or other habitats, or sensitive natural communities, and Federally or State protected wetlands.
- **Recreation:** Construction and operation could reduce access to or close recreation areas.
- **Cultural Resources:** Construction could result in adverse effects to historic properties, and/or substantial adverse changes to historical resources, unique archaeological resources, or tribal cultural resources, or result in the disturbance of human remains.

These issue areas will be discussed in the EIR, and potentially feasible mitigation measures will be recommended to avoid or substantially reduce potentially significant impacts.

Opportunities for Public Participation

Scoping Meeting

A public scoping meeting will be held to inform interested parties about the proposed project and to solicit agency and public input on the scope and content of the EIR:

- May 26, 2020, 4:00 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.

Given the coronavirus disease pandemic and the associated precautions and procedures being followed throughout California, the public scoping meeting is being conducted online utilizing Microsoft Teams. This meeting format will allow presentation of the project and public participation through the online chat function.

If special assistance is required to participate in the public scoping meeting, please contact Pablo Arroyave (contact information is provided below) as far in advance as possible, and no less than five days in advance, to enable SLDMWA to secure the needed services. If a request cannot be honored, the requestor will be notified.

Comments

This NOP is being circulated for a 30-day public comment period, beginning on May 14, 2020, and ending on June 14, 2020. Written comments on the proposed content and scope of the EIR can be provided at the public scoping meeting via the online chat function, or submitted via mail or email directly to SLDMWA. Comments must be received no later than 5:00 p.m. on June 14, 2020. When submitting comments, agencies that will need to use the EIR when considering permits or other approvals for the proposed project should:

1. State if they are a responsible or trustee agency for the project, and if so, explain why, and note the specific project elements that are subject to their regulatory authority.
2. Identify any significant environmental issues, reasonable alternatives, and mitigation measures they believe should be explored in the EIR.
3. Provide the name, email address, and phone number of a contact person.

Please send all written and/or e-mail comments to Pablo Arroyave, Chief Operating Officer, San Luis & Delta Mendota Water Authority, 842 6th St, Los Banos, CA 93635; or e-mail at pablo.arroyave@sldmwa.org.

Before including your name, address, telephone number, e-mail address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, please be aware that your entire comment, including your personal identifying information, may be made publicly available at any time. While you can request in your comment that your personal identifying information be withheld from public review, SLDMWA and Reclamation cannot guarantee that this will be possible.

All comments received during the public comment period will be considered and addressed in the EIR as appropriate.