Notice of Preparation

To: Agencies and Interested Parties

From: San Luis & Delta-Mendota Water Authority

Date: July 24, 2026

Subject: Notice of Preparation of a North-to-South Water Transfers Subsequent Environmental Impact Report to the 2019 Long-Term Water Transfers Final Environmental Impact Report

A Subsequent Environmental Impact Report (SEIR) is being prepared by the San Luis & Delta-Mendota Water Authority (SLDMWA). SLDMWA is the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Lead Agency for the project.

Purpose of the Notice of Preparation

The purpose of this Notice of Preparation (NOP) is to notify responsible and trustee agencies that SLDMWA plans to prepare a SEIR to the 2019 Long-Term Water Transfers Final EIR (LTWT EIR) (SCH # 2011011010) (State CEQA Guidelines, 14 CCR § 15082[a][1] and § 15083). In April 2020, SLDMWA certified the LTWT EIR. Since certification, changes have been proposed to the project that warrant consideration in a subsequent EIR to assess the potential effects of the project with the proposed changes (consistent with California Public Resources Code, § 21166 and State CEQA Guidelines, 14 CCR § 15162). Specifically, the SEIR will consider a revised list of participating sellers and transfer quantities. The LTWT EIR retains its informational value regarding the environmental effects of the project. Preparation of the SEIR will evaluate the potential environmental effects of the project as revised and ensure that any new or substantially more severe environmental impacts are addressed through the CEQA process. SLDMWA will prepare the SEIR in accordance with the provisions of the CEQA and the State CEQA Guidelines.

The purpose of the NOP is to provide agencies with sufficient information describing both the proposed revisions to the project and the associated potential environmental effects to enable the agencies to make a meaningful response as to the scope and content of the information to be included in the SEIR. SLDMWA is soliciting comments from responsible and trustee agencies, federal agencies involved in approving or funding the project, and other interested parties concerning the scope and content of the SEIR.

Comments

Agencies and interested parties are encouraged to submit comments regarding the scope and content of the environmental information to be contained in the draft SEIR for SLDMWA's consideration. This NOP is being circulated for a 30-day public comment period, beginning on July 24, 2026 and ending on August 24, 2026. Comments must be received no later than 5:00 p.m. on August 24, 2026. 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 cannot guarantee that this will be possible.

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

Project Background

Hydrologic conditions, climatic variability, and regulatory requirements that govern the operation of water projects commonly affect water supply availability in California. This variability can strain water availability in areas that are dependent on the delivery of Central Valley Project (CVP) supplies to meet most, if not all, of the water demand. Historically, water entities (i.e., water districts/agencies, and farmers) have implemented one-year water transfers to alleviate water supply shortages (e.g. reduced deliveries of CVP water and availability of other local and contracted supplies) in order to meet existing demand. These transfers are a common tool in water resource planning.

A water transfer involves an agreement between a willing Seller and a willing Buyer and available infrastructure capacity to convey water between the two parties. To make water available for transfer, the willing Seller must take an action to reduce the consumptive use of surface water (such as idling cropland or pumping groundwater in lieu of using surface water) or releasing additional water from reservoir storage. This surface water would then be conveyed to the Buyers' Service Area for beneficial use. The SEIR will evaluate a range of potential single-year transfers and will conservatively assume that the entire range of transfer methods included in each alternative would occur each year over a defined timeframe. Actual water transfers occur far less frequently and in much smaller volumes.

Each potential transfer must be proposed, reviewed, and approved by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) on an annual basis. In all instances, the methods by which surface water could be made available for transfer, if and when they are proposed, are subject to individual review and approval on an annual basis based on real-time assessment of hydrologic conditions, regulatory requirements, and other operation limitations.

The SEIR will focus primarily on the modifications or changes to the LTWT Project since the Final EIR was certified in April 2020. Additional project documentation includes the Addendum to the 2019 Final Environmental Impact Report (adopted in September 2021) and the Addendum to the LTWT EIR for 2026-2027 North to South Water Transfers (adopted in May 2026). All project-related documentation can be found at: https://sldmwa.org/water-transfers/. Project alternatives to be considered in this SEIR are presented below.

Initial Alternatives

Project Objectives

The potential to transfer water is needed by water users that are at risk of experiencing water shortages and who may require one-year supplemental water supplies to meet existing demands in the future. The following are SLDMWA's objectives for the proposed modifications to the project:

- Facilitate the development of supplemental water supply for willing Buyers from willing Sellers during times of CVP shortages to meet existing demands.

- Facilitate meeting the need of willing Buyers for a water supply that is immediately implementable and flexible and can respond to changes in hydrologic conditions and CVP allocations.

Reasonable Range of Alternatives

CEQA requires a SEIR to include a discussion of a reasonable range of alternatives, including the "no project" alternative. A No Project Alternative will be defined to characterize existing conditions at the time this notice of preparation is published, including the continued operation of water resource projects or facilities, such as the SWP and CVP, in combination with planned water resource projects or facilities that are approved or are authorized but not yet implemented.

The preliminary range of potential project alternatives identified by SLDMWA, in collaboration with Reclamation, for analysis in the SEIR is described below.

Alternative 2: Full Range of Transfers (Proposed Project)

This alternative combines all potential transfer methods that met the project objectives and were carried forward through the screening process. Transfer methods included in the Full Range of Transfers Alternative are:

- **Groundwater substitution:** Transfer of water made available through groundwater substitution actions occur when Sellers choose to pump groundwater in lieu of diverting surface water supplies, thereby making the surface water available for transfer. Water could be made available for transfer by agricultural users during the irrigation season of April through September for conveyance to the Buyers during transfer window (July 1 through November 31). Municipal and industrial users could make water available during the transfer window.

- **Cropland idling:** Cropland idling makes water available for transfer that would have been used for agricultural production. Water transfers would occur in real time, and water would be made available on the same pattern throughout the growing season as it would have otherwise been consumed had a crop been planted. The irrigation season generally lasts from April or May through September for most crops in the Sacramento Valley. The 2025 Long-Term Operation of the CVP and SWP Record of Decision includes the transfer window from July 1 through November 30.

- **Crop shifting:** For crop shifting transfers, water is made available when farmers shift from growing a higher water use crop to a lower water use crop. The difference in the accepted evapotranspiration of applied water values between the two crops would be the amount of water that can be transferred.

- **Reservoir release:** Buyers could acquire water by purchasing surface water stored in reservoirs owned by non-Project entities (not part of the CVP or SWP). To ensure that purchasing this water would not affect downstream users, transferred water would be limited to that which would not have otherwise been released downstream absent the transfer.

Transfers would only be implemented through single-year agreements between willing Sellers and Buyers. The project description establishes an upper limit for the range of potential transfers in any one year at 250,000 acre-feet, with up to 88,399 acres of cropland potentially idled. Through-Delta transfers would be limited to the transfer window provided by Reclamation and the California Department of Water Resources (DWR), typically July 1 through November 30, unless pumping capacity is restricted by Reclamation and DWR. This alternative proposes a menu of methods that Buyers and Sellers can select from to implement in a given transfer year. Some methods in an alternative may not be implemented if there are no willing Sellers or Buyers interested in that particular method. SLDMWA, on behalf of its member agencies and other interested buyers would negotiate one-year transfer agreements with willing sellers, including agreeing upon methods of making water available for transfer and quantities to be made available.

Alternative 3: No Cropland Idling/Shifting Transfers

This alternative would consider a subset of the methods that met the project objectives and were carried forward through the screening process. Methods under Alternative 3 include groundwater substitution and reservoir release transfers. The upper limit for water made available for transfer in any one year would be 250,000 acre-feet.

Alternative 4: No Groundwater Substitution Transfers

This alternative would consider a subset of the methods that met the project objectives and were carried forward through the screening process. Methods under Alternative 3 include cropland idling, crop shifting, and reservoir release transfers. The upper limit for water made available for transfer in any one year would be 250,000 acre-feet, with up to 88,399 acres of cropland potentially idled.

Other Alternatives

Public and agency input during the scoping process for the SEIR may identify other alternatives for consideration. These will be evaluated in comparison to the preliminary range of alternatives identified above.

Project Location

The project location includes the counties overlapping the Buyer and Seller Service Areas and at reservoirs used for release transfers. Affected counties include Alameda, Butte, Colusa, Contra Costa, El Dorado, Fresno, Glenn, Kings, Merced, Placer, Sacramento, Shasta, Stanislaus, Sutter, San Benito, Santa Clara, Tehama, and Yolo counties. (Figure 1).

Environmental Impacts

The purpose of an SEIR is to identify and consider any new or substantially more severe significant adverse impacts on the environment associated with revisions to a previously approved project and to identify measures that can reduce, avoid, or mitigate significant adverse impacts. The SEIR will also evaluate the cumulative impacts of the project as modified when considered in conjunction with other related past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future projects.

The SEIR will include a detailed hydrologic analysis and will focus on potential environmental impacts of the proposed project and alternatives, including:

- **Water Quality:** Transfers could impact the level of sediment, organic carbon, and contaminants in water bodies. Changes in Delta inflow and outflow, reservoir storage, and river flows from transfers could impact water quality.

- **Surface Water Supply:** Transfers could change flows in surface water bodies and the annual supply of water available to Buyers.

- **Groundwater:** Transfers could impact groundwater levels, land subsidence, and groundwater quality from groundwater pumping.

- **Geology and Soils:** Transfers could increase soil loss and erosion from land idling. Changes in streamflow from transfers could also increase erosion.

- **Air Quality:** Transfers could impact fugitive dust emission from agricultural land use changes and impact emissions of air pollutants from groundwater pumping.

- **Greenhouse Gas Emissions:** Transfers could impact greenhouse gas emissions from agricultural land use changes and groundwater pumping.

- **Aquatic Resources:** Transfers could alter flows, hydrologic conditions, and water levels in rivers and creeks, the Delta, and reservoirs supporting fisheries resources.

- **Agricultural Land Use:** Transfers could impact the amount of land categorized as Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, or Unique Farmland under the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program or convert agricultural lands under the Williamson Act and other land resource programs to an incompatible use.

- **Visual Resources:** Transfers could degrade the existing landscape character or scenic attractiveness of visual resources in the project area.

- **Terrestrial Resources:** Transfers could affect special-status species, riparian habitat or other habitats, or sensitive natural communities, and Federally or State protected wetlands.

- **Recreation:** Transfers could alter river flows and reservoir water levels impacting water-based recreation opportunities.

- **Utilities and Power:** Transfers could change the power generated by reservoir and facilities.

- **Flood Control:** Transfers could change storage levels in reservoirs and river flows, potentially affecting flood control capacity.

- **Cultural and Tribal Resources:** Transfers could alter reservoir surface elevations beyond historically low levels which could expose previously inundated cultural resources.

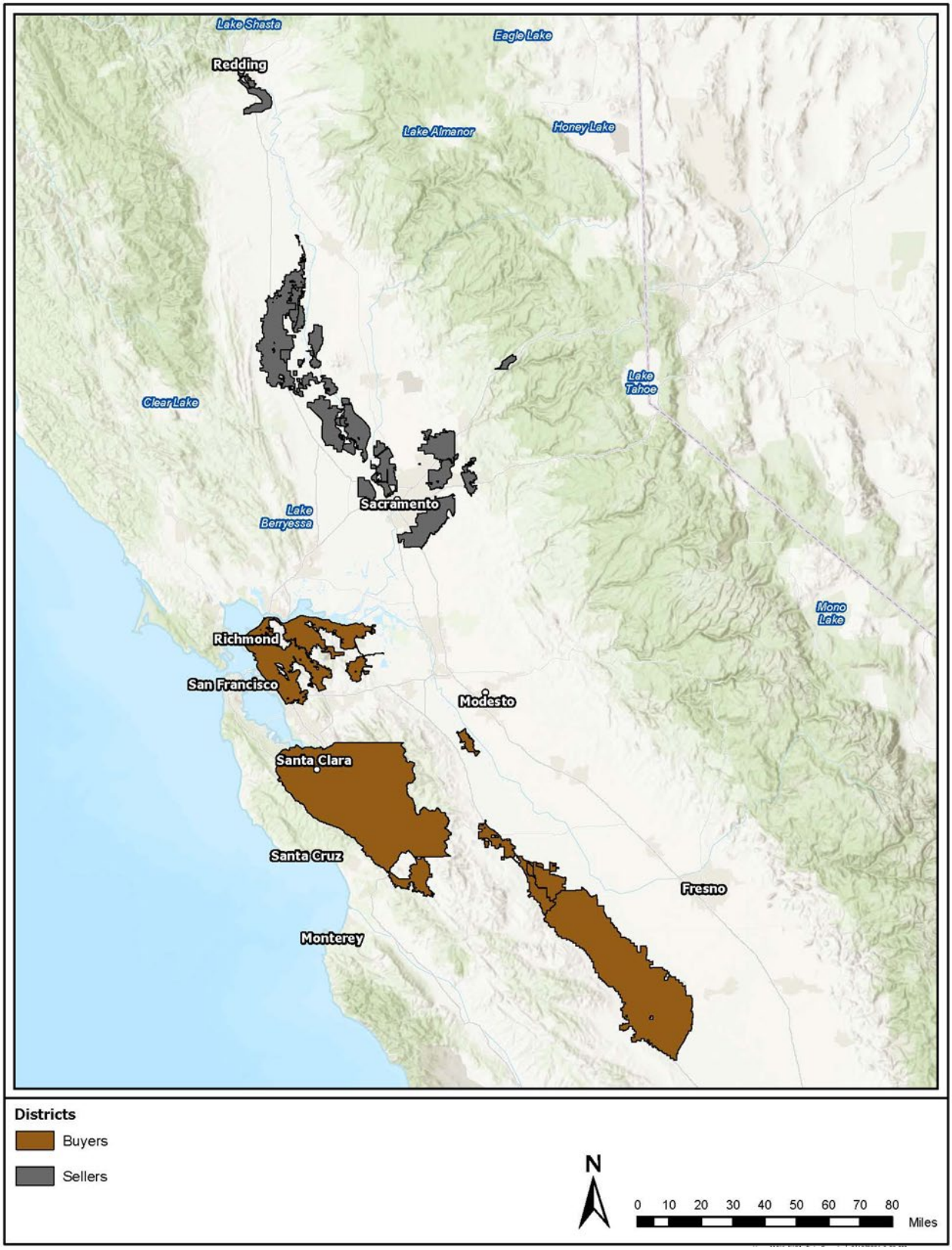

Figure 1. Project Study Area