



## BOARD ACTION

**TO:** Governing Board (Operations Committee)  
**FROM:** Management  
**DATE:** March 27, 2020  
**SUBJECT:** Consideration to Adopt Addendum No.1 to the Mitigated Negative Declaration for the Sweetwater Reservoir Wetlands Habitat Recovery Project

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### **SUMMARY**

The Sweetwater Reservoir Wetlands Habitat Recovery Project (HRP) has been in development since 2009 as an adaptive management response to the Harris Fire that occurred in 2007. The HRP is inclusive within the Upper Sweetwater Reservoir Habitat Management Program (HMP), a program that has been in place since the mid-1990s to balance the operational needs of the reservoir and the occurrence of endangered species. The Authority is under a permit from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) to protect and maintain the habitat in this area for the least Bell's vireo, a small North American songbird that is an endangered subspecies in Southern California, among other endangered species.

The HRP was initially conceived as a floodplain improvement project to correct identified topographical and hydrologic deficiencies that were preventing vegetative recovery. A Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND) for the project was adopted by the Board in March 2014 (*Resolution 14-02*). The Authority was then awarded \$1.5 million in funding under the Integrated Regional Water Management (IRWM) Proposition 84 Round 4 grant program. Project planning had become challenged due to the significantly increasing costs of earthwork and channel structural improvements in addition to complex and overly arduous environmental permitting. Rather than withdraw from the IRWM grant program, staff proposed a modified project that largely met the original IRWM project goals, but with significantly reduced project costs, reduced environmental impacts, and consequently, a simpler environmental permitting process.

The Department of Water Resources, the granting agency, has approved the modified project which, provides ecological benefit through the planting and temporary irrigation of approximately 68 acres of wetlands at Sweetwater Reservoir, including riparian forest, for the least Bell's vireo. Attachment 1 is a figure for the modified project. Plant installation would be followed by a three-year maintenance and monitoring period to ensure successful habitat establishment. Additionally, the modified project would expand the HMP Conservation Easement to 250 acres as intended under the original

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March 27 2020

Page 2 of 3

project. The water storage benefit of the IRWM grant is the removal of the 230' elevation imported water restriction, a level that was put in place under the 1994 HMP permit process and reduced imported water storage by 7,873 acre-feet. Through the HRP permitting process and updated HMP Plan, this restriction would be removed and the reservoir level managed more adaptively, thus allowing for improved storage volume when imported water is available.

An Addendum to the MND has been prepared to reflect the project modifications. The Initial Study for the Addendum found there are **no** substantial changes in the proposed project that would require major revisions to the previous MND, and an Addendum is the appropriate document under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). In fact, environmental impacts have been dramatically reduced in the modified HRP. The Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program has been updated accordingly in the Addendum.

### **FISCAL IMPACT**

There is no fiscal impact associated with the adoption of Addendum No. 1 to the MND.

For background purposes, the IRWM Project budget for the Modified HRP is \$2,067,816. Of this, \$1.5 million has been awarded as a grant, and \$567,816 (27 percent) are matching funds by the Authority.

### **POLICY**

Strategic Plan Goal 7: Environmental Stewardship - Provide core services while maintaining a balanced approach to human and environmental needs.

- Objective ES5: Continue to implement the Sweetwater Reservoir Habitat Management Plan (HMP), applying adaptive management recommendations and improvements of the Conceptual Plan for the Wetlands Habitat Recovery Project (HRP) and pursue other strategies to aid in the long-term management of the area

This Addendum to the MND was prepared in compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and the *Sweetwater Authority Local Guidelines for Implementing the CEQA*.

## **ALTERNATIVES**

1. Adopt Resolution 20-08, adopting Addendum No. 1 to the Mitigated Negative Declaration and a revised Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program for the Sweetwater Reservoir Wetlands Habitat Recovery Project and Approving the Modified Project
2. Do not adopt the Addendum to the Mitigated Negative Declaration and Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program and direct staff to reevaluate the Modified HRP.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

Staff recommends that the Governing Board adopt Resolution 20-08, adopting Addendum No. 1 to the Mitigated Negative Declaration and a Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program for the Sweetwater Reservoir Wetlands Habitat Recovery Project and Approving the Modified Project.

## **ATTACHMENTS**

1. Figure Map – Sweetwater Reservoir Wetlands Habitat Recovery Project
2. Resolution 20-08 – Adopting Addendum No. 1 to the Mitigated Negative Declaration (Sch #2013121098) and a Revised Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program for the Sweetwater Reservoir Wetlands Habitat Recovery Project and Approving the Modified Project
3. Addendum No. 1 to the Initial Study and Mitigated Negative Declaration for the Sweetwater Reservoir Wetlands Habitat Recovery Project