



South Coast Air Quality Management District

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Draft Program Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) for the Replenish Big Bear Program Project (Proposed Project)

The South Coast Air Quality Management District (South Coast AQMD) appreciates the opportunity to review the above-mentioned document. The Big Bear Area Regional Wastewater Agency (BBARWA) is the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Lead Agency for the Proposed Project. To provide context, South Coast AQMD staff has provided a brief summary of the project information and prepared the following comments.

South Coast AQMD's Summary of Project Information in the Draft PEIR

Based on the Draft PEIR, the Proposed Project consists of construction and operation of an advanced water purification facility (AWPF), and associated pipelines and infrastructure, in the Big Bear Valley area of the San Bernardino Mountains of San Bernardino County.¹ Specifically, the aforementioned includes the construction of: 1) approximately 6.59 miles of drinking water and reverse osmosis (RO) pipelines; 2) brine minimization; 3) three pump stations; 4) a groundwater recharge system; and 5) four monitoring wells with a capacity of up to 2,210 acre-feet per year of water from the AWPF.² The AWPF will be co-located at the existing BBARWA Wastewater Treatment Plant (WWTP).³ Upgrades to the WWTP to accommodate the AWPF consist of upgrades to the existing oxidation ditches and the addition of tertiary filtration, ultrafiltration and RO membrane filtration, brine pellet reactor, and ultraviolet advanced oxidation processes.⁴ Construction is anticipated to commence in January 2025 and be completed by January 2027.⁵ The Proposed Project is located roughly east of Big Bear Lake and spans to the BBARWA WWTP.⁶

South Coast AQMD Comments

South Coast AQMD Air Permits and Role as a Responsible Agency

¹ Draft PEIR. Program Description. Pages 3-19 through 3-33.

² *Ibid.* Executive Summary. Page 1-4 & Chapter 3. Page 16.

³ *Ibid.* Chapter 3. Page 14 through 17.

⁴ *Ibid.* Pages 3-51 through 3-59.

⁵ *Ibid.* Appendices. Table 3-2: Construction Duration. PDF Page 877 of 2826.

⁶ *Ibid.* Project Description. Figure 3-29. Page 3-22.

If implementation of the Proposed Project would require the use of new stationary and portable sources, including but not limited to emergency generators, fire water pumps, boilers, etc., air permits from South Coast AQMD will be required. The final CEQA document, whether a MND or EIR, should include a discussion about the potentially applicable rules that the Proposed Project needs to comply with. Those rules may include, for example, Rule 201 – Permit to Construct,⁷ Rule 203 – Permit to Operate,⁸ Rule 401 – Visible Emissions,⁹ Rule 402 – Nuisance,¹⁰ Rule 403 – Fugitive Dust,¹¹ Rule 1110.2 – Emissions from Gaseous and Liquid Fueled Engines,¹² Rule 1113 – Architectural Coating,¹³ Rule 1166 – VOC Contaminated Soil Excavation,¹⁴ Rule 1179 – Publicly Owned Treatment Works Operation,¹⁵ Regulation XIII – New Source Review,¹⁶ Rule 1401 – Air Toxics,¹⁷ Rule 1466 – Control of Particulate Emissions from Soils with Toxic Air Contaminants,¹⁸ Rule 1470 – Requirements for Stationary Diesel Fueled Internal Combustion and Other Compression Ignition Engines,¹⁹ etc. It is important to note that when air permits from South Coast AQMD are required, the role of South Coast AQMD would change from a Commenting Agency to a Responsible Agency under CEQA. In addition, if South Coast AQMD is identified as a Responsible Agency, per CEQA Guidelines Sections 15086, the Lead Agency is required to consult with South Coast AQMD.

CEQA Guidelines Section 15096 sets forth specific procedures for a Responsible Agency, including making a decision on the adequacy of the CEQA document for use as part of the process for conducting a review of the Proposed Project and issuing discretionary approvals. Moreover, it is important to note that if a Responsible Agency determines that a CEQA document is not adequate to rely upon for its discretionary approvals, the Responsible Agency must take further actions listed in CEQA Guideline Section 15096(e), which could have the effect of delaying the implementation of the Proposed Project. In its role as CEQA Responsible Agency, the South Coast AQMD is obligated to ensure that the CEQA document prepared for this Proposed Project contains a sufficient project description and analysis to be relied upon in order to issue any discretionary approvals that may be needed for air permits. South Coast AQMD is concerned that the project analysis in its current form in the Draft PEIR is inadequate to be relied upon for this purpose.

⁷ South Coast AQMD. Rule 201 available at <https://www.aqmd.gov/docs/default-source/rule-book/reg-ii/rule-201.pdf>

⁸ South Coast AQMD. Rule 203 available at <https://www.aqmd.gov/docs/default-source/rule-book/reg-ii/rule-203.pdf>

⁹ South Coast AQMD. Rule 401 available at <https://www.aqmd.gov/docs/default-source/rule-book/rule-iv/rule-401.pdf>

¹⁰ South Coast AQMD. Rule 402 available at <https://www.aqmd.gov/docs/default-source/rule-book/rule-iv/rule-402.pdf>

¹¹ South Coast AQMD. Rule 403 available at <https://www.aqmd.gov/docs/default-source/rule-book/rule-iv/rule-403>

¹² South Coast AQMD. Rule 1110.2 available at https://www.aqmd.gov/docs/default-source/rule-book/reg-xi/r1110_2.pdf

¹³ South Coast AQMD. Rule 1113 available at <https://www.aqmd.gov/docs/default-source/rule-book/reg-xi/r1113.pdf>

¹⁴ South Coast AQMD. Rule 1166 available at <https://www.aqmd.gov/docs/default-source/rule-book/reg-xi/rule-1166.pdf>

¹⁵ South Coast AQMD. Rule 1179 available at <https://www.aqmd.gov/docs/default-source/rule-book/reg-xi/rule-1179.pdf>

¹⁶ South Coast AQMD. Regulation XIII available at <https://www.aqmd.gov/home/rules-compliance/rules/scaqmd-rule-book/regulation-xiii>

¹⁷ South Coast AQMD. Rule 1401 available at <https://www.aqmd.gov/docs/default-source/rule-book/reg-xiv/rule-1401.pdf>

¹⁸ South Coast AQMD. Rule 1466 available <https://www.aqmd.gov/docs/default-source/rule-book/reg-xiv/rule-1466.pdf>

¹⁹ South Coast AQMD. Rule 1470 available at <https://www.aqmd.gov/docs/default-source/rule-book/reg-xiv/rule-1470.pdf>

The project will likely be subject to the following permitting requirements:

1. Modification application to incorporate the BBARWA WWTP Upgrades Project.
2. New construction application(s) for emergency generator(s).
3. New construction application(s) for odor control units, if new odor control equipment are to be constructed at the WWTP and/or pump stations.

For these reasons, the final CEQA document should be revised to include a discussion about any and all new stationary and portable equipment requiring South Coast AQMD air permits, provide the evaluation of their air quality and greenhouse gas impacts, and identify South Coast AQMD as a Responsible Agency for the Proposed Project as this information will be relied upon as the basis for the permit conditions and emission limits for the air permit(s). Please contact South Coast AQMD's Engineering and Permitting staff at (909) 396-3385 for questions regarding what types of equipment would require air permits. For more general information on permits, please visit South Coast AQMD's webpage at <http://www.aqmd.gov/home/permits>.

Conclusion

As set forth in California Public Resources Code Section 21092.5(a) and CEQA Guidelines Section 15088(a-b), the Lead Agency shall evaluate comments from public agencies on the environmental issues and prepare a written response at least 10 days prior to certifying the Final PEIR. As such, please provide South Coast AQMD written responses to all comments contained herein at least 10 days prior to the certification of the Final PEIR. In addition, as provided by CEQA Guidelines Section 15088(c), if the Lead Agency's position is at variance with recommendations provided in this comment letter, detailed reasons supported by substantial evidence in the record to explain why specific comments and suggestions are not accepted must be provided.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments. South Coast AQMD staff is available to work with the Lead Agency to address any air quality questions that may arise from this comment letter. Please contact Evelyn Aguilar, Air Quality Specialist, at eaguilar@aqmd.gov should you have any questions.

Sincerely,

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