South Coast
Air Quality Management District
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January 16, 2007

Mr. Dale Hoffman-Floerke
Colorado River and Salton Sea Office
1416 Ninth Street, Room 1148-6
Sacramento, CA. 95814

Draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Report (DPEIR) for the Salton Sea Ecosystem Restoration Program (October 2006)

Dear Mr. Hoffman-Floerke:

The South Coast Air Quality Management District (SCAQMD) appreciates the opportunity to comment on the above-mentioned document. SCAQMD staff understands the stakes involved regarding the lead agency's efforts to restore the Salton Sea ecosystem. Any efforts at restoration efforts, however, must proceed without further exacerbating the already poor air quality in the region. The SCAQMD, therefore, requests that preference be given to those alternatives with the lowest air quality impacts, both during construction and, especially, over the long term. Further, the SCAQMD requests that the lead agency specifically identify measures in the Final PEIR to mitigate significant adverse construction and operational air quality impacts to the maximum extent feasible, consistent with both the California Environmental Quality Act and the Salton Sea Restoration Act.

Pursuant to Public Resources Code Section 21092.5, please provide the SCAQMD with written responses to all comments contained herein prior to the adoption of the Final Programmatic Environmental Impact Report. The SCAQMD staff would be happy to work with the Lead Agency to address these issues and any other questions that may arise. Please contact Dr. Steve Smith, Program Supervisor – CEQA Section, at (909) 396-3054, if you have any questions regarding these comments.

Sincerely,

Steve Smith, Ph.D.
Program Supervisor – CEQA Section

Attachment

SS:CB

SBC061024-01
Control Number(c:/documents/letters/saltsealtr2.doc)

Draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Report (DPEIR) for the Salton Sea Ecosystem Restoration Program

1. SCAQMD staff has reviewed the DPEIR and understands that a preferred alternative has not been identified in the document. Further, a preferred alternative will be identified in the Final PEIR based on comments submitted by the public with assistance from the Salton Sea Advisory Committee, which includes the SCAQMD's Executive Officer as a member. It is also understood that the preferred alternative must balance the needs and interests of a number of different stakeholders and take into consideration effects of the proposed project on a wide range of environmental topic areas. Given the general nature of the analysis of air quality impacts identified for each alternative evaluated in the DPEIR, the SCAQMD is not endorsing any specific project alternative at this time. However, the lead agency should be reminded that the Salton Sea Restoration Act specifically identifies as one of the three main objectives, "Elimination of air quality impacts from restoration projects…" Therefore, strong preference should be given to alternatives with the lowest air quality impacts during both construction and, most importantly, during operation of the preferred alternative over the long term. Further, any alternative selected should focus on mitigating significant adverse air quality impacts to the maximum extent feasible, as required by CEQA.

2. On page 10-35 of the DPEIR the lead agency lists number of emissions sources that "were not included as part of this programmatic analysis, but would be considered for the project-level analyses…" Although these sources are expected to be included in the project level analyses for the preferred alternative, SCAQMD staff requests that the lead agency acknowledge that air quality impacts evaluated for each of the project alternatives are underrepresented and are likely to be substantially greater.

3. On page 10-26 the lead agency states, "A screening level analysis of construction emissions was used to estimate the impacts of the alternatives. This means… that emission calculations were focused on two pollutants, NOx and PM10." The SCAQMD understands that a screening analysis at the programmatic level may be appropriate, but this does not excuse the lead agency from calculating impacts for the other criteria pollutants or deferring this analysis to the subsequent project-specific analyses. SCAQMD staff, therefore, recommends that carbon monoxide (CO), sulfur oxides (SOx), and volatile organic compound (VOC) emissions be calculated in the Final PEIR for the preferred project alternative.

4. As of January 1, 2007, the SCAQMD has advised lead agencies to calculate PM2.5 emissions for projects. Because the DPEIR was prepared and released for public review prior to 2007, the SCAQMD would not normally request an evaluation of PM2.5 impacts. However, because of the magnitude of potential particulate emission impacts from all of the project alternatives, both PM10 and, possibly PM2.5; the long-term timeframe of the impacts; and the fact that PM2.5 impacts are reasonably foreseeable, the SCAQMD believes the lead agency is obligated to evaluate PM2.5 impacts as part of the CEQA analysis. Therefore, the SCAQMD requests that, in addition to including an analysis of CO, SOx, and VOC emissions in the Final PEIR for the preferred alternative (see comment #3), the lead agency also calculate PM2.5 emissions for the preferred alternative. Further, all future project-specific CEQA documents for the preferred alternative should include an analysis of PM2.5

emissions. Information on the appropriate PM2.5 significance thresholds to be used in the SCAQMD's jurisdiction and a calculation methodology for calculating PM2.5 can be found online at the following URL: http://www.aqmd.gov/ceqa/handbook/PM2_5/PM2_5.html.

5. In Appendix E, Attachment E5, the lead agency acknowledges that dust generating activities within the SCAQMD's jurisdiction for any preferred alternative would be subject to SCAQMD dust control Rule 403 – Fugitive Dust. The lead agency, however, should be aware that the preferred alternative would also be subject to SCAQMD Rule 403.1 – Supplemental Fugitive Dust Control Requirements for Coachella Valley Sources, Riverside County Ordinance 742.1 in county unincorporated areas and other local city dust control ordinances for any portions of the preferred alternative that occur within the sphere of influence of local Coachella Valley cities.

6. According to Table 10-15 and Figures 10-5 through 10-7, construction PM10 impacts during phase 1, operational PM10 impacts during phase IV, peak NOx construction emissions, and operational NOx emissions during phase IV are expected to exceed applicable significance thresholds. However, no mitigation measures are specifically identified in the DPEIR. Instead, Table 10-14 identifies assumptions common to all alternatives, which include the following "control measures":

    (2) The following control measures for fugitive dust emissions during construction were assumed:

    - To control fugitive dust emissions from dry land disturbed to construct Saline Habitat Complex cells and roads, a 2-hour surface watering interval would be implemented, with an estimated control efficiency of 55 percent (WRAP, 2004);

    - To control fugitive dust emissions associated with truck and vehicle travel on unpaved roads, watering twice a day would be implemented, with an estimated control efficiency of 55 percent (WRAP, 2004);

    (3) To estimate exhaust emissions generated during construction of each alternative, the following assumptions were made:

    - Land-based construction equipment would be required to meet Tier 4 emissions standards; Diesel engines used on marine vessels would be required to meet Tier 2 emission standards;

    - Diesel engines used on marine vessels would be required to meet Tier 2 emission standards;

    The SCAQMD request that these "control measures" be made mandatory as mitigation measures in the Final PEIR. In addition, the SCAQMD requests that the lead agency include these mitigation measures in a mitigation monitoring plan pursuant to Public Resources Code (PRC) §21081.6 and California Code of Regulations (CCR) §15097 and the Statement of Findings for the preferred Alternative prepared pursuant to PRC §21081 and CCR §15091.

Further, the SCAQMD requests that these mitigation measures be included in all future CEQA documents prepared for the preferred alternative.

7. In addition to the mitigation measures described in comment #6, the SCAQMD requests that the following mitigation measures also be included in the Final PEIR, mitigation monitoring plan, all future CEQA documents and the Statement of Findings, and all future CEQA documents for the preferred alternative:

    - All on-road heavy-duty mobile sources used in connection with implementing the preferred alternative shall meet year 2010 on-road emission standards of 0.2 grams per brake horsepower-hour (g/bhp-hr) for NOx and 0.01 g/bhp-hr for PM.

    - In addition to meeting Tier 2 emission standards, marine vessels shall use marine fuel with a maximum sulfur content of 0.1 percent in both main and auxiliary engines.

    - Any locomotives used in connection with implementing the preferred alternative shall comply with Tier 3 standards.

    - All future CEQA documents prepared for the preferred alternative shall include an analysis of the feasibility of implementing all control measures identified in the "Next Steps" section in Appendix E, Attachment E5.

8. Item #6 in Table 10-14 includes the following "control measures":

    - 30 percent of the Exposed Playa would not be emissive (nonemissive);

    - 50 percent of the Exposed Play would use Air Quality Management, such as water efficient vegetation (assumed 95 percent control efficiency); and

    - 20 percent of Exposed Play would use other Air Quality Management measures (assumes 85 percent control efficiency).

    Given the current state of knowledge with regard to emissivity of future exposed playa areas, these assumptions may be appropriate at this time as part of the analysis in the DPEIR. However, the SCAQMD requests that the lead agency consider the following points. First, the SCAQMD requests that the validity of these assumptions be tested and evaluated as part of any future CEQA documents. Second, it may not be reasonable to assume that "nonemissive" playa areas will never be emissive. The lead agency needs to identify backup fugitive dust management measures for the "nonemissive" playa areas should they become emissive because of windblown dust or become destabilized and emissive. Third, the SCAQMD requests that the lead agency specifically identify the "Air Quality Management" measures that comprise the third bullet point. Finally, the SCAQMD requests that any backup measures to control fugitive dust from "nonemissive" playa areas and measures identified as part of the "Air Quality Management" measures be identified as mitigation measures and incorporated into the documents identified in comment #6 above.

9. Staff evaluated the construction air quality analysis methodology in Appendix E and believes that, at the programmatic level, the analysis methodology is generally acceptable. The lead agency estimated the volume of rock, gravel, etc., used per year that would be necessary to construct barriers, perimeters, dykes, etc. Then based on operating hours of various types of equipment, load factors, emission factors, etc., developed an emission factor per cubic yard, multiplied the emission factor by total number of cubic yards used per year and then divided the result by the number of operating days per year to obtain an average daily construction estimate. First, staff could not validate the emission factor because the intermediate data such as the actual number of pieces of construction equipment, marine barges, etc., and equations were not included in the DPEIR. The main point, however, is that this approach will not be acceptable at the project-specific level because calculating annualized average daily emissions generally underestimates peak daily construction emissions. Construction proceeds in phases where some phases will require different numbers and types of construction equipment. As a result, for the project-specific analysis, SCAQMD staff expects that actual construction scenarios will be identified and specific types and numbers of equipment will be estimated to identify peak daily construction emissions. Any mitigation measures would then be based on peak daily emissions, not average daily emissions.

10. In response to the SCAQMD Governing Board's Environmental Justice Enhancements, the SCAQMD adopted a methodology to analyze localized air quality impacts and localized significance thresholds (LSTs). The SCAQMD does not require an LST at the program EIR level. However, the SCAQMD requests that LST analyses be prepared for all subsequent project-specific CEQA analyses. Information on preparing an LST analysis can be found online at the following URL: http://www.aqmd.gov/ceqa/handbook/LST/LST.html.

11. On pages 10-23 and 10-24 the lead agency discusses toxic air contaminants (TACs) in a very general fashion, primarily identifying potential TACs of concern. The lead agency then does not address TAC emissions again except to say on page 10-37 that the project level analyses will address criteria pollutants, in addition to NOx and PM10, and TACs. Because of the potential exposure to TACs from construction activities (diesel PM10 from construction equipment) and the potential for exposure to windblown toxic sediments from the sea as it recedes, the lead agency should make a stronger commitment to evaluating TACs than simply saying, in some cases TACs would be evaluated. The SCAQMD requests that in the adopting resolution the lead agency make a firm commitment to analyzing and mitigating significant TAC emissions as part of project-specific CEQA documents to follow the PEIR.