

# Notice of Preparation

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Project Title: Upper Santa Ana River Tributaries Restoration Project  
Lead Agency/  
Project Applicant: San Bernardino Valley Municipal Water District  
380 East Vanderbilt Way  
San Bernardino, CA 92408

## **Subject: Notice of Preparation of a Draft Environmental Impact Report**

The San Bernardino Valley Municipal Water District (Valley District), as the Lead Agency under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), has prepared this Notice of Preparation (NOP) for the Upper Santa Ana River Tributaries Restoration Project (the project) in Riverside County and has determined that an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) is necessary. The EIR will be prepared under the terms and requirements of CEQA. Copies of available project materials may be reviewed or obtained from the Valley District address shown above and for review on the Valley District's website: <http://www.sbvmd.com/Upper-SAR-Restoration>.

In order for the concerns of your agency to be incorporated into the Draft EIR, we need to know the views of your agency as to the scope and content of the environmental information relevant to your agency's statutory responsibilities in connection with the proposed project.

The purpose of this notice is (1) to serve as the NOP to potential Responsible Agencies, including federal agencies involved in funding or approving the project, and Trustee Agencies responsible for natural resources affected by the project, pursuant to Section 15082 of the State CEQA Guidelines, and (2) to advise and solicit comments and suggestions regarding the preparation of the EIR, environmental issues to be addressed in the EIR, and any related issues from interested parties other than those noted above, including interested or affected members of the public. Valley District requests that any potential Responsible or Trustee Agency responding to this notice respond in a manner consistent with the State CEQA Guidelines Section 15082(b).

All parties that have submitted their names and mailing addresses will be notified as part of the current project's CEQA review process. If your agency wishes to be placed on the mailing list, has any questions, or needs additional information, please contact Valley District, information provided later in this NOP.

Pursuant to the CEQA Statute Section 21080.4 and State CEQA Guidelines Section 15082(b), Responsible Agencies must submit any comments in response to this notice no later than 30 days after receipt. The project description and location are contained in the attached materials.

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# Project Description

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The San Bernardino Valley Municipal Water District (Valley District) proposes to construct and maintain four tributary restoration sites in Riverside County as an early effort to implement conservation measures of the Upper Santa Ana River (SAR) Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP). The four restoration sites are: Anza Creek, Old Ranch Creek, Lower Hole Creek, and Hidden Valley Creek. The sites would be designed to mitigate impacts on endangered and/or threatened species and jurisdictional aquatic resources identified by the Upper SAR HCP. The main restoration efforts at the sites would include restoration and enhancement of existing channels, creation of new channels, restoration of an existing floodplain tributary, enhancements to existing riparian and floodplain habitats, limiting of human disturbance, and control of nonnative invasive species.

Anza Creek, Old Ranch Creek, and Hole Creek are located entirely within the city of Riverside, while Hidden Valley Creek is in the cities of Riverside and Jurupa Valley. The combined Anza Creek and Old Ranch Creek sites are within a restoration area totaling 321 acres, while Hidden Valley Creek is 112 acres and Hole Creek is 75 acres.

The purpose of this Notice of Preparation (NOP) is to describe the details of the restoration projects to the public and to provide reviewing agencies and decision-makers with a description of the proposed action with enough detail to solicit guidance from agencies and the public as to the scope and content of environmental information to be included in the Environmental Impact Report (EIR). The Initial Study (IS) for the project will also serve as a preliminary analysis as prepared by the Lead Agency, Valley District, and to identify the significant environmental effects to be analyzed in the EIR.

## 1.2 Background

Since the 1970s, the natural hydrogeomorphology of the Santa Ana River has changed dramatically. Changes began as a result of flood control construction projects lead by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), which included the construction of the Seven Oaks Dam in the 1990s. These USACE-led projects have resulted in legal actions to address water rights allocation and natural resource protection. In addition, water district agencies in the Upper Santa Ana River watershed have been entangled in lawsuits due to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (USFWS's) 2010 expansion of designated critical habitat for the Santa Ana sucker. In this charged atmosphere, environmental regulatory compliance has become one of the most challenging aspects of managing and developing water resources in the Upper Santa Ana River watershed. Simultaneously, water management agencies are experiencing increasing demands for water supply in the Upper Santa Ana River watershed.

To address these challenges, water management agencies in the Upper Santa Ana River watershed have initiated environmental compliance efforts for their water management activities. These efforts include the following:

- Development and implementation of the Upper SAR HCP to provide take coverage for endangered and/or threatened species under the federal and California Endangered Species Acts for water management activities.

- Development of the Santa Ana River Mitigation Bank or other mitigation delivery methods to offset potential impacts on regulated aquatic and other resources from water management activities.
- Early implementation of conservation measures (e.g., habitat restoration and enhancement activities) for species listed under the federal and California Endangered Species Acts and to mitigate impacts on aquatic resources.
- Creation of an environmental compliance framework for project-specific environmental review and permitting requirements for water management projects.

The Upper SAR HCP referenced above is a collaborative effort among the water resource agencies of the Santa Ana River watershed in partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), and several other government agencies and stakeholder organizations. The purpose of the Upper SAR HCP is to enable the water resource agencies to continue to provide and maintain a secure source of water for the residents and businesses in the watershed, and to conserve and maintain natural rivers and streams that provide habitat for a diversity of unique and rare species in the watershed, including the Santa Ana sucker, a key covered species of the Upper SAR HCP. The Upper SAR HCP will also detail how species and their habitats will be protected and managed in the future and will provide information regarding the regulatory permitting needed, including any incidental take permits by the water resource agencies under federal and state regulations to maintain, operate, and improve their water resource infrastructure.

Regardless of the implementation status of the Upper SAR HCP, Valley District has identified independent value in the implementation of conservation measures to offset impacts to endangered and threatened species along the Santa Ana River. To initiate implementation of these conservation measures that will be required by the Upper SAR HCP, Valley District proposes the development of four restoration sites along the Santa Ana River in Riverside County. These four sites are supported by the award of a Proposition 84 grant for construction and by contribution of five local water agencies. The restoration sites, from east to west, are Anza Creek, Old Ranch Creek, Lower Hole Creek, and Hidden Valley Creek; all sites are described as the proposed project, and the potential environmental impacts of these proposed restoration sites are evaluated in this NOP and IS.

## 1.3 Purpose and Need

The proposed project is a concerted effort by Valley District to initiate environmental compliance efforts and to implement conservation measures for the Upper SAR HCP given the increasing demands for water supply in the Upper Santa Ana River watershed. The purpose is to provide improved habitat for endangered and/or threatened species and to improve conditions of aquatic resources. The protection of these resources also provides recreational opportunities for the public, such as hiking, fishing of predatory fish, and wildlife viewing. In addition, restoration of endangered and/or threatened species' habitat and aquatic resources will aid the water agencies in establishing and identifying compensatory mitigation options that can be used to obtain necessary permits for water management activities.

## 1.4 Project Location

As detailed above, the proposed project consists of four restoration sites. As shown in Figure 1, all four sites are located in the northwestern portion of Riverside County and along or within the Santa Ana River. Figure 2 provides a more detailed view of the project location. The restoration sites of Hidden Valley Creek and Hole Creek are located west of the intersection of the Santa Ana River and Van Buren Boulevard, while the Anza Creek and Old Ranch Creek sites are located north of Jurupa Avenue and Grand Avenue and west of Rubidoux Avenue. Surrounding land uses, zoning designations, access, and land ownership details are provided below.

### 1.4.1 Surrounding Land Uses and Setting

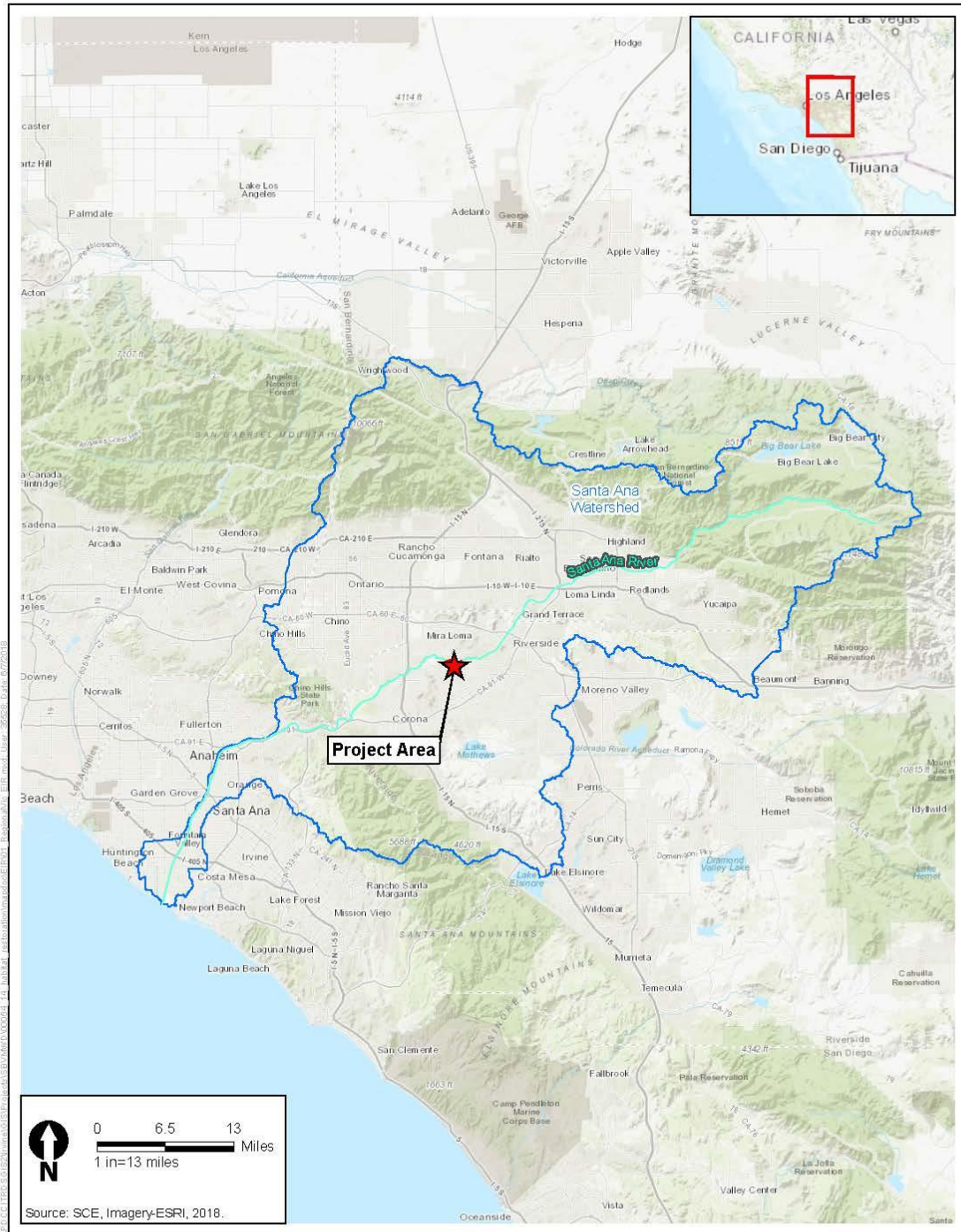
#### 1.4.1.1 Anza Creek and Old Ranch Creek

The Anza Creek and Old Ranch Creek sites are approximately 321 acres when combined and are located on the Santa Ana River's south floodplain about 2 miles downstream of Mount Rubidoux. Because these two sites are located generally in the same area, they have been combined for discussion purposes here. The Anza Creek and Old Ranch Creek sites are bounded to the north by the Santa Ana River, to the east by the closed Tequesquite Landfill, and to the south and west by the Santa Ana River bicycle trail and Martha McLean-Anza Narrows Park. Single-family homes are located beyond the Santa Ana River bicycle trail to the south of the site. The site is zoned as PF (Public Facilities) by the City of Riverside. The site currently supports a variety of native floodplain habitats, including black willow cottonwood riparian forest, arrow weed thickets, and salt grass flats. In addition, extensive nonnative plant communities, including nonnative grassland and nonnative riparian habitat, are located on site.

Currently, there is public and private ownership of the land within the restoration sites. Riverside County owns the majority of the sites, while some land along the eastern boundary adjacent to the landfill is owned by the City of Riverside. Martha McLean-Anza Narrows Park is located at the sites' northwestern boundary. The sites contain two small privately owned parcels about 1,500 feet west of the Anza Creek culvert outfall along the southern border of the sites. The Santa Ana River bicycle trail extends through these private parcels. Two small wooden pole transmission lines cross the southern portion of the sites. Access roads and the bike path cross the sites and provide feeders to numerous social pedestrian trails that zigzag throughout the sites, with a heavy concentration on the northeastern corner where multiple large homeless encampments currently exist. Access is available via public right-of-way.

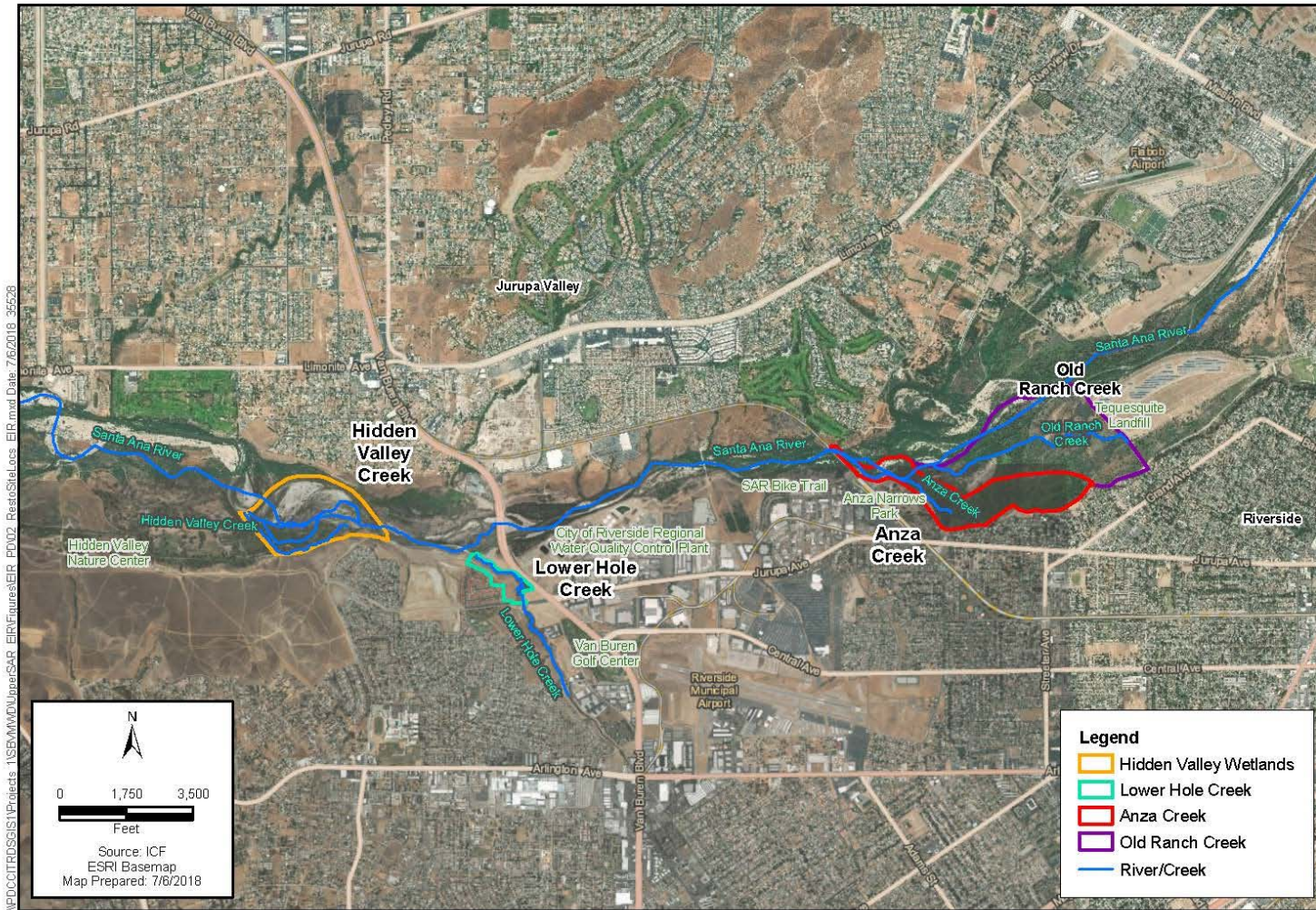
#### 1.4.1.2 Lower Hole Creek

The proposed Lower Hole Creek restoration site would be located to the west of Van Buren Boulevard, south of the Santa Ana River, and north and east of the single-family housing developments located along Lower Hole Creek. The primary land uses south and west of the restoration site are single-family residences. Commercial buildings and the continuation of Lower Hole Creek are also located south of the restoration site. The primary land use to the east is the Riverside Water Quality Control Plant east of Van Buren Boulevard, and the Santa Ana River is located north of the restoration site. Jurupa Avenue is the dividing line between two Hole Creek areas—Lower Hole Creek and Hole Lake. The site has the following City of Riverside zoning



**Figure 1**  
**Regional Location**  
**Upper Santa Ana River Restoration Project**





**Figure 2**  
**Project Location**  
**Upper Santa Ana River Restoration Project**

designations: PF (Public Facilities), BMP (Business and Manufacturing Park Zone), and RE (Residential Estate Zone).

The site currently supports dense riparian vegetation along most of the upstream half of the creek. The primary riparian vegetation in this area is black willow cottonwood. However, there are also many invasive species. In addition, the site is heavily affected by human use, as encampments and extensive trash are found throughout the site.

The CDFW owns most of the site, while the upper 260 feet of the Lower Hole Creek channel and floodplain are owned by the City of Riverside. In addition, privately owned parcels are located in the southeastern corner of the site and are elevated high above the creek. Access is available via public right-of-way. Homeless encampments currently exist throughout the site.

### **1.4.1.3 Hidden Valley Creek**

The eastern portion of the proposed Hidden Valley Creek restoration site is located on the inside of a meander bend, and the site continues westward on the south side of the Santa Ana River. Van Buren Boulevard is to the east, the Santa Ana River trail is to the south, and Kennedy Street is to the north of the restoration site on the opposite sides of the Santa Ana River. The primary land uses to the north and south of the restoration site are single-family residences and open space. The land use to the east and west of the restoration site is open space, as the Santa Ana River is located to the north of the site flowing in an east to west direction. The site has the following City of Riverside zoning designation: PF (Public Facilities). The site has the following City of Jurupa Valley zoning designation: W-1 (Watercourse, Watershed, and Conservation Areas).

The site currently supports a series of native riparian and floodplain vegetation communities, including Fremont cottonwood/willow forest, mulefat thickets, and sandbar thickets. In addition, a large portion of the site supports nonnative California annual grassland.

Nearly all of the land at the site is owned by the State of California. There is a 2-acre rectangular parcel at the upstream end of the site that connects with the base of the hillslope that is owned by the City of Riverside. Access is available via public right-of-way.

## **1.5 Proposed Project**

The proposed project would pursue restoration opportunities at the following four restoration sites: Anza Creek, Old Ranch Creek, Lower Hole Creek, and Hidden Valley Creek. At each site, unique restoration opportunities have been identified. Some of the opportunities for each site are described below, although other opportunities may be added later.

### **1.5.1 Anza Creek**

The Anza Creek site is currently disturbed and has limited ecological value, but it provides an opportunity for a restored site that would contribute to increased ecosystem functions and benefits to endangered and/or threatened species and aquatic resources. Site restoration would occur primarily through two native fish channel restoration opportunities. A description of the individual restoration measures is provided below.



- Restoration of the Anza Creek through the following measures:
  - Enhancement of the existing Anza Creek Channel
  - Creation of a new floodplain within Anza Creek
  - Reconfiguration of the Anza Creek Channel near confluence
  - Placement of woody debris in the Anza Creek
  - Re-contouring of the deep pool within Anza Creek

## 1.5.2 Old Ranch Creek

The Old Ranch Creek site is currently disturbed and has limited ecological value, but it provides an opportunity for a restored site that would contribute to increased ecosystem functions and benefits to endangered and/or threatened species and aquatic resources. Site restoration would occur primarily through two native fish channel restoration opportunities. A description of the individual restoration measures is provided below.

- Restoration of Old Ranch Creek, including providing a perennial water source to the currently dry channel
- Restoration of riparian and floodplain habitat
- Control of invasive wildlife species
- Limitation of human disturbance of habitat

## 1.5.3 Lower Hole Creek

The Lower Hole Creek site currently has limited ecological value due to extensive trash, human disturbance, and channel incision throughout the site. However, Lower Hole Creek provides an opportunity for a restored site that would contribute to increased ecosystem functions and benefits to endangered and/or threatened species and aquatic resources. Site restoration would occur primarily through restoration of the riparian corridor, enhancement of an existing channel, and reestablishment of floodplains. A description of the individual restoration measures is provided below.

- Restoration of the riparian corridor
- Enhancement of 2,200 feet of the existing channel located downstream of Jurupa Avenue
- Construction of woody material structures every 200 feet of the Lower Hole Creek channel
- Re-establishment of 1 acre of new floodplain along the channel
- Stabilization of the Lower Hole Creek channel banks
- Restoration of the tributary east of Lower Hole Creek channel
- Narrowing of the Lower Hole Creek channel and creation of a terrace at the downstream end of the channel
- Control of invasive wildlife species within the restoration site
- Control of human disturbance within the restoration site

## 1.5.4 Hidden Valley Creek

The Hidden Valley Creek site currently has limited ecological value due to human disturbance, invasive species, and the absence of a perennial water source. However, Hidden Valley Creek provides an opportunity for a restored site that would contribute to increased ecosystem functions and benefits to endangered and/or threatened species and aquatic resources. Site restoration would occur primarily through restoration of the existing canal so that it may support Santa Ana sucker habitat. Control of invasive wildlife species and control of human disturbance would also contribute to site restoration. A description of the individual restoration measures is provided below.

- Restoration of the existing canal within the restoration site so that it serves as a floodplain tributary that supports Santa Ana sucker habitat through the following measures:
  - Restoration of channel structural complexity
  - Restoration of hydrology to floodplain channel
  - Enhancement of native riparian vegetation
  - Placement of woody material structures every 200 feet of the channel
  - Enhancement of floodplain habitat through removal of existing nonnative species and revegetation
  - Providing a perennial water source
  - Control of invasive wildlife species within the restoration site
  - Control of human disturbance within the restoration site

## 1.6 Potential Environmental Effects

The proposed project has been found to have potentially significant environmental effects in the following areas, which will be further analyzed in the EIR.

- Agricultural and Forestry Resources
- Air quality
- Biological resources
- Cultural resources/Tribal cultural resources
- Geology, Soils and Paleontological Resources
- Greenhouse Gas Emissions
- Hazards and Hazardous Materials
- Hydrology/Water quality
- Land Use and Planning
- Noise
- Population and Housing
- Public Services

- Recreation
- Utilities/Service Systems

## 1.7 Scoping Meeting and Comments

The Valley District will be holding a scoping meeting to obtain public input regarding environmental issues related to the project. The scoping meeting will be held at the following location:


Date: July 18, 2018  
Time: 3:30 p.m.—5:30 p.m.  
Location: San Bernardino Valley Municipal Water District  
380 East Vanderbilt Way  
San Bernardino, California, 92408

This NOP and associated IS are available for review on the Valley District's website:  
<http://www.sbvmd.com/Upper-SAR-Restoration>.

All comments or other responses to this notice must be submitted in writing by August 9, 2018 to:

Heather Dyer, Water Resources Project Manager  
San Bernardino Valley Municipal Water District  
380 East Vanderbilt Way  
San Bernardino, CA 92408  
Email: [comments@sbvmd.com](mailto:comments@sbvmd.com)

Date: July 6, 2018

Signature:   
Title: Water Resources Project Manager  
Telephone: (909) 387-9256

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