



# SECTION 1.0 INTRODUCTION

This document is an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the construction of a 2.34-mile-long, 18-inch-diameter, water main pipeline, to provide water service to existing residences and businesses in the service area, and for proposed new housing developments on Vasquez Canyon Road in the Santa Clarita Valley of Los Angeles County, California (hereafter referred to as the “Vasquez Water Main Project”). Project background, as well as the legal basis for preparing this EIR, is described below.

## 1.1 PURPOSE AND LEGAL AUTHORITY

This EIR has been prepared in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), and the *State CEQA Guidelines*. In accordance with Section 15121(a) of the *State CEQA Guidelines*, the purpose of this EIR is to serve as an informational document that:

*“...will inform public agency decision-makers and the public generally of the significant environmental effect of a project, identify possible ways to minimize the significant effects, and describe reasonable alternatives to the project...”*

This EIR is prepared as a *Project EIR* pursuant to Section 15161 of the *State CEQA Guidelines*, which analyzes the impacts of an individual activity or specific project. As stated in the *State CEQA Guidelines*:

*“...This type of EIR should focus primarily on the changes in the environment that would result from the development project. The EIR shall examine all phases of the project including planning, construction, and operation.”*

The purpose of this report is to serve as an informational document for the public and Newhall County Water District (NCWD) decisionmakers. The process will culminate with a NCWD public hearing to consider certification of a Final EIR and a decision whether to approve the proposed project, possibly with conditions of approval.

## 1.2 SCOPE AND CONTENT

In accordance with the *State CEQA Guidelines*, an Initial Study was prepared for the project, and a Notice of Preparation (NOP) was distributed for review by affected agencies and the public. The NOP and public comments to the NOP are presented as Appendix A at the end of this report. The Initial Study is presented as Appendix B. This EIR addresses the issues determined to be potentially significant by the Initial Study, responses to the NOP, and scoping discussions among the public, consulting staff, and NCWD. The issues addressed include:

- Aesthetics
- Agriculture Resources
- Air Quality
- Biological Resources
- Cultural Resources
- Geology and Soils
- Hazards and Hazardous Materials
- Hydrology and Water Quality
- Land Use and Planning
- Mineral Resources
- Noise
- Population and Housing
- Public Services
- Transportation/Traffic
- Utilities and Service Systems

This EIR addresses the issues referenced above and identifies potentially significant environmental impacts, including site-specific and cumulative effects of the project, in accordance with the provisions set forth in the





*State CEQA Guidelines.* In addition, this EIR recommends feasible mitigation measures, where possible, that would reduce or eliminate adverse environmental effects. Several pertinent sources were used in preparing the EIR, such as County policies and guidelines, existing EIR's, and background documents prepared by NCWD. A complete list of references cited is contained in Section 9.0 (Citations) of this EIR.

The Alternatives Section of this EIR was prepared in accordance with Section 15126(d) of the *State CEQA Guidelines* and focuses on alternatives that are capable of eliminating or reducing significant adverse effects associated with the project, while feasibly attaining most of the basic objectives of the project. In addition, this EIR identifies the "environmentally superior" alternative from the alternatives assessed. Therefore, the alternatives evaluated include the CEQA-required No Project Alternative, two modified project alternatives (Reduce Pipeline Size Alternative and Creek Avoidance Alternative), and the Environmentally Superior Alternative.

The level of detail contained throughout this EIR is consistent with the requirements of CEQA and applicable court decisions. The *State CEQA Guidelines* provide the standard of adequacy on which this document is based, which state:

*"An EIR should be prepared with a sufficient degree of analysis to provide decision-makers with information which [sic] enables them to make a decision which [sic] intelligently takes account of environmental consequences. An evaluation of the environmental effects of a proposed project need not be exhaustive, but the sufficiency of an EIR is to be reviewed in the light of what is reasonably feasible. Disagreement amongst experts dose not make an EIR inadequate, but the EIR should summarize the main points of disagreement among the experts. The courts have looked not for perfection but for adequacy, completeness, and a good faith effort at full disclosure."*

### 1.3 LEAD, RESPONSIBLE, AND TRUSTEE AGENCIES

The *State CEQA Guidelines* define "lead", "responsible", and "trustee" agencies. The NCWD is the Lead Agency for the project since it has the principal responsibility for carrying out or approving the project and preparing CEQA documents.

A Responsible Agency must actively participate in the Lead Agency's CEQA process, review the Lead Agency's CEQA document, and use the Lead Agency's CEQA document when making a decision on the project. The Department of Health Services (DHS), Division of Drinking Water and Environmental Management is a Responsible Agency, pursuant to CEQA, since they are responsible for issuing water supply permits under the Safe Drinking Water Program. DHS will need to issue a new or amended water supply permit for the operation of the public water system. DHS will need to consider an environmental document when deciding whether to permit the new facilities. The NCWD is also a Responsible Agency, since they share the responsibility for carrying out and approving the project.

A Trustee Agency refers to a state agency having jurisdiction by law over certain resources held in trust for the people of California (natural resources affected by the project). The California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) has jurisdiction over biological resources, including wetlands that may be impacted by the project development. CDFG is, therefore, a Trustee Agency.

### 1.4 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REVIEW PROCESS

The environmental impact review process, as required under CEQA, is outlined below in sequential order:

- 1. Notice of Preparation Distributed.** Immediately after deciding that an EIR is required, the Lead Agency must file an NOP soliciting input on the EIR scope to Responsible, Trustee, and involved federal agencies; to the State Clearinghouse, if one or more state agencies is a Responsible or Trustee Agency; and to parties



previously requesting notice in writing (*State CEQA Guidelines* Section 15082; Public Resources Code Section 21092.2).

2. **Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) Prepared.** The DEIR must contain: (a) table of contents or index; (b) summary; (c) project description; (d) environmental setting; (e) significant impacts, including direct, indirect, cumulative, growth-inducing, and unavoidable impacts; (f) alternatives; (g) mitigation measures; and (h) irreversible changes.
3. **Public Notice and Review.** A Lead Agency must prepare a Public Notice of Availability of an EIR. The Notice must be placed in the County Clerk's office for 30 days (Public Resources Code Section 21092.2). The Lead Agency must send a copy of its Notice to anyone requesting it (*State CEQA Guidelines* Section 15087). In addition, public notice of DEIR availability must be given through at least one of the following procedures: (a) publication in a newspaper of general circulation; (b) posting on and off the project site; and/or (c) direct mailing to owners and occupants of contiguous properties. The Lead Agency must consult with, and request comments on, the DEIR from Responsible and Trustee Agencies, and adjacent cities or counties (Public Resources Code Sections 21104 and 21253). The minimum public review period for the DEIR is 30 days. When a DEIR is sent to the State Clearinghouse for review, the public review period must be 45 days, unless a shorter period is approved by the Clearinghouse (Public Resources Code Section 21091). Distribution of the DEIR may be required through the State Clearinghouse (*State CEQA Guidelines* Section 15305).
4. **Notice of Completion.** The Lead Agency must file a Notice of Completion with the State Clearinghouse as soon as it completes a DEIR.
5. **Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR).** An FEIR must include the following: (a) the DEIR; (b) copies of comments received during public review; (c) list of persons and entities commenting; and (d) responses to comments.
6. **Certification of FEIR.** The Lead Agency shall certify: (a) the FEIR has been completed in compliance with CEQA; (b) the FEIR was presented to the decisionmaking body of the Lead Agency; and (c) the decisionmaking body reviewed and considered the information in the FEIR prior to approving the project (*State CEQA Guidelines* Section 15090).
7. **Lead Agency Project Decision.** A Lead Agency may: (a) disapprove a project because of its significant environmental effects; (b) require changes to a project to reduce or avoid significant environmental effects; or (c) approve a project despite its significant environmental effects, if the proper findings and Statement of Overriding Considerations are adopted (*State CEQA Guidelines* Sections 15042 and 15043).
8. **Findings/Statement of Overriding Considerations.** For each significant impact of the project identified in the EIR, the Lead or Responsible Agency must find, based on substantial evidence, that either: (a) the project has been changed to avoid or substantially reduce the magnitude of the impact; (b) changes to the project are within another agency's jurisdiction, and such changes have been or should be adopted; or (c) specific economic, social, or other considerations make the mitigation measures or project alternatives infeasible (*State CEQA Guidelines* Section 15091). If an agency approves a project with unavoidable significant environmental effects, it must prepare a written Statement of Overriding Considerations that set forth the specific social, economic, or other reason supporting the agency's decision.
9. **Mitigation Monitoring/Reporting Program.** When an agency makes findings on significant effects identified in the EIR, it must adopt a reporting or monitoring program for mitigation measures that were adopted or made conditions of project approval to mitigate significant effects.
10. **Notice of Determination.** An agency must file a Notice of Determination after deciding to approve a project for which an EIR is prepared (*State CEQA Guidelines* Section 15094). A local agency must file the Notice with the County Clerk. The Notice must be posted for 30 days and sent to anyone previously requesting notice. Posting of the Notice starts a 30-day statute of limitations on CEQA challenges (Public Resources Code Section 21167[c]).

