

NOTICE OF PREPARATION/SCOPING ANNOUNCEMENT

Responsible Agencies, Review Agencies, and Interested Parties:

The Big Bear Area Regional Wastewater Agency (BBARWA or Agency) proposes to adopt and implement a Recycled Water Master Plan, including a specific program of groundwater recharge using recycled water at the Greenspot site in the Big Bear Valley. To evaluate the potential significant environmental impacts that may result from implementing the proposed Master Plan and the specific improvements outlined below, the Agency intends to prepare an environmental impact report in accordance with Section 15060 of the State CEQA Guidelines which states: *“If the lead agency can determine that an EIR will be clearly required for a project, the agency may skip further initial review of the project and begin work directly on the EIR process...”* BBARWA has concluded that an EIR will be required and it will serve as the Lead Agency for compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) based on its responsibility for funding the proposed recycled water infrastructure improvements and for implementing the Master Plan, assuming it is adopted.

This transmittal constitutes a Notice of Preparation (NOP) for the preparation of an EIR on the proposed project and serves as a request for environmental information that you or your organization believes should be addressed in the proposed environmental document. A general summary of the proposed recycled water system infrastructure improvements and the potential recycled water uses are provided below for your review to assist you in focusing comments on the scope and significance of environmental impacts to be addressed in the EIR. In addition to any general comments regarding issues or concerns about this project, please be sure to address the specific scope and content of environmental information or issues that relate to your agency’s statutory responsibilities in connection with this proposed project. Also, in response to this NOP, you are requested to advise BBARWA of the applicable permits and environmental review requirements of your agency, and the scope and content of the environmental information that is germane to your agency’s statutory responsibilities with regard to the proposed project.

The purpose of this NOP is to fulfill legal notification requirements and inform the public and CEQA Responsible and Trustee Agencies that an EIR is being prepared. This NOP solicits Agency and interested party concerns regarding the potential environmental effects of approving and then implementing the proposed Recycled Water Master Plan. CEQA encourages early consultation with private persons and organizations that may have information regarding or may be concerned with any potential adverse environmental effects related to physical changes in the environment that may be caused by implementing the project.

Responses to the NOP that specifically focus on potentially significant environmental issues regarding use of recycled water within the Big Bear Valley are of particular interest to BBARWA. All written or electronic responses to this NOP will be included in the appendices to the EIR. The content of the responses will help guide the focus and scope of the EIR in accordance with State CEQA Guidelines.

Project Title: Recycled Water Master Plan for the Big Bear Valley

Project Proponent/Lead Agency: Big Bear Area Regional Wastewater Agency

Project Location

The project area is located in the central portion of the San Bernardino Mountains. The treatment plant is located in the eastern portion of the Big Bear Valley, adjacent to and south of Baldwin Lake. Future recycled water use sites are located throughout the Valley. The attached figure shows the regional and area location. The Big Bear Valley is located on a portion of four USGS topographic Maps: Big Bear Lake, Moonridge, Fawnskin and Big Bear City. Most of the Big Bear Valley is located within T2N and R1W/R2W, San Bernardino Meridian.

Summary Project Description

The Recycled Water Master Plan Project consists of five components.

1. The first component of the project was identification of potential recycled water users. Many future potential uses for recycled water have been identified in the Draft Final Master Plan, but the specific uses that will actually be served cannot be defined at this time, except for groundwater recharge in the Greenspot area. The range of proposed recycled water uses includes: landscape irrigation; habitat enhancement; surface impoundment; industrial and commercial uses; and artificial groundwater recharge.
2. The second component of the project is the creation of the recycled water supply. This entails modifications to the existing secondary wastewater treatment facility to provide adequate treatment to meet the Title 22 water quality standards, and any other water quality standards required to support permitting the recycled water use. The proposed upgrades to the existing facility include: microfiltration unit; reverse osmosis unit; brine handling facility, including an evaporation pond; an ultraviolet disinfection unit; and reclaimed water pump station. These facilities are proposed to be installed at the existing wastewater treatment plant location. The proposal at this time is to install these facilities in modular 500 acre-feet per year phases, allowing an initial capacity of 1,000 acre-feet per year and up to a maximum of 2,000 acre-feet per year capacity. This will allow staging the treatment facility installation and spreading the cost expenditures over time.
3. The third component of the recycled water project is the installation of the transmission facilities required to distribute the recycled water to the point of use, and to install the facilities, such as the percolation basins, required to support the proposed recycled water use. The Recycled Water Master Plan identifies up to 34 miles of recycled water pipelines (mostly in existing disturbed road rights-of-way); 1.2 million gallons of storage; about 520 horsepower of pumping capacity; and up to 1,500 acre-feet per year of artificial recycled water recharge capacity, which will require installation of artificial surface recharge basins (percolation ponds).
4. The means to deliver an initial 1,000 acre-feet per year of recycled water to users (including the recharge site in Greenspot) in the Agency's service area, with a maximum design capacity of 2,000 acre-feet per year of recycled water being made available to future recycled water consumers.

5. A reduction in wastewater deliveries to Lucerne Valley by up to 2,000 acre-feet per year in accordance with full implementation of the Recycled Water Master Plan.

Primary Environmental Issues of Concern

The Agency proposes to evaluate all of the standard Initial Study issues in the EIR that will be prepared for this project. The following issues have been identified as having the greatest potential for significant environmental impact if the project is implemented as proposed.

1. Air Quality: The proposed project will result in an increase in energy consumption by the Agency, and resulting energy consumption emissions will be evaluated in the EIR. Construction emissions may exceed local thresholds of significance. Emissions from project-related construction activities will be quantified and the potential for significant impacts from these emissions will be evaluated.
2. Biological Resources: Significant biological resources occur at certain locations where new recycled water infrastructure facilities will be installed. These include potential significant effects on aquatic resources; riparian/wetland resources; jurisdictional waters; and listed species. All of these issues will be evaluated in the EIR.
3. Cultural Resources: Important cultural resources, primarily historical and archaeological, are known to occur in the Big Bear Valley. A general cultural resources evaluation will be incorporated to address the overall Master Plan implementation, and detailed, specific evaluation will be performed for the first phase Master Plan facilities. Cultural resources within the defined area of potential effect (APE) will be fully evaluated for significant effects in the EIR.
4. Hydrology/Water Quality: The hydrology/water quality evaluation will examine the proposed project's potential significant impacts to groundwater, local drainage systems and to water quality, both during and after construction.
5. Land Use/Planning: Concerns have been identified regarding potential for land use compatibility impacts at the location of proposed facilities and the potential for growth inducement. These issues will be examined in detail in the EIR.
6. Noise: The short-term, construction noise environment adjacent to new Master Plan facilities will be modified. The potential for significant noise impacts, during both construction and operation will be examined in detail in the EIR.

All other environmental issues (Aesthetics, Agricultural Resources, Geology/Soils, Hazards & Hazardous Materials, Mineral Resources, Population/Housing, Public Services, Recreation, Transportation/Traffic, and Utilities/Service Systems) will be given full consideration in the EIR being prepared for this project, but at this preliminary stage of review no specific significant environmental impacts have been identified. Information regarding the potential for significant impact to these issues is of particular interest to the Agency.

Alternatives

The EIR will examine the environmental effects of not approving and implementing the proposed Recycled Water Master Plan. Since federal funding may be utilized to support this project, two additional alternatives will be examined. Another alternative is a Master Plan that establishes a lower maximum volume of recycled water use in Big Bear Valley. The only other alternative(s) being considered at this time would be relocation of some recycled water infrastructure facilities to avoid potentially significant effects on biological or cultural resources. Comments and/or suggestions regarding the project alternatives is encouraged by the Agency.

Comment Period

Based on the time limits defined by CEQA, your response should be sent at the earliest possible date, but no later than 30 days from receipt of this notice. The actual comment period will extend from April 20, 2005 to May 20, 2005. All comments and question should be directed to:

Big Bear Area Regional Wastewater Agency
Attention: Mr. Steve Schindler
121 Palomino Drive
P.O. Box 517
Big Bear City, California 92314

Scoping Meeting

To ensure that interested parties and agencies within Big Bear Valley have an opportunity to effectively participate in the CEQA review process for this project, the Agency intends to conduct a scoping meeting during the NOP review period that will be open to the public. Public notice of this meeting will be published in newspapers of general circulation in the local area to ensure that members of the public are informed of these meetings. The following scoping meeting will be held:

1. Location: Big Bear City
Date: May 10, 2005
Time: 5:30 p.m.
Location: BBARWA Board Room, 121 Palomino Drive

This scoping meeting will be conducted in the following manner to maximize input from the interested parties and agencies attending the meeting. A short presentation of the proposed Recycled Water Master Plan will be provided by the Agency and consulting team to start the meeting. Then, a moderator will open the scoping meeting and take comments/questions from meeting attendees. Comments will be recorded and all comments will be included in the EIR Appendices with responses directing the commentor to the portion of the EIR text that addresses the comment. The engineering consultants will be at the meeting to respond to technical or engineering questions regarding the project. The names of individuals or agencies that wish to receive copies of the Draft EIR for public comment will be compiled prior to the end of the meeting.

Thank you in advance for any comments you may submit in response to this NOP. For agencies, please include the name of a contact person in your agency if you submit comments. If you have any questions, please contact Mr. Steve Schindler at (909) 585-4018.

Steven C. Schindler
General Manager