



Notice of Intent to Adopt

Initial Study and Negative Declaration of Environmental Impact for the Zones 2A and 3A Natural Channels Maintenance Project

Public Review: December 23, 2015 to January 27, 2016

INTRODUCTION

The Sonoma County Water Agency (Water Agency) is the Lead Agency under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) for the proposed **Zones 2A and 3A Natural Channels Maintenance Project** (Project). The Water Agency has prepared an Initial Study and Negative Declaration (IS/ND) for the project in accordance with CEQA and the Water Agency's Implementation Procedures for CEQA. An electronic copy of the IS/ND is available at www.sonomacountywater.org/stream-maintenance-program/. Hard copies of the IS/ND are available for purchase by request at (707) 547-1900 or at the Water Agency's administrative office (404 Aviation Boulevard, Santa Rosa). Hard copies are also available for public viewing at the following locations:

- **Petaluma Regional Library:** 100 Fairgrounds Drive, Petaluma
- **Sonoma Valley Regional Library:** 755 West Napa Street, Sonoma
- **Sonoma County Water Agency's:** 404 Aviation Boulevard, Santa Rosa

An Initial Study is a preliminary analysis of a project's potential environmental impacts used to determine whether a Negative Declaration or an Environmental Impact Report will be prepared. The Initial Study document is intended to provide a clear understanding of the environmental impacts associated with the construction and operation of the proposed project for decision-makers, responsible and trustee agencies under CEQA, and the public. If an Initial Study identifies potentially significant impacts but the project is modified or revised to clearly mitigate the impacts, a Mitigated Negative Declaration may be prepared. If an Initial Study concludes that a project may have a significant effect on the environment, an Environmental Impact Report should be prepared.

PROJECT LOCATION

The Project is located in two flood control zones that encompass natural streams in the Petaluma Valley and upper Sonoma Valley watersheds, in southern Sonoma County, California (see map below).

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The proposed Project would implement small-scale flood control maintenance activities primarily on properties under private ownership in the Petaluma and upper Sonoma Creek watersheds. Most maintenance would be preventative actions to reduce flood risk and avoid bank erosion or other environmental damage. Maintenance work would typically occur at the request of a landowner who has observed a hydraulic blockage that is causing (or likely to cause) bank erosion. The Water Agency would then evaluate the site and determine if maintenance is needed and could be completed under the scope of the proposed Project. Projects not considered suitable candidates include, but are not limited to, instream sediment removal, bank armament using riprap, and any project with significant and unavoidable impacts to threatened and endangered species.

It is anticipated that approximately five to ten vegetation maintenance projects and two to three erosion protection projects would be conducted annually. Each erosion protection project would be limited to 10 cubic yards of excavated material and to a linear stream bank length of 200 feet. Vegetation removal along banks would not exceed 100 contiguous feet. Although the exact number of maintenance activities is dependent on requests from the public, the Project includes an upper limit of 100 cubic yards of material removed along up to 3,000 feet of stream bank per five-year maintenance period. There would be no limit on the number of trash debris removal events. The two categories of maintenance activities are described below.

Vegetation Management

Vegetation management activities would be conducted to maintain flow conveyance and capacity, establish a canopy of riparian trees by selectively retaining native tree species, trimming lower branches, and controlling invasive vegetation. Mature native trees would not be removed, but may be pruned to prevent bank damage from an unstable tree or a branch that could cause flood damage. Trash and vegetative materials that could cause flood damage (mattresses, tires, appliances, etc.) would be removed. Vegetation management would be conducted primarily using hand tools. Heavy equipment may be needed to remove large debris. Depending on the specific project needs, vegetation management may also consist of habitat enhancement activities including planting of native trees, shrubs, and in-stream grasses and sedges.

Erosion Protection

When possible, bank stabilization would be conducted in a preventative manner by planting exposed banks with appropriate native species that would enhance riparian and aquatic habitats. Biotechnical erosion controls may be used, if needed. This could include biodegradable erosion control fabric with coir logs, brush mattresses, willow stakes, and willow walls. Rock riprap and other hardscape elements would not be used. Most biotechnical work would be conducted using hand tools and is expected to be small in scale and require limited excavation or grading. Minor bank grading with mechanical equipment may be used when installing willow walls, mattresses,

or other biotechnical remediation. Trucks and other heavy equipment may be used at the top of bank; however, no in-stream work with heavy equipment would be permitted. A typical erosion protection action may consist of installing a willow wall along 100 feet of unstable bank requiring three cubic yards of grading and trenching, seeding or planting with native wetland and transitional species, and covering barren areas with coconut fiber fabric.

INITIAL STUDY REVIEW

Agencies and interested members of the public are invited to review and comment on the IS/ND. Please include a name, address, and telephone number of a contact person in your agency for all future correspondence on this subject.

Please send your comments to:

David Cook
Sonoma County Water Agency
404 Aviation Blvd.
Santa Rosa, CA 95403

Or email your comments to:

dcook@scwa.ca.gov

The public comment period closes at 5:00 p.m. **January 27, 2016.**

ADOPTION OF THE INITIAL STUDY AND NEGATIVE DECLARATION

The project is scheduled for consideration and adoption by the Water Agency's Board of Directors at their regularly scheduled Board meeting beginning at 8:30 a.m. on **February 9, 2016**. Comments submitted during the Initial Study review period will be included in our report to the Board of Directors. Opportunity to comment on the project will also be available at the Board meeting.