

DEPARTMENT OF WATER RESOURCES

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U.S. BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
HOLLISTER, CA 95023

March 3, 2010

Bureau of Land Management
Attn: CCMA RMP/EIS
20 Hamilton Court
Hollister, California 95023

Comments on the Resource Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement of the Bureau of Land Management for the Clear Creek Management Area

The California Department of Water Resources (DWR) has reviewed the Draft Resource Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement (RMP/EIS) for the Clear Creek Management Area.

The U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is proposing to increase the recreational activities of the Clear Creek Management Area (CCMA) which was closed to the public in May 2008 after the Environmental Protection Agency released a report that concluded public land use activities could expose individuals to excess cancer risk associated with exposure to airborne asbestos fibers. As a State Agency with lands and facilities that may be affected by the change in land use in the CCMA, we have reviewed this plan from a flood and sediment management perspective, with special attention on the potential effects on water quality and increased sedimentation to the ponding basin along the California Aqueduct. During our review, several questions or issues were raised:

- The RMP/EIS does not describe the impact of increased activities in the CCMA on floodwater runoff, sediment transport, and suspended asbestos fibers in the creeks that drain the CCMA.
- The RMP/EIS does not describe the impact of increased activities in the CCMA on the operation and maintenance activities in the ponding basin at the California Aqueduct.

The CCMA is located in San Benito and Fresno Counties in Central California. It includes part of the New Idria Formation, a serpentinite rock body that contains the largest asbestos deposit in the country. This area is part of the Arroyo Pasajero watershed which ultimately drains into the ponding basin along the California Aqueduct. Asbestos is a known carcinogen according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the CCMA is part of the Atlas Asbestos Mine Superfund Site. It should be noted that an overwhelmingly vast majority of the asbestos fibers contained in sediments from this area are from naturally occurring outcrops and not the superfund sites; these superfund sites encompass approximately 1,300 acres or about 4 percent

of the total exposed asbestos-bearing serpentinite body.¹ DWR and Reclamation owns, operates, and maintains the ponding basin as part of the California Aqueduct which serves 25 million people in Southern California and hundreds of thousands of acres of farmland in the San Joaquin Valley. DWR cannot support any increased recreational activity in the CCMA because it will likely increase sedimentation into the Arroyo Pasajero Ponding Basin including sediments containing naturally occurring asbestos fibers sourced from the New Idria Serpentinite outcrop within the CCMA and therefore could potentially affect our operations and maintenance activities in the basin. These activities include maintenance of a channel in the Arroyo Pasajero to guide its flows into the ponding basin to reduce flooding along Lassen Avenue and the town of Huron.

The watershed is drained by several streams that drain into Los Gatos Creek, which in turn drains into the Arroyo Pasajero ponding basin managed by DWR. Historical flood events have brought a significant amount of floodwaters and asbestos-laden sediments into the ponding basin at the California Aqueduct. Many of these flood events cause significant damage to roads and surrounding farmlands and can be a threat to the aqueduct. DWR is concerned that any increased activity in the CCMA would increase sediment loads and naturally occurring asbestos concentrations in floodwaters, potentially reducing the ability to effectively operate the ponding basin during flood events and send floodwaters into the aqueduct. We are further concerned that these increased sediment loads would reduce the storage capacity of the basin and reduce the flood protection that the basin provides to surrounding farmlands and State and federal water users who depend on the high quality deliveries from the California Aqueduct. In 2005, DWR and Reclamation spent over \$16 million to restore storage in the basin. Increased sediment deposition in the basin will require DWR to conduct this work more often at a further cost to water users.

DWR is also concerned that any increased activity within the CCMA could potentially further restrict maintenance activities of DWR and Reclamation in managing the ponding basin at the California Aqueduct. In coordination with EPA due to the Superfund sites that formerly existed on the Los Gatos Creek drainage of the New Idria Serpentinite outcrop, DWR and Reclamation have significantly restricted the activities in the ponding basin to ensure that the basin is managed to reduce airborne asbestos and the inflow of floodwaters into the California Aqueduct that may contain asbestos. EPA continues to make certain that DWR's and Reclamation's maintenance activities in the ponding basin reasonably reduce the amount of airborne and waterborne asbestos.

Several studies have documented the flood-sediment-asbestos problems within the Arroyo Pasajero watershed and ponding basin. These studies show that prudent watershed management is necessary to reduce the magnitude of floods and transported sediments and asbestos from flood runoff. The Coordinated Resource and

¹ Coleman, R G., 1995, New Idria serpentinite a land management dilemma, California: Department of Geology, Stanford University, Stanford, CA 94305, 17 p.

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Management Planning (CRMP) groups formed in the watershed have worked hard to inform landowners that responsible watershed management is necessary to reduce floods and preserve the water quality in the watershed. DWR, Reclamation, and BLM have all participated in the CRMPs and we should also ensure that our activities are also protecting the valuable resources in the area.

DWR would be glad to discuss these issues further and provide any information that would assist in your evaluation of developing an acceptable management plan for the CCMA area. If you have any questions in this regard, please call me at (916) 653-6271.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Teodoro Z. Alvarez". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being the most prominent.

Teodoro Z. Alvarez
Arroyo Pasajero Program Manager