



MWD

METROPOLITAN WATER DISTRICT OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

Doreen E. Duff 9-10
Executive Secretary

February 4, 1992

To: Board of Directors (Engineering & Operations Committee--Information)
(Land Committee--Information)

From: General Manager

Subject: Endangered Species Mitigation Implementation for the Eastside
Reservoir Project

Report

On October 9, 1991, your Board certified the Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR) for the Eastside Reservoir Project. The FEIR identified measures to provide biological habitat and endangered species (Stephens' kangaroo rat) mitigation for the Domenigoni Valley Reservoir site through acquisition and management of the Santa Rosa Plateau and Shipley Ranch Reserve. These mitigation measures are now complete and mitigation credit has been received for impacts to these habitats and endangered species.

The FEIR also identified impacts to eight sensitive (but not listed) plant and animal species within the 2,504-acre zone of impact to habitats at the Domenigoni Valley Reservoir site, including impacts to 543 acres of suitable California gnatcatcher habitat. This species is very likely to be listed as endangered within the next year. The listing of any of the sensitive species prior to or during construction could stop construction or reservoir filling until an acceptable conservation plan was developed with federal and state resource agencies. These eight species include birds (California gnatcatcher, Bell's sage sparrow, and rufous crowned sparrow), lizards (orange-throated whiptail and San Diego horned lizard), and plants (smooth tarplant, Parry's spineflower, and Payson's jewelflower). An additional sensitive plant species, San Jacinto saltbush, is found along the pipeline alignment between Domenigoni Valley and the head of the San Diego Canal. Where avoidance of this plant cannot be accomplished, additional mitigation measures may be required beyond those discussed herein.

Metropolitan is pursuing pre-listing agreements with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the California Department of Fish and Game, whereby advance credit would be received for any sensitive species at the reservoir site that could

potentially be listed as endangered during the life of the project. These agreements are intended to provide Metropolitan the maximum assurance possible under the endangered species laws that incidental "take" of species can occur should they become listed. However, it is not totally certain that all endangered species issues will be resolved through these agreements.

The pre-listing agreements would involve the placement of conservation easements over approximately 5,500 acres of properties currently owned or to be purchased by Metropolitan at the Domenigoni, Shipley Reserve, and Lake Skinner areas. These are similar habitats to those where the above sensitive species have been identified at the Domenigoni site. The resource agencies have concurred that this action, and associated management planning and habitat restoration, would provide suitable mitigation for impacts should the species be listed at a future date. All conservation easement areas would be outside of operations and recreational areas required for the project. No additional lands are proposed for acquisition for mitigation purposes.

As a part of its plan to pre-mitigate for impacts to these sensitive species, Metropolitan must propose acceptable pre-listing habitat conservation and management plans for the 5,500 acres to be placed under conservation easement. To prepare these plans, Metropolitan must conduct field studies on the area to be reserved, leading to a better understanding of the management issues and problems which will be encountered in operation of the reserve. In addition, there is a need to restore and enhance about 320 acres of previously occupied but currently degraded sage scrub habitat on the site.

To implement the above endangered species mitigation program, staff has recently contracted with a qualified biological-ornithological firm to oversee the required management studies and the revegetation effort. In addition, staff has contracted with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to provide field biological survey support of California gnatcatcher for the management planning effort. Scientists with the University of California, Riverside, will be retained to conduct studies of microclimate and insects pertinent to management of these sensitive species. Botanists will be contracted to oversee relocation and enhancement of rare plant populations. Revegetation experts will be retained to aid planning and revegetation for the 320-acre habitat restoration area.

This pre-listing endangered species program is estimated to cost \$7.9 million over the next two years, and to total to no more than \$14 million through reservoir construction

and initial filling, a period of approximately 12 years. The cost of this endangered species mitigation program was included in the Capital Improvement Program Deferral budget presented to your Board in December 1991. Implementation of this program is essential to maintaining project cost and construction schedule.

Board Committee Assignments

This letter was referred to the Engineering and Operations Committee for information because of its interest in initiation, scheduling, and contracting for construction programs pursuant to Section 2431(b).

This letter was referred to the Land Committee for information because of its interest in policies for the acquisition of rights-of-way pursuant to Section 2451(a).

Recommendation

For information only.


Carl Boronkay

DGM-KMK/dgs