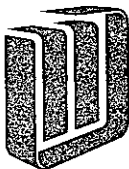


FILED by order
of the Board of Directors of
The Metropolitan Water District
of Southern California
at its meeting held JUN - 9 1992

9-14

**MWD**

METROPOLITAN WATER DISTRICT OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

Baron E. Doff
Executive Secretary

May 18, 1992

To: Board of Directors (Water Problems Committee--Information)
From: General Manager
Subject: Ward Valley Low Level Radioactive Waste Site

Report

Federal law requires States to establish adequate disposal capacity to manage the nation's commercial low-level radioactive waste. Federal law further provides that States that have not made arrangements for disposal of their own waste can be denied access to the three existing sites in the nation. State law requires that a disposal facility be built within the State and directs that a private company be selected as licensee-designee to locate, develop, and operate the facility subject to regulation by the California Department of Health Services. The Southwestern Low-Level Radioactive Waste Disposal Compact obligates California to develop a low-level radioactive waste facility to serve the four member States--California, Arizona, North Dakota, and South Dakota.

A site in Ward Valley, near Needles, California, has been proposed as the location for the low level radioactive waste storage facility. A site location map is attached. Low level radioactive waste material from medical and pharmaceutical facilities, academic institutions, government, and industry would be stored on site, as well as contaminated equipment and by-products from nuclear power plants. The radioactive materials would be stored in containers in five trenches and covered with a 20-foot layer of soil at this 70-acre desert site. The site is located on Federal land adjacent to Metropolitan's 230 kilovolt Iron Mountain to Camino Substation transmission line. Access to the site from Interstate Highway 40 would be via right-of-way on which Metropolitan has an easement from the Federal Government for its transmission line road. The access road would be paved. Metropolitan's use of the road would not be adversely impacted by the proposed project. In addition, Metropolitan would be indemnified by the project operator against any damages resulting from or assignable to the project.

A final Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement (EIR/EIS) on the project has been prepared by the firm of Dames and Moore for the California Department of Health Services and the U.S. Bureau of Land Management. During and following the public review of the draft EIR/EIS, a number of groups have voiced opposition to this project, including the "Committee to Bridge the Gap", the City of Needles, various legislators, and in an editorial in the Los Angeles Times. This opposition is based partially on concerns that the EIR/EIS inadequately addressed the possibility of leakage from the site.

Metropolitan's staff has reviewed the final EIR/EIS for the Ward Valley Low Level Radioactive Waste Facility and a report prepared by the Committee to Bridge the Gap. Based on the information presented in the EIR/EIS, the following two findings can be made:

(1) It is not credible that the project will impact the quality of Metropolitan's Colorado River water. Surface water runoff from the Ward Valley drains into Danby Lake. The EIR/EIS indicates that no impact to groundwater would occur under the expected site and facility operational conditions, as no transport of radionuclides would occur through the 590 feet of unsaturated soil beneath the bottom of the trench. Groundwater, which is at least 650 feet below the site, flows southeastward toward Danby Lake. Deposits at Danby Lake indicate that there is significant evaporation of the groundwater occurring. Also, monitoring is being proposed that would warn of unexpected migration of radionuclides. Monitoring would provide for investigation, actions, and reporting in time for mitigation to occur so that no event would result in any significant dose or exceedance of a regulatory limit. A number of hypothetical radiation release scenarios were evaluated in the EIR/EIS, including the drilling of a well at the boundary of the site and the consumption of water from a well. With unexpected migration of radionuclides to groundwater, projected maximum doses would be well below specified regulatory limits. Furthermore, groundwater in the area moves very slowly, and it would take thousands of years to reach the Colorado River if groundwater from beneath the site migrated to the River.

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(2) The groundwater basin beneath Ward Valley has minimal potential for future conjunctive use. This is because of high total dissolved solids concentrations in the groundwater.

These findings do not imply that Metropolitan should support or oppose this project. They indicate that, based on the information presented in the EIR/EIS, the potential for the Ward Valley project to adversely impact the quality of Metropolitan's Colorado River supply is very remote. The conclusions could change if information presented in the EIR/EIS is proved by project opponents to be faulty or inadequate. However, at this time, there is no reason to believe the information in the EIR/EIS is faulty or inadequate. Use of Metropolitan's easement is not expected to unreasonably interfere with Metropolitan's uses. Metropolitan would not execute a Consent to Facility Access Route until after the final EIR/EIS is certified. A State adjudicatory hearing regarding the disposition of the proposed project operator's license application is to take place this year. The Department of Health Services expects to complete the process in 1993.

Board Committee Assignments


This letter is referred to the Water Problems Committee because of its authority to study, advise, and make recommendations with regard to policies, sources, and means of importing water required by Metropolitan under Administrative Code Section 2461 (a).

Recommendation

For information only.

JPM:MDB:ra
BOARD/AL3

Attachment


for Carl Boronkay

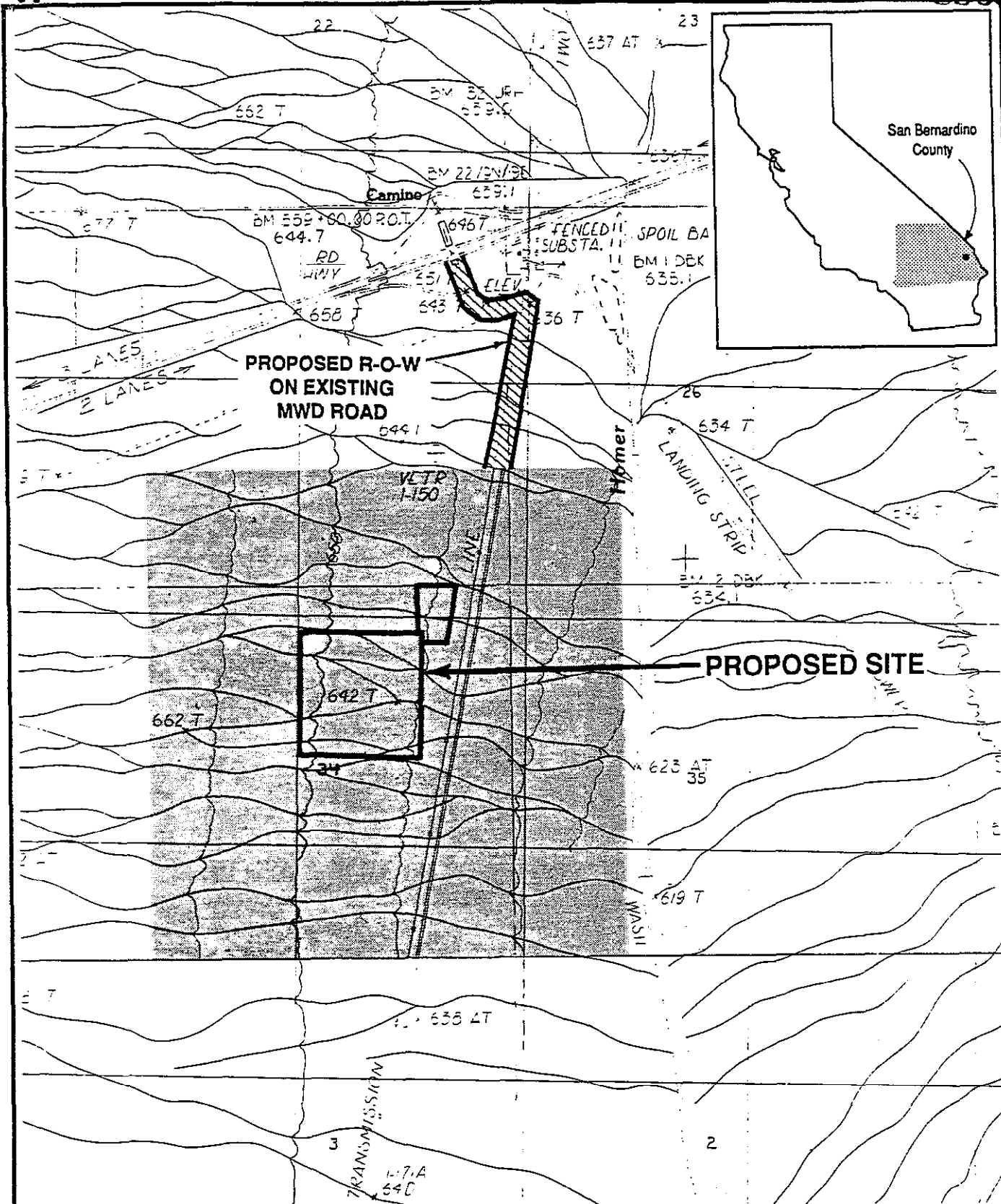


FIGURE 1.2-1

LOCATION MAP FOR WARD VALLEY SITE

Figure Source: USE 1989

Dames & Moore



Scale in Miles
 Basemap: USGS 7.5 minute quadrangle
 West of Flattop Mtn., CA 1984