



July 19, 2024

Santa Clara Valley Water District
Attention: Todd Sexauer
5750 Almaden Expressway
San Jose, CA 95118

Via email to:

Todd Sexauer, Senior Environmental Planner <tsexauer@valleywater.org>

Re: Sierra Club Comments on Design Level Geotechnical Investigations for the Pacheco Reservoir Expansion Project Draft - Initial Study and Mitigated Negative Declaration

The Sierra Club appreciates the opportunity to evaluate the *Design Level Geotechnical Investigations for the Pacheco Reservoir Expansion Project Draft Initial Study and Mitigated Negative Declaration* (MND). Our comments are detailed below. We also support the comments submitted by Soluri Meserve law corporation and comments from other environmental organizations (Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society, Friends of the River, Center for Biological Diversity, and Save Mt Diablo). We ask that, at minimum, you update and re-circulate the MND once the noted deficiencies have been corrected.

A. General Comments

1. This MND is generally difficult to read. There is a lot of repetition of information that is confusing in that it is unclear why the information is repeated rather than referencing where the information can be found. This also makes it more likely that inconsistent information is presented. This repetition is also often a sign of a document that is generated by artificial intelligence. **If artificial intelligence was used in any part of the preparation of this MND or the Appendices, please disclose that clearly, in bold text, at the beginning of the document.**
2. It would be helpful if the MND included information about next steps to certify the document, either in section 1.4 Public Review Process or section 2.3.5 Project Schedule. We have learned that the Valley Water CEO will certify the MND, but the process for this should be transparent and should be disclosed in the MND.
3. **A Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program must be adopted with the MND and should be made available for review along with the MND.** Many of the mitigation measures are not described in detail and monitoring requirements are missing or not fully described. This information is needed to help the public evaluate the effectiveness of these mitigation measures.

B. Comments on Project Description

1. **The current project description for access routes is insufficient.** The project description should include a section about the access routes shown in yellow on Figures 2.2a through 2.2e (pages 2-5 through 2-9). Additional information is needed so the public can evaluate

impacts on plants and wildlife, soil, water quality (erosion), etc. The information should include a table describing each access segment that includes the following: length of the segment; quality and width of current surface (or indicate off-road); maximum slope; stream-bed crossings; vegetation types (including any natural communities); BMPs to be applied; and “other potential concerns.” Total impacts accumulated from all the segments should also be documented to allow for the full impacts to be evaluated.

2. **Surface Geophysical Surveys will likely have impacts to vegetation and will increase fire danger since no vegetation will be removed.** Electrical Resistivity Imaging will extend for 1,520 feet, more than ¼ mile (page 2-4). Seismic-refraction lines total approximately 16,890 feet, about 3.2 miles (page 2-12). Laying down multiple cables will require several workers to move back and forth along the line and will disturb existing vegetation. If there are any sensitive plants, they could easily be trampled. Please discuss how disturbed vegetation and creation of an ad hoc temporary trail will impact vegetation and how possible impacts to special status plants will be mitigated.
3. Under Exploratory Borings (page 2-17 through 2-34) more details are needed to explain how disposal of drilling fluids will be handled. **Please add information about where drilling fluids will be stored on site and where they will be taken to be disposed of.**
4. Under 2.3.5 Project Schedule, Table 2-4 Proposed Project Equipment and Duration of Use Equipment (Page 2-37) lists all the equipment to be used for the geotechnical investigations. However, **other equipment needed to implement BMPs and mitigation measures is not included in the list of equipment to be used for the project.** Specifically, many water trucks will take multiple trips daily to implement dust control measures and tire washing and to water exposed, dry stockpiles. Power vacuum street sweepers will be used to remove dirt from public roads. Many hazardous materials trucks will be used for delivery and disposal of hazardous materials and hazardous waste. Table 2-4 should include these and any other equipment (such as tremie pipes) used to support this project or to mitigate the impacts of the project. And **the impacts of this additional equipment should be included in the analysis of emissions (air quality), transportation, water supply, etc.**
5. Section 2.3.5 Project Schedule says “Valley Water would review weather conditions, weather forecasting, biological observations, and site conditions to determine when geotechnical field work on site would be allowed to occur” (page 2-37). **Please document specific metrics and trigger values to instruct decisions about commencing or halting work on the project site.**

C. Comments on Environmental Evaluation

1. Section 4.9 Hazards and Hazardous Materials should include a discussion on hazards to the workers who will be implementing the Project, under Worker Safety Requirements (page 4-121). Specifically, the MND needs to address hazards related to extreme heat or related to smoke from nearby wildfire. **Please document mitigation measures to protect workers from heat, and from wildfire smoke.** This may not be required by CEQA analysis but needs to be addressed and **may impact project schedule.**
2. Section 4.10 Hydrology and Water Quality discusses operation of the existing Pacheco Reservoir and North Fork Dam (page 4-128), but neglects to include information about the restricted operation criteria put in place by the Division of Safety of Dams due to spillway deficiencies. **Please include information about operation restrictions in place for the existing Pacheco Reservoir.**

3. Section 4.19.3b related to Water Supply (page 4-230) discusses the use of water “for the purposes of dust control on roadways and staging areas, for exploratory drilling, and for in situ jet testing.” **Please quantify the amount of water to be used for each purpose in the MND.** Will all this water really come from one hydrant at Casa de Fruta? How many truck trips of what size per day? How often will dust control water trucks need to be refilled?
4. Section 4.20.3 Discussion of wildfire impacts CEQA Checklist item b relates to exacerbating wildfire risks (page 4-242). During high fire danger warnings, vehicles operating on dry grass can spark a dangerous wildfire. **A mitigation measure should be included to cease operations on days designated as high wildfire danger.** This is especially crucial since there will be minimal clearing around each worksite, and some access routes will be off-road. Operations will therefore be conducted on or very near dry grass. Most concerning are the hammering operations for the Surface Geophysical Surveys which do not involve any vegetation removal – this hammering could cause sparks and increase wildfire danger. **Please also describe how hammer sparks will be mitigated to reduce the potential for wildfire.**

D. Additional Suggested Mitigation Measures

1. **We request a mitigation measure be added to require replacement of any removed trees.** Tree replacement ratios should be specified for all mature, healthy native trees that are removed. Trees should be replaced with the same species if possible.

Sincerely,

Katja Irvin, AICP
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Sierra Club Loma Prieta Chapter

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