

**NOTICE OF PREPARATION OF AN ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT AND PUBLIC SCOPING
MEETINGS**

To: California State Clearinghouse; California Responsible and Trustee Agencies; Other Interested Public Agencies; and, Interested Parties and Organizations

From: California Department of Food and Agriculture, Integrated Pest Control Branch, 2800 Gateway Oaks Dr, Sacramento, CA 95833

Subject: Notice of Preparation of a Draft Environmental Impact Report and Notice of Scoping for the Hydrilla Eradication Program

Date: January 3, 2020

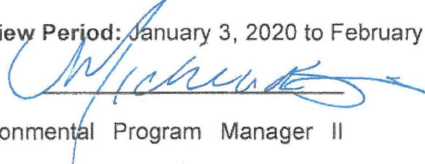
The California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) as Lead Agency is preparing an environmental impact report (EIR) for its Hydrilla Eradication Program. CDFA is requesting input from your agency and interested members of the public regarding the scope and content of the environmental information that is germane to your agency's statutory responsibilities in connection with the proposed project.

The project description, location, and potential environmental effects are contained in the attached materials. A copy of the initial study ☐ is ☒ is not attached.

Project Title: Environmental Impact Report for the Hydrilla Eradication Program

Project Applicant, if any: N/A

Public Review Period: January 3, 2020 to February 16, 2020

Signature: 

Title: Environmental Program Manager II

Email: Michelle.Dennis@cdfa.ca.gov

**NOTICE OF PREPARATION OF A DRAFT
ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT
FOR THE
HYDRILLA ERADICATION PROGRAM**

1. Introduction

The California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) Plant Health Division, is preparing an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for its Hydrilla Eradication Program (the Project), described below. *Hydrilla verticillata* (hydrilla) is an invasive aquatic weed that presents a vast threat to California's water system, environmental habitats, recreational use of streams, lakes, and waterways, and the agricultural industry. Hydrilla produces a survival structure in sediments commonly called a tuber, which can remain dormant seven to ten years before sprouting and presents a major challenge in eradicating the plant. The overall goal of the Hydrilla Eradication Program is to eradicate all existing infestations of hydrilla within the State and prevent any new infestations from establishing in the future.

The EIR will be prepared by CDFA in accordance with the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and the CEQA Guidelines. CDFA will be the lead agency pursuant to CEQA and will consider comments from responsible and trustee agencies, property owners, and interested persons and parties regarding the scope and content of the environmental information to be included in the EIR.

2. Project Location

The project location for the Hydrilla Eradication project is all freshwater bodies in the State of California. Since initial detections in a municipal lake in Yuba County in 1976, there have been approximately 35 hydrilla infestations throughout California, ranging from Shasta County in the north to San Diego and Imperial counties in the south. Currently, there are three counties in which hydrilla infestations are known: Lake, Nevada, and Yuba.

3. Goals and Objectives

The Project will comply with the California Food and Agriculture Code (FAC) 6048(c) which states: "The director shall conduct an ongoing survey and detection program for hydrilla. Whenever and wherever hydrilla is discovered, the director shall immediately investigate the feasibility of eradication. If eradication is feasible, the director shall perform the eradication in cooperation with federal, city, county, and other state agencies taking those steps and actions the director deems necessary." The Project objective is to eradicate all existing infestations of hydrilla within the state and prevent any new infestations from becoming established in the future via survey, detection, rapid-response and eradication measures.

4. Project Description

The EIR will evaluate the potential effects of the ongoing operation of the Project. To comply with the legislative mandate to eradicate Hydrilla statewide, the Project consists of three components:

- 1) Prevention efforts that rely on education and commodity inspections.
- 2) Statewide detection survey for early identification of potential infestation.

- 3) Eradication and Rapid Response: Eradication would consist of rapid response to detections of Hydrilla that may require actions anywhere hydrilla is detected.

The EIR will organize the impact evaluation of the three project components by considering the effects within small ponds, large ponds and lakes, and flowing water (e.g. irrigation canals, creeks, streams, and rivers).

Project Component 1: Prevention

To prevent future infestations of hydrilla in waterbodies throughout the state, CDFA personnel interface with irrigation districts, county biologists, water resource agencies, wildlife protection agencies, non-governmental environmental protection groups, pest control operators, agricultural producers, fisherman, boaters and the general public to provide education regarding hydrilla and how to avoid its introduction into waterbodies. Annual meetings may be coordinated with local county agencies, non-governmental organizations, University of California Cooperative Extensions, and federal and state agencies.

CDFA Pest Exclusion Inspectors would continue to be stationed at points of entry to inspect boats and other watercraft as they enter the state for all aquatic pests, including invasive weed fragments. CDFA would continue to work jointly with county agricultural inspectors to inspect pet stores, aquaculture centers, water gardens and aquatic nurseries for invasive aquatic species. Commodities shipped from out of state would continue to be inspected by dog teams at Federal Express, United Parcel Service, US Postal Service as well as other distribution facilities and shipping company locations.

Education plays a key role in preventing the spread of aquatic weed infestations. CDFA would work with other key agencies to develop and distribute materials that describe the target species and their risk to the environment. These materials would continue to be placed at public and private boat docks and public recreational or commercial water use areas. Educational materials would also be provided to private citizens within quarantine areas by the local county agricultural commissioner's office and occasionally to boat owners through the DMV.

Project Component 2: Detection via Surveys

CDFA would continue to conduct general detection surveys across the state, with the intent to find infestations while they are small and easier to eradicate. Delimitation surveys would be triggered for new hydrilla detections. If hydrilla is confirmed at a new site, expanded or intensified surveys would be conducted in all bodies of water within a 5-mile area of the detection site or the extent of the water system. Surveys would include all public and private ponds as well as reservoirs and drainage areas.

Post-treatment monitoring (following eradication efforts) would be conducted anywhere from two to ten times per season, depending on the size and stage of the infestation, and the threat posed by the water body to the local watershed. When necessary, CDFA would conduct sediment dredging or core sampling in an area of a hydrilla infestation to determine the presence of tubers. Counting recovered tubers indicates population numbers. Post-treatment monitoring would continue for a minimum of four annual life cycles, after the last prescribed herbicide treatment.

Project Component 3: Eradication

When there is confirmation of an active hydrilla infestation, CDFA would evaluate treatment options based on the severity and feasibility of eradication. CDFA would continue to employ an integrated pest management (IPM) model to actively eradicate hydrilla. Many factors would be considered before an action plan was initiated. These factors include location, waterbody volume, water use, public or private ownership, local endangered or threatened species, watershed, local ordinances, tributaries and local economic beneficiaries. For each identified infestation, eradication efforts could include the following methods:

- Cultural: Methods include burying (filling in the water body), lining the water body with plastic or cement, or complete and permanent drainage.
- Physical: Management tactics include employing the use of divers or other mechanical means to remove hydrilla, including the use of physical barriers to isolate hydrilla during these processes, dredging and tuber removal.
- Biological: Introduction of a type of modified grass carp, commonly referred to as triploid grass carp, for control of hydrilla in certain isolated water systems
- Chemical: Use of various aquatic-use herbicides, dyes, and adjuvants.

5. CEQA Process

Notice of Preparation

This Notice of Preparation (NOP) presents general information on the CDFA Hydrilla Eradication Program (the Project), the scoping and larger CEQA process, and the environmental issues to be addressed in the EIR. CDFA has prepared this NOP pursuant to CEQA Guidelines section 15082.

Scoping Meetings

In order for the public and agencies to have an opportunity to ask questions and submit comments on the scope of the EIR, several open house-style public scoping meetings will be held during the NOP review period. Because the Hydrilla Eradication Program is a statewide program, the scoping meetings will be held in six (6) different locations throughout the State. All six meetings will use the same format and interested parties may attend one or more meetings. The scoping meetings will be held to solicit input from the public and interested agencies regarding the nature and scope of environmental impacts to be addressed in the draft EIR. Staff members from CDFA and the consultant team will be available to discuss the Project, CEQA process, and expected issues. A court reporter will be available to record oral comments from agency personnel and concerned public citizens regarding the range of alternatives, potentially significant effects, and mitigation measures that should be addressed in the EIR. Written comments will also be accepted at the scoping meeting and during the remainder of the scoping period which will extend from January 3, 2020 to February 16, 2020.

The dates, times and exact locations of the scoping meetings are as follows:

Date and Time	Location
January 24, 4:30PM to 6:00PM	Imperial County Farm Bureau Building 1000 Broadway Street El Centro, CA 92243

January 27, 4:30PM to 6:00PM	CDFA Office 2895 N. Larkin Ave Fresno, CA 93727
January 28, 4:30PM to 6:00PM	CDFA Headquarters 2800 Gateway Oaks Drive, Room 101, Sacramento, CA 95833
January 29, 3:30PM to 5:00PM	Lakeport City Hall, Counsel Chambers 875 Lakeport Blvd Lakeport, CA 95453
January 30, 1:30PM to 3:00PM	Yuba County Agricultural Commissioner Building 915 8 th Street Marysville, CA 95901
January 30, 4:30PM to 6:00PM	Nevada County Government Complex 950 Maidu Ave, Providence Room Nevada City, CA 95959

As a covered entity under Title II of the American with Disabilities Act, CDFA does not discriminate. The meeting facility and its parking are wheelchair accessible. Sign language interpreters, assistive listening devices, or other auxiliary aides and/or services may be provided upon request. Other services, such as translation between English and other languages, may also be provided upon request. To ensure availability of services, please make your request no later than 5PM on January 15, 2020 by calling Michelle Dennis at (916) 262-1102.

Draft EIR

The primary purpose of the EIR is to analyze and disclose the direct and reasonably foreseeable indirect environmental impacts that may occur as a result of the Project. The draft EIR, as informed by public and agency input through the scoping period, will analyze and disclose the potentially significant environmental impacts associated with the Program, and where any such impacts are significant, the EIR will identify and discuss potentially feasible mitigation measures and alternatives that substantially reduce or avoid such effects, including the "No Project Alternative".

Below is a preliminary list of potential environmental issues to be addressed in detail in the EIR. The analysis in the draft EIR ultimately will determine whether impacts under each issue area could reasonably occur, and whether such direct or reasonably foreseeable indirect impacts are significant based on the identified thresholds of significance. The EIR analysis will also evaluate whether such impacts could be avoided or substantially reduced by potentially feasible mitigation measures and alternatives.

- Aesthetics
- Agriculture and Forestry Resources
- Air Quality
- Biological Resources
- Cultural Resources
- Energy
- Geology/Soils
- Greenhouse Gas Emissions
- Hazards and Hazardous Materials
- Hydrology/Water Quality
- Land Use/Planning
- Mineral Resources
- Noise
- Population/Housing
- Public Services
- Recreation

- Transportation
- Tribal Cultural Resources
- Utilities/Service Systems
- Wildfire

The level of detail for each resource area analyzed in the EIR will be commensurate with the intensity of the impact. The primary issues expected to be studied in detail in the EIR, either due to the potential for significant environmental impacts or expected public concerns, are as follows:

- Agricultural Resources (including potential impacts to agricultural crops and irrigation pumps).
- Air Quality and Greenhouse Gases (including potential impacts from emissions generated by watercraft and herbicide applicators).
- Biological Resources (including potential impacts to threatened and endangered species, aquatic and terrestrial resources, and riparian habitat from herbicide treatment and physical/mechanical disturbances).
- Cultural Resources and Tribal Cultural Resources (including potential impacts to tribal resources and historic properties from herbicide treatment and physical/mechanical disturbances).
- Hazards and Hazardous Materials (including potential impacts from herbicide exposure to applicators and accidental releases of hazardous materials).
- Hydrology and Water Quality (including potential impacts to water quality during herbicide treatment).
- Noise (including potential impacts to sensitive receptors from airboat use and pumps).
- Recreation (including potential temporary impacts to water-based recreation during herbicide treatments).

CDFA will prepare ecological and human health risk assessments to support the analysis of the potential impacts of herbicide use to biological and human receptors. The EIR will also evaluate the potential for cumulative impacts and growth-inducing impacts.

Public Review of the Draft EIR

Once the draft EIR is completed, it will undergo public review for a minimum of 45 days. CDFA is also planning to hold several public meetings to solicit comments from agencies and the public regarding the analysis and conclusions set forth in the Draft EIR. The date, time, and exact location of the public meetings will be published in a Notice of Availability, on the CDFA website, and in local newspapers prior to the event.

Final EIR

Written and oral comments received in response to the draft EIR will be addressed in a Response to Comments document which together with the draft EIR will constitute the final EIR. The Final EIR, in turn, will inform CDFA's exercise of discretion as a lead agency under CEQA in deciding whether or how to approve the Project.

6. Submittal of Written Comments

CDFA is soliciting comments regarding, the scope, content and specificity of the EIR from all responsible agencies, agencies with jurisdiction by law, trustee agencies, involved agencies, and interested parties requesting notice. If you would like to submit scoping comments, please submit a written response to the following mailing address or e-mail address:

- Mail: Attention: Michelle Dennis, Branch Chief Integrated Pest Control
California Department of Food and Agriculture
2800 Gateway Oaks Drive
Sacramento, CA 95832
- Email: IPCinfo@cdfa.ca.gov

In your comments, please include your name, email address, telephone number, address, and **RE: Hydrilla Eradication EIR** at the top of your comment or in the subject line of your email. In accordance with CEQA Section 15082, this Notice of Preparation is being circulated for a 45-day comment period; CDFA requests that written comments be provided at the earliest possible date, **but no later than 5:00 p.m. on February 16, 2020.**

Because of the time limits mandated by Title 14 California Code of Regulations section 15082(b), each responsible and trustee agency and the Office of Planning and Research should respond at the earliest possible date but not later than 30 days after receipt of this notice.

7. Document Availability

CDFA has created a website where interested individuals can access information and documents and stay informed regarding the CEQA process events and timeline:
https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/plant/ipc/hydrilla/hydrilla_program_Documents.html. Future documents, including the EIR, will also be made available at this website.