

Notice of Exemption

To: ☒ Office of Planning and Research
P.O. Box 3044, Room 212
Sacramento, CA 95812-3044

From: Sonoma County Water Agency
404 Aviation Blvd.
Santa Rosa, CA 95403

☒ Sonoma County Clerk
585 Fiscal Drive, Room 103
Santa Rosa, CA 95403

Project Title: Emergency Occidental Road Well Activation and Aquifer Storage and Recovery Project

Project Location - Specific: 5610 Occidental Road, 0.5 mile east of Sanford Road, Sonoma County, California (Figure 1)

Project Location – City: Unincorporated

County: Sonoma

Description of Nature, Purpose and Beneficiaries of Project: The Sonoma County Water Agency (Sonoma Water) is proposing a drought emergency project to bring the existing Occidental Road Well Station (Well Station) into operation and to increase regional and community drought resiliency. The Well Station is located along the Russian River-Cotati Intertie Aqueduct (Aqueduct), an underground pipeline. The purpose of the project is to provide supplemental groundwater to support public water retailers (cities and water districts) during the drought emergency. The project would consist of decommissioning two existing wells, drilling a new well, installing chlorine contact piping to ensure regulatory requirements are met for potable water use, and installing aquifer storage and recovery (ASR) system components and conducting pilot testing. ASR is the process of recharging the underground aquifer, when surface water is plentiful (typically during wet winter periods), for storage and use at a later time. The new well, piping, small sheds, and appurtenances would connect to the Aqueduct. Approximately 132 feet of 36-inch-diameter pipe with 12-inch-diameter connector pipes would be installed to increase chlorine contact time. In addition, a second and new holding tank would be installed and connected to an existing underground recycled pipeline adjacent to the Well Station. The tanks temporarily hold flush water prior to discharge to the recycled pipeline. ASR equipment would be installed on the new well and surplus water from the Aqueduct used to pilot test the capability of the ASR to recharge the aquifer. Project activities would be contained within the 0.14-acre Well Station and adjacent 0.13-acre existing gravel road. All disturbed areas would be returned to pre-existing conditions. The proposed project would not change the design capacity of the Well Station, Aqueduct, or impact mature trees or native vegetation.

Name of Public Agency Approving Project: Sonoma County Water Agency

Name of Person or Agency Carrying Out Project: Sonoma County Water Agency

Exempt Status: (check one)

- ☐ Ministerial (Sec. 21080(b)(1); 15268);
- ☐ Declared Emergency (Sec. 21080(b)(3); 15269(a));
- ☒ Emergency Project (Sec. 21080(b)(4); and State CEQA Guidelines 15269(b)(c)): Specific actions necessary to prevent or mitigate an emergency.
- ☒ Categorical Exemption: CEQA Guidelines §15301(b)(f), Existing Facilities; 15304(f) Minor Alterations to Land
- ☒ Exemption under Governor's Executive Order N-7-22 (Section 12): Government Code section 8571
- ☐ Statutory Exemptions. State code number: [Click here to enter text.](#)

Reasons why project is exempt: The proposed action is statutorily exempt under California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Statute 21080(b)(4) and State CEQA Guidelines 15269(b)(c), which provides that specific actions necessary to prevent or mitigate an emergency are exempt from CEQA; categorically exempt from CEQA under the State CEQA Guidelines Sections 15301(b)(f) and 15304(f); and under Section 12 of the Governor's March 28, 2022, Executive Order (EO) N-7-22.

On April 21, 2021, Governor Newsom issued a Proclamation of a State of Emergency in Sonoma and Mendocino counties due to drought conditions in the Russian River Watershed (Governor's Drought Proclamation). The Governor has continued that proclamation for Sonoma and Mendocino counties through further drought proclamations on May 10,

☐ Signed by Lead Agency ☐ Signed by Applicant Date received for filing at OPR: _____

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July 8, October 19, 2021, and most recently with EO N-7-22 on March 28, 2022. Section 12 of EO N-7-22 suspends CEQA to advance groundwater recharge projects that address the impacts of drought.

On April 27, 2021, the Board of Supervisors for the County of Sonoma proclaimed a local emergency for the Sonoma County Operational Area due to drought conditions, which was most recently continued on December 13, 2022. On June 16, 2021, the General Manager of Sonoma Water determined that due to drought conditions, an emergency exists that poses a clear and imminent danger, requiring immediate action to prevent or mitigate the loss or impairment of life, health, property, or essential public services, necessitating immediate action pursuant to the authority of the County of Sonoma Resolution #06-0649. On June 18, 2021, the Sonoma Water Board of Directors adopted a resolution ratifying the General Manager's emergency determination and declaring the need to do emergency work related to drought and that such projects are exempt for the requirements of CEQA. The Board of Directors has since continuously renewed the emergency determination every two weeks.

Sonoma Water staff are proposing work necessary to bring the existing Occidental Road Well Station into operation to increase regional and community drought resiliency. Also, ASR components would be installed and pilot testing would be conducted. Section 12 of EO N-7-22 suspends CEQA to advance groundwater recharge projects and to demonstrate feasibility of projects that can use available high water flows to recharge local groundwater while minimizing flood risk and applies to any actions taken by local agencies where the state agency with primary responsibility for the implementation of directives concurs that local action is required. The State of California Department of Water Resources (DWR) provided grant funding for the Santa Rosa Plain Water Supply Resiliency Project, which includes funding for the Emergency Occidental Road Well Activation and Aquifer Storage and Recovery Project, under the Urban and Multibenefit Drought Relief Grant on December 22, 2021. In addition to the suspension of CEQA provided by EO N-7-22, CEQA Guidelines Section 15301 provides that the operation, repair, maintenance or minor alteration of existing facilities involving negligible or no expansion of use beyond that existing at the time of the lead agency's determination is categorically exempt from CEQA. Section 15301(b) exempts existing facilities, including public utility services. Section 15301(f) specifies that health protection devices for use in conjunction with existing facilities are exempt under CEQA. CEQA Guidelines Section 15304(f) provides that minor alterations to land, such as trenching and backfilling, where the surface is restored and there is no removal of healthy, mature, scenic trees is categorically exempt from CEQA. The proposed project would add chlorination to provide safe potable water that meets regulatory requirements, have minor ground disturbance at an existing facility where the surface will be restored, and will not remove any trees.

Lead Agency Contact Person: Dave Cook

Telephone: 707-322-8176

Signature: 

Title: General Manager

Date: 1/30/2023

☐ Signed by Lead Agency

☐ Signed by Applicant

Date received for filing at OPR: _____



Figure 1: Emergency Occidental Road Well Activation and Aquifer Storage and Recovery Project location.