

## VIII. Environmental Considerations

An environmental assessment of the project described in the Agreement will be prepared in compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act ("CEQA") [Pub. Res. Code §§ 21000 et seq.] and the implementing regulations ("State CEQA Guidelines") [Cal. Code of Regulations §§ 15000 et seq.]. Pursuant to the Agreement, the IID will serve as the "Lead Agency" and the Authority will be a "Responsible Agency" for purposes of compliance with CEQA.

The IID anticipates that compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act ("NEPA") [U.S.C. §§ 4321 et seq.] will also be required and that a joint EIR/EIS will be prepared in order to satisfy these requirements, subject to approval of this concurrent approach by the affected federal agencies. The environmental review process requires consultation by the IID with all affected state and federal agencies, including the SWRCB as a Responsible Agency. The IID will seek the comments and participation of such entities throughout the environmental review process.

The IID staff is presently preparing an Initial Study pursuant to the State CEQA Guidelines, which will assist the IID in identifying potentially significant impacts created by the project, including any impacts that would result from the SWRCB's actions pursuant to this Petition. In addition, the IID has issued a Request for Qualifications and is finalizing a Request for Proposals to hire an environmental consultant to assist with the environmental assessment and the preparation of all required environmental documents. After the consultant is hired and the Initial Study is completed, the IID will issue a Notice of Preparation (and Notice of Intent if it is determined that a joint EIR/EIS will be prepared), and then conduct an extensive scoping process. This scoping process will promote participation by the public and federal and state agencies, including the SWRCB, and will enable the IID to determine the scope and depth of the EIR (or joint EIR/EIS) to be prepared.

Based upon the results of the scoping process, the IID will prepare and circulate a draft EIR (or joint EIR/EIS) for review and comment. After completion of the comment period, a final EIR (or joint EIR/EIS) will be prepared. The final EIR (or joint EIR/EIS) must be reviewed and certified by the IID as the Lead Agency, and it must be considered by the IID in determining whether to implement the project. The EIR (or joint EIR/EIS) must also be considered by the SWRCB and each other Responsible Agency prior to granting any approval for the project.

This Petition is submitted in connection with the Agreement between the IID and the Authority. The Agreement describes a proposed project. Implementation of the project is contingent upon completion of an environmental review process, as required by CEQA and NEPA, as described above, and issuance of all necessary permits and approvals by state and federal agencies, including the SWRCB and the BOR. A "Summary of Agreement" is included at Section II to the Petition.

The project anticipates the implementation by the IID of conservation measures which will result in conserved water and the transfer of up to 200,000 AF of this conserved water to the Authority. The conservation methods to be implemented will be determined by the IID after completion and review of the environmental assessment. The conservation methods to be evaluated include on-farm measures and conveyance system measures.

On-farm conservation methods may include: (1) pump back systems; (2) improved water management techniques (irrigation scheduling, water measurement, soil monitoring); and/or (3) revised irrigation methods such as drip, sprinkler, and land leveling/land reshaping.

Conveyance system conservation methods may include: (1) construction of additional interceptors to collect operation spills from lateral canals; (2) reservoirs to match demand flows to

delivery flows; and/or (3) seepage collectors to collect canal leakage/seepage and return it (pump back) to the same canal.

The conservation program is intended to reduce the deliveries of Colorado River water to farmland participating in the program. This quantity of conserved water would be available for transfer to the Authority. The conserved water will be diverted into the MWD's CRA at Lake Havasu for delivery to the Authority.

#### Form Question 2.

The IID is currently in the process of organizing its environmental compliance team, who will then be in contact with state and local agencies, which will include Imperial County. Although at this time the IID does not believe that any permits will be required from Imperial County, the IID will supplement this response after it has initiated its contact with Imperial County regarding the project.

With respect to the County zoning designation, the on-farm conservation methods to be implemented in Imperial County will take place in areas zoned for agricultural uses. The IID is not certain of the zoning designation at the proposed point of diversion (Lake Havasu) or at the area of the change of place of use (San Diego County). To the extent that the SWRCB requires this information, the IID will supplement this response as requested.

#### Form Question 3.

Although at this time the IID does not believe that any state or federal "permits" are required, the Agreement is contingent upon approval of the transfer of the conserved water by the SWRCB and BOR, as described in the Agreement. In addition, it is anticipated that consultation or approvals from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Services and/or the California Department of Fish & Game or other resource agencies may be required with respect to project's impacts on endangered species or habitats.

#### Form Question 4.

The IID and the Authority each filed and posted a Notice of Exemption pursuant to CEQA with respect to the execution of the Agreement in the Office of the County Clerks of Imperial, Riverside and San Diego Counties. Copies of these Notices are in the IID Appendix at Tab 13.

As set forth in the Agreement, a comprehensive environmental review of the project is planned, which includes the preparation of an EIR or a joint EIR/EIS. See the above "Environmental Process Summary" for a description of the environmental review process to be implemented. The IID is designated in the Agreement as the Lead Agency for purposes of compliance with CEQA. The EIR (or joint EIR/EIS) will address the environmental impacts of the actions requested to be taken by the SWRCB in the Petition in conformance with CEQA and the State CEQA Guidelines, and the IID will consult with the SWRCB with respect to the preparation of the EIR (or a joint EIR/EIS) regarding any such impacts.

#### Form Question 5.

The IID will investigate the answer to this question during the environmental review process. Depending upon which methods are used to implement the proposed conservation efforts, it is possible that there will be effects on water quality when the project is implemented. For example, the IID already has identified that the proposed conservation efforts may result in a reduced discharge of agricultural drainage water to the drains and to the New and Alamo Rivers and

ultimately to the Salton Sea, and that as a result of such reduction, there may be an increased concentration of salinity, selenium and other chemical constituents in drainage water flowing into the New and Alamo Rivers and into the Salton Sea. This impact could be potentially significant unless mitigated, and will be further studied and assessed in the EIR (or joint EIR/EIS) to be prepared.

The impact of each of the proposed conservation methods on water quality (and any other environmental effects) will be investigated as part of the environmental review process. If it is determined that the project may have a significant effect on water quality, this impact will be studied and assessed in the EIR (or joint EIR/EIS).

#### Form Question 6.

At this time, no archeological reports have been prepared for the project. The Initial Study required for the CEQA environmental review process is currently being prepared. If it is determined that the project may have a significant effect on archeological or historical sites, this impact will be studied, assessed and addressed in the EIR (or joint EIR/EIS). In addition, the IID will initiate a record search with the Southeastern Research Center (INC Desert Museum) to determine whether there are archeological or historic sites located within the general project area. Form Question 7. See IID Appendix, Tab 14.

#### Form Question 8.

The information requested will be ascertained during the environmental review process. In general, however, the general plant community type for the various project areas is as follows: the Imperial County area where the on-farm conservation methods will be implemented is "Developed Communities--Cropland;" the point of diversion at Lake Havasu is generally "Shrub Dominated Communities--Desert Scrub;" and the San Diego County area (change in place of use) is primarily "Developed Communities--Urban."

#### Form Question 9.

The information requested will be investigated during the environmental review process. If it is determined that the project may have a significant effect on trees and shrubs, this impact will be studied and assessed in the EIR (or joint EIR/EIS). In the past, removal of several cottonwoods or mesquites has been required in connection with the installation of lateral interceptors.

#### Form Question 10.

The project's potential effect on fish and wildlife will be studied and assessed in the EIR (or joint EIR/EIS). At this time, a preliminary review of the project indicates that it may have the potential to impact certain endangered species, such as the desert pupfish, the razorback sucker or the Yuma clapper rail or their habitats. It is also possible that there may be an increased accumulation of selenium and other contaminants within the aquatic and avian food chains. See Item 5 above.

#### Form Question 11.

The project's potential effect on riparian and terrestrial wildlife will be studied and assessed in the EIR (or joint EIR/EIS). At this time, a preliminary review of the project indicates that it may impact wetland habitats within specific agricultural drainage channels as a result of the conservation measures located within the drainage area. In addition, wetland habitat around the mouths of the New and Alamo Rivers as well as those around the Salton Sea may be impacted by the

conservation program. Minimal impacts to the wetland habitat in the lower Colorado River may occur. The predominate riparian habitat that may be affected by the project is arrow weed and salt cedar.

Form Question 12.

At this time, it is not expected that the proposed changes will involve any construction or grading-related activity which has significantly altered or would significantly alter the bed or bank of any stream or lake.