

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**BACKGROUND** The Authority was established in July 2000 by State Assembly Bill 807 in order to “identify, evaluate, fund, and implement flood prevention and control strategies in the Pajaro River Watershed, on an intergovernmental basis.” The watershed covers areas of four counties and four water districts and the board is comprised of one representative from each:

- County of Monterey
- County of San Benito
- County of Santa Clara
- County of Santa Cruz
- Monterey County Water Resources Agency
- San Benito County Water District
- Santa Clara Valley Water District
- Santa Cruz County Flood Control and Water Conservation District, Zone 7

In addition to the Authority’s primary goal of flood protection, other goals to promote general watershed interests include:

- Municipal, agricultural, and industrial water supply
- Groundwater recharge
- Support of rare, threatened, or endangered species
- Migration and spawning of aquatic organisms
- Preservation of wildlife habitat

**ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED** Different flood protection alternatives were reviewed, including upstream flow retention or detention, downstream flow management flood protection, and sediment management for potential erosion/sediment control. Each alternative was developed and sized to build upon a flood protection project being developed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) on the Lower Pajaro River. When the Corps project was deemed adequate to provide 100-year flood protection to the lower Pajaro River, structural alternatives to supplement the Corps project were not necessary. Instead, the preservation of the Soap Lake floodplain, which was an inherent assumption in the lower project, became the project evaluated in this document.

**PROJECT DESCRIPTION** Soap Lake is a floodplain within the watershed that has been found to be an extremely important flood protection feature. It acts like a natural detention basin, storing water and reducing peak flows that would otherwise increase flooding in the lower Pajaro River in the Watsonville area.

The proposed project would not build any structural facilities, but instead would include either purchasing land or obtaining flood easements for the land within the Soap Lake floodplain. The objective is to maintain the current flood protection benefits provided by the Soap Lake floodplain by protecting the area from changes that would impact the flood protection properties of the floodplain. The purchase of land or floodplain easements would restrict development and preserve agriculture and open space in the approximately 9,000 acre floodplain with the goal of preserving the floodplain attenuation benefits. Several conservation easements have already been obtained within the Soap Lake project area totaling over 1,000 acres and funding has been secured for another 1,200 acres.

This project would maintain the current hydrologic and hydraulic conditions at the project site and adjacent properties. The floodplain limits would not be changed. The project would minimize the effects of flooding on developments both within and downstream of the study area by preventing development on the property and additional flooding downstream. Floodprone land acquisition could also help create recreational opportunities, maintain agricultural land and open space, preserve riparian habitat and enhance ground water quality.

Potential impacts to resources were evaluated at a programmatic level; no significant adverse impacts were identified and no mitigation measures are proposed at this time. Impacts are summarized below.

**AESTHETICS** - The project would maintain existing views of agricultural lands and rangeland and would not substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings. There are no designated scenic highways or scenic vistas within the project site.

**AGRICULTURE RESOURCES** - The proposed project area is comprised almost entirely of agricultural lands and rangeland including Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, and Farmland of Statewide Importance. Other potential land uses that could be compatible within a floodplain could include environmental restoration (such as riparian or wetland restoration), open space, or trails. Such conversion would place the land in open space use but would not change the ability of the land, in terms of soil or water, to be farmed in the future if needed. If a land purchase or conservation easement included conversion of agricultural land to non-agricultural uses such as environmental restoration, separate environmental documentation would be prepared as needed.

**AIR QUALITY** - The proposed project does not include any construction activities or any other actions that would generate air pollutant emissions. Since existing land uses would be maintained, air emissions from these uses would continue but would not increase. There are no sensitive receptors (schools, hospitals, etc.) located within the project area.

**BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES** - Threatened and endangered plant and wildlife species have been identified within the 100-year floodplain, however the proposed project would not directly or through habitat modifications, have an impact on these species. If future land acquisition or conservation easements included any ground disturbing activities or changes in land use that could affect special-status species, such as the creation of a trail or conversion of agricultural land, then additional environmental documentation would be required to assess these impacts and provide mitigation measures. Both San Benito and Santa Clara Counties are in the process of preparing Habitat Conservation Plans. The proposed project is not expected to conflict with these plans, and could perhaps be used to help the counties reach their conservation goals.

**CULTURAL RESOURCES** - There are 26 recorded Native American and historic-period cultural sites within the project area of which four sites have been determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. There is also the potential for paleontological (fossil) resources. Because the proposed action would not involve any ground-disturbing activities and would preserve the area by minimizing future development, no mitigation measures are recommended at this stage. If a future land acquisition or conservation easement included any changes to the landscape, further archival research and field study by an archeologist or paleontologist would be required. In addition, because of the number of historic buildings and structures (bridges, canals, etc) within the project area, any future land acquisition or easement should not include changes to these features until a qualified architectural historian assesses their historical value.

**GEOLOGY AND SOILS** - Soils within the project area are rich agricultural soils underlain by alluvium. The project area is within a region of high seismic activity. The San Andreas Fault System is comprised of a series of northwest-trending faults including three active faults near the project site; the Sargent Fault, the San Andreas Fault, and the Calaveras Fault. The project would not have impacts to soils or seismic safety.

**HAZARDS AND HAZARDOUS MATERIALS** - There is one chemical facility that is located within the project's modeled 100-year floodplain. Trical's Bolsa facility is a fumigant formulation and packaging operation. If the facility is flooded, there could be a potential for hazardous materials to be released if the facility is not flood proofed. The project area is not included on the State's list of hazardous materials sites (Cortese List).

**HYDROLOGY AND WATER QUALITY** - The proposed Project would maintain existing drainage patterns, sedimentation rates, groundwater recharge and flooding conditions and could prevent worse flooding conditions downstream by restricting development in the project area. Access to the rivers and streams for continued maintenance activities would need to be provided for any conservation easements or land purchased along these water bodies.

**LAND USE AND PLANNING** - The proposed project would not conflict with any local land use policies or ordinances. In fact the project would be consistent with the recently adopted agricultural mitigation policy by the City of Gilroy. That policy identifies portions of unincorporated Santa Clara County as their preferred location for agricultural mitigation, which includes a portion of the proposed Soap Lake project area.

**MINERAL RESOURCES** - The majority of the project site appears to have not been classified for mineral resources. The proposed project would preclude development in the area, which would help preserve access to any mineral resources that may be located there.

**NOISE** - The proposed project would not change existing noise levels, would not result in any temporary or permanent increase in noise levels, or create any noise impacts in excess of established standards within the County Noise Ordinance. No sensitive noise receptors (schools, hospitals, etc) are located within the project area.

**POPULATION AND HOUSING** - Since project implementation would reduce future development within the project area, this could indirectly contribute to development in other adjacent areas. If this development occurred within city boundaries, this would be consistent with Santa Clara County policies to develop incorporated areas rather than unincorporated areas.

**PUBLIC SERVICES** - Because the project would limit further development within the floodplain, it could decrease the burden on flood emergency services to repair or replace flood-damaged facilities that could otherwise be located there.

**RECREATION** - If conservation easements are obtained that include trail easements, there could be a beneficial impact by providing additional recreational opportunities. There are five proposed trail routes throughout the project area. Inclusion of trails in such easements would be consistent with county policies encouraging trail development but would need to be designed to avoid conflicts with other resources.

**TRANSPORTATION/TRAFFIC** - The proposed project would not increase traffic, change levels of service, or disrupt transportation and circulation patterns. Roads, highways, bridges, and railroads would continue to be located within the floodplain and inundated during flood events. Roadways and highways that are flooded can restrict or block access for landowners, commercial traffic and emergency vehicles. This would continue to be an impact under the proposed project and existing conditions; however this risk would not be increased due to the project. Several transportation improvement projects have been completed or are proposed within the project area and some of these projects will raise the roadways due to floodplain conditions. The 100-year floodplain does cross a small portion of the Frazier Lake Airpark. However the runway and most areas of the airpark are not within the floodplain and the proposed Project would not interfere with any airport operations

**UTILITIES AND SERVICE SYSTEMS** - A 96-inch underground water supply pipeline, the Santa Clara Conduit, provides water from the Central Valley Project to the Santa Clara Valley Water District and crosses the project area south of San Felipe Lake. Access points for the SCVWD to repair and maintain the pipeline are also within the project area. There is a risk to county water supply when the area is flooded and the district is unable to repair /maintain the pipeline. Also, the 100-year floodplain crosses an area proposed for the future expansion of the Gilroy Wastewater Treatment plant.

Placeholder for Figure ES-1