

To: Responsible and Trustee Agencies, Stakeholders and Interested Parties

Subject: Notice of Preparation (NOP) of a Draft Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report (EIS/EIR) for the San Joaquin River Reach 4B, Eastside Bypass and Mariposa Bypass Low Flow Channel and Structural Improvements Project under the San Joaquin River Restoration Program, Merced County, California

CEQA Lead Agency: California Department of Water Resources

NEPA Lead Agency: The United States Department of Interior Bureau of Reclamation

Pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) and the California Department of Water Resources (DWR) propose to prepare an EIS/EIR for the San Joaquin River Reach 4B, Eastside Bypass and Mariposa Bypass Low Flow Channel and Structural Improvements Project (Project).

Project Description:

Reclamation and DWR are proposing to prepare a joint EIS/EIR, pursuant to NEPA and CEQA, to evaluate the proposed Project. The proposed Project includes the construction, operation, and maintenance of a low-flow channel in Reach 4B of the San Joaquin River and in the Eastside and Mariposa bypasses and improvements to facilities in the Eastside and Mariposa bypasses to allow for fish passage. The purpose of the Proposed Project is to comply with the San Joaquin River Settlement by improving conveyance capacity in Reach 4B of the San Joaquin River to ensure conveyance of at least 475 cubic feet per second (cfs), modifying the Eastside and Mariposa bypass channels to establish a low flow channel, and modifying structures in the Eastside and Mariposa bypasses to provide for fish passage.

The planning and environmental review for the proposed Project is authorized under Section 3406(c)(1) of the Central Valley Project Improvement Act and the San Joaquin River Restoration Act included in Public Law 111-11. Construction of the proposed Project is authorized under the San Joaquin River Restoration Act (Public Law 111-11). The proposed Project is a component of the San Joaquin River Settlement.

The proposed Project location is within Reach 4B of the San Joaquin River and the Eastside and Mariposa Bypasses in Merced County, California (Figures 1 and 2).

Probable Environmental Effects:

The purpose of the EIS/EIR is to fully disclose the environmental consequences of the proposed Project. The EIS/EIR will examine the extent to which the Project alternatives and alignments will result in environmental impacts including potential cumulative and growth-inducing impacts. In addition, it will discuss actions to reduce, eliminate, or mitigate such impacts.

Environmental resources to be analyzed in the EIS/EIR include the following: hydrology, water quality, and water supply; flood control; land use and agricultural resources; mineral resources; noise; public utilities and power consumption; biological resources including wetlands and rare and sensitive plant and animal species; geology and soils; socioeconomics, population, and

housing; transportation and traffic; air quality; cultural resources; aesthetics; flood protection; and recreation. Impacts to resources will be evaluated for both the temporary construction period and the long-term operation of the alternatives. Potential measures to mitigate any potential impacts will also be identified.

To ensure that the full range of issues related to this proposed Project will be addressed and all significant issues identified, comments and suggestions are invited from all interested parties. Comments or questions concerning this proposed Project and the EIS/EIR should be directed to the DWR Program Manager as noted below.

Scoping Process:

DWR requests comments from State, Federal, and local agencies with respect to the scope and content of the environmental information that is germane to each agency's statutory responsibilities in connection with the proposed Project. In order to ensure that the full range of alternatives is included in the EIS/EIR and that all pertinent issues are addressed, DWR also invites written comments from all other interested parties. All comments received, including names and addresses, will be made available to the public. Due to the time limits mandated by CEQA Guidelines section 15082(b), written comments on the scope of the EIS/EIR must be sent at the earliest possible date but no later than 30 days after receipt of this NOP.

Please send comments to the DWR Program Manager:

Kevin Faulkenberry, P.E.
Supervising Engineer, Water Resources
California Department of Water Resources
South Central Region Office
3374 E. Shields Ave.
Fresno, California 93726

Scoping Meetings:

A series of identical scoping meetings have been scheduled to solicit agency and public input on the scope of the Proposed Project and to ensure incorporation of any issues and concerns that should be addressed in the EIS/EIR. Meeting dates, times and locations are as follows:

DATES and ADDRESSES:

- Wednesday, September 23, 2009, 6:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m., Los Banos, CA
 - Miller & Lux Building, 830 6th street, Los Banos, California 93635; and
- Thursday, September 24, 2009, 6:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m., Merced, CA
 - Merced Fairgrounds Rock House Facility, 900 Martin Luther King, Jr. Way, Merced, California 95340

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Please see the website at <http://www.restoresjr.com> or contact: Ms. Margaret Gidding, Bureau of Reclamation, 2800 Cottage Way MP-170, Sacramento, CA 95825, by telephone at 916-978-5461, TDD 916-978-5608 or via fax at 916-978-5469 or Kevin Faulkenberry, California Department of Water Resources, South Central Region Office, 3374 E Shields Ave. Fresno, California 93726: telephone (559) 230-3300, e-mail: faulkenb@water.ca.gov.

If special assistance is required at one of the scoping meetings, please contact Ms. Margaret Gidding via the phone number or e-mail listed above prior to the meetings.

Paula J. Landis *9-1-09*
Paula J. Landis Date
Chief, SCRO
California Department of Water Resources

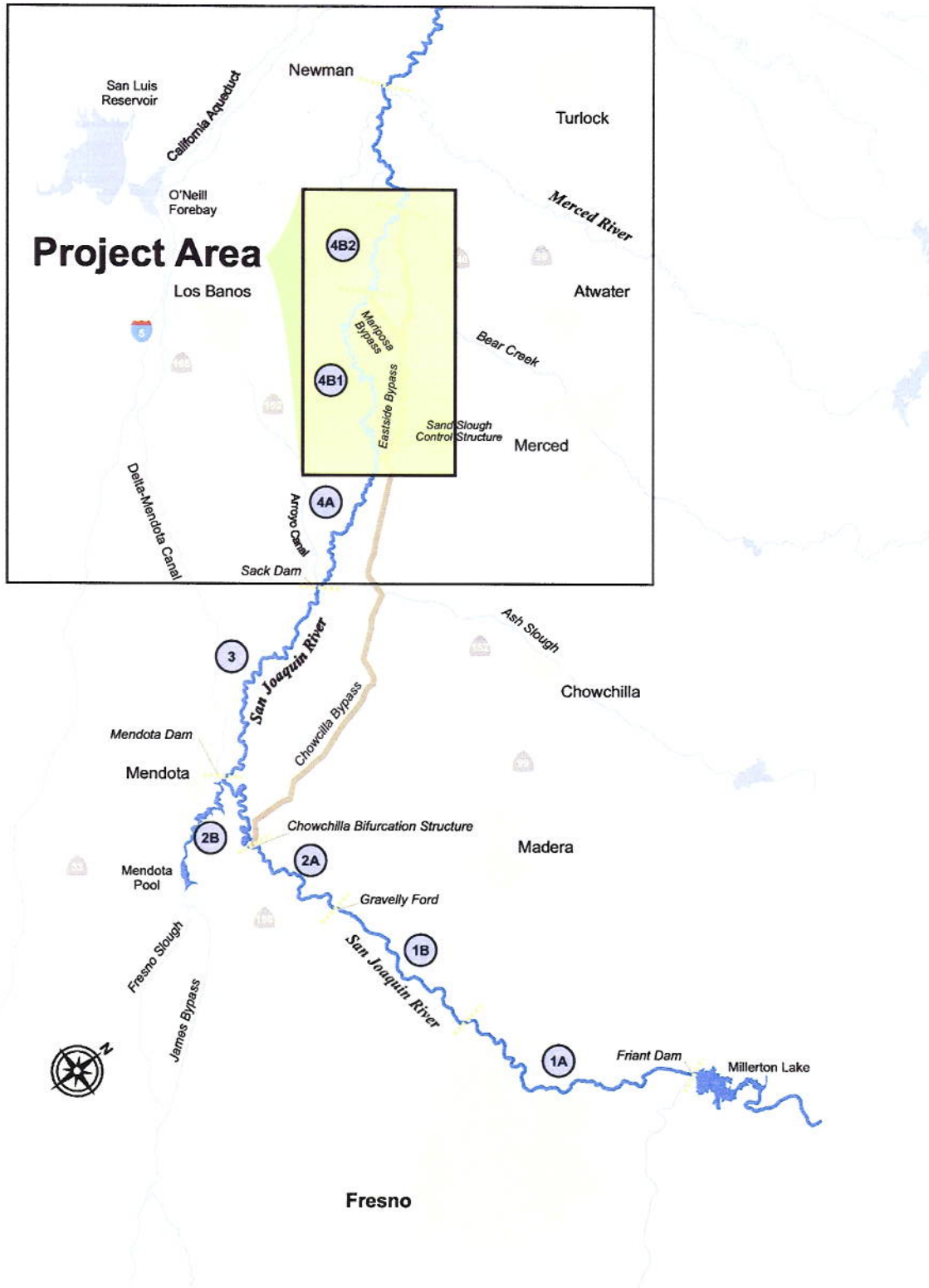


Figure 1. Proposed Project location and outlying areas.

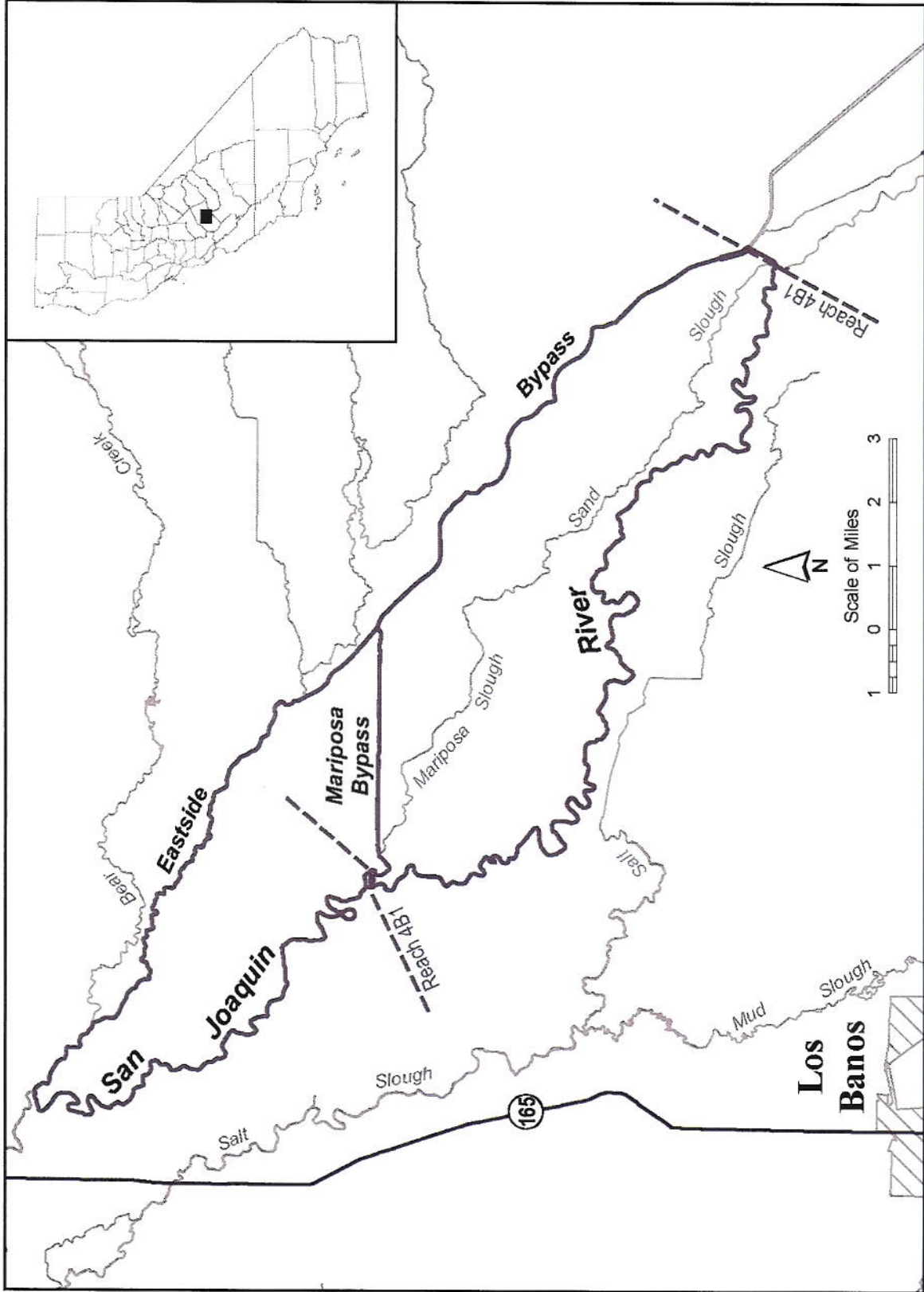


Figure 2. Proposed Project location; more detailed area.