

State Water Resources Control Board

Notice of Availability of a Recirculated Draft Environmental Impact Report for the El Sur Ranch Water Right Application No. 30166 (SCH # 2006061011)

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that the State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board), is the lead agency pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) for review of the proposed El Sur Ranch (Ranch) Water Right Application No. 30166 (Proposed Project). The State Water Board is recirculating the Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) for the Proposed Project.

The DEIR for Water Right Application No. 30166 was originally circulated for public review on October 8, 2009, and the public review and comment period lasted until November 23, 2009. During this period, the State Water Board received 14 comment letters, and a Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR) was then published in 2011, but never certified. Subsequently, in 2023, based on negotiations with protesters/commenters on the DEIR, the Ranch's Water Right Application No. 30166 was amended ("Fifth Amended Application" or Proposed Project) to include additional elements that had not been evaluated in the original DEIR. Principally, these additional elements include the following:

- New off-stream reservoir with a capacity of roughly 404 acre-feet (AF);
- Additional pasture area place of use (POU) to offset the pasture acreage lost to the reservoir footprint (i.e., "replacement pasture");
- Bypass flow requirements and other diversion limitations identified in the 2019 draft Settlement Agreement with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW); and
- Implementation of best management practices (BMPs) for ranching and land maintenance.

The State Water Board, in coordination with the Ranch, has determined that the project modifications constitute "significant new information," including the potential to result in new significant environmental impacts, such that revision and recirculation of the DEIR is warranted. The Recirculated DEIR is now available for review and public comment, as described further below.

PROJECT LOCATION AND SUMMARY DESCRIPTION: The Ranch is located along the Big Sur Coast in Monterey County, California, approximately 25 miles south of the City of Monterey on Highway 1 between the Santa Lucia Mountains to the northeast and the Pacific Ocean to the southwest. The Ranch, established in 1834, consists of approximately 7,000 acres of privately-owned land located immediately north of the Big Sur River and Andrew Molera State Park and approximately one and one-half miles south of the Point Sur State Historic Park.

The proposed reservoir would be located within one of the Ranch's existing pastures (Pump House Field Pasture) and would occupy roughly 29 acres. It would have a capacity of 404-AF and be constructed of earthen embankments, which would be up to 26 feet tall on the tallest side. Water supply for the reservoir would be supplied by two existing wells (the "Old Well" and "New Well") which are located within Andrew Molera State Park, near the Big Sur River, and which draw subterranean flow of the river. To offset the loss of pasture acreage to the reservoir, the Proposed Project would establish a replacement pasture area of roughly similar acreage at the northwest end of the Ranch's existing POU. Following implementation of the Proposed Project, the total size of the POU would remain the same at 292 acres, with a net irrigated acreage of 246 acres. The Ranch's existing irrigation conveyance system would be extended to this replacement pasture as part of the Proposed Project.

Diversion of water via the Ranch's existing wells would continue under the Proposed Project subject to additional restrictions and limitations. Relative to the version of Water Right Application No. 30166 evaluated in the previous DEIR (2009), the total annual maximum diversion would be reduced from 1,615 acre-feet per annum (AFA) to 1,320 AFA; whereas the 20 year running average would be reduced from 1,200 AFA to 1,087 AFA. The seasonal limit during the period July 1 to October 31 has also been reduced from 735 AF to 676 AF, while the monthly limit during this period is reduced from 230 AF to 203 AF.

Bypass flow requirements are streamflow levels within the Big Sur River whereby if streamflow falls below the prescribed level then pumping and diversion to the Ranch would not be allowed. Bypass flow requirements were not included under the prior iteration of the project or under the baseline existing conditions, but would be implemented under the current Proposed Project. Generally, the bypass flow requirements would be as follows:

- November 1 to April 30 – 75 cfs¹
- May 1 to May 31 – 55 cfs
- June 1 to October 31 – reduced pumping rate from 23 cfs to a complete cessation of pumping at 17 cfs

¹ An extended period of flows below 75 cfs would allow for a reduced bypass to 55 cfs. Refer to the Recirculated DEIR for full details on the proposed bypass.

The bypass flow would be measured at United States Geological Survey (USGS) Gage 11143000. The Proposed Project also includes Holiday pumping restrictions and stipulations for Conference Year provisions.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW: The Recirculated DEIR analysis has found that potentially significant environmental effects could occur as a result of the Proposed Project, specifically for the following resource topics: aesthetics, biological resources, cultural resources, geology and soils, hazardous materials, hydrology and water quality, public services, transportation, tribal cultural resources, wildfire, and cumulative impacts. For all impacts determined to be potentially significant, effective and feasible mitigation measures are presented to reduce those impacts to levels that are less than significant. Therefore, the Proposed Project would not result in any significant and unavoidable impacts.

PUBLIC REVIEW AND COMMENT: The Recirculated DEIR is now available for review on the State Water Board's website:

https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/administrative_hearings_office/el_sur_ranch.html.

Copies of the DEIR can be viewed on public access computers at area libraries and at the State Water Board's offices below:

State Water Resources Control Board/CalEPA Building

1001 I Street,
2nd Floor Records Room, Room 2-114
Sacramento, CA 95814
(916) 341-5300

Appointment Preferred. Schedule an appointment by emailing:
dwr@waterboards.ca.gov

Written comments should be received during the public review period which begins on the date of this notice, and ends at 5 p.m. on October 17, 2025. Comments must be postmarked or received by October 17, 2025. Please email or mail comments to the State Water Board at:

adminhrgoffice@waterboards.ca.gov

State Water Resources Control Board
Administrative Hearings Office
Attention: Kyle Wooldridge
P.O. Box 100
Sacramento, CA 95812-0100.

All comments received, including names and addresses, will become part of the official public record.

CONTACT INFORMATION

For questions regarding this notice, email adminhrgoffice@waterboards.ca.gov.

September 2, 2025

/s/ Sam Bivins

Sam Bivins
Senior Hearing Officer