

VWVRA SUBREGIONAL FACILITIES DRAFT
PROGRAM EIR/EIS
SECTION 8
LONG-TERM IMPLICATIONS OF THE PROJECT

8.1 SIGNIFICANT IRREVERSIBLE ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGES

An evaluation of the merits of the proposed VWVRA Subregional Facilities Program would contrast the irreversible environmental costs of the project with its alternatives over both the short and long term horizons. Short-term irreversible costs of the project include:

- The commitment of land for construction of new subregional facilities at each of the four sites, easements for construction of new reclaimed water distribution lines and sludge collection lines, as well as improvements at reclaimed water receiving sites to facilitate use of the reclaimed supply
- A reduction (or elimination) in the rate of growth in the volume of reclaimed supply that is discharged to the Mojave River with concomitant impacts on downgradient communities that rely on groundwater.
- The commitment of substantial material and financial resources.

Over the long term, the most significant irreversible project effects would pertain to changes in hydrologic patterns associated with discharge of treated supplies, and the increased reliability of water supply for certain types of uses in the high desert Mojave basin:

- Project implementation would redirect a majority (up to 80%) of future increases in treated flow volumes from direct discharge to recycling and reuse.⁹⁵ In so doing, the project would reduce irrigation demands on groundwater resources. At the same time, it would reduce the rate of increase in recycled water discharges to the transition zone, thereby influencing the make-up obligation assigned to Alto Basin producers. The *Stipulated Judgment* assures sufficient groundwater supplies for downgradient land uses, up to their respective water right.
- The reclaimed project would result in a more consistent and stable source of irrigation supply for non-potable uses. In so doing, the project may serve to safeguard higher quality but more scarce groundwater supplies for domestic uses, and/or the more costly imported supplies for groundwater recharge in lieu of irrigation. Continued reclamation in the future may also yield positive cost-benefit ratios in terms of the energy costs associated with development of new water supply sources compared with reuse options.

The most significant long-term irreversible effects would pertain to changed hydrologic patterns and increased water supply reliability.

⁹⁵ The MOU between CDFG and VWVRA stipulates that VWVRA will continue to discharge 9,000 AFY of available flows from the Regional WTP, plus no less than 20% of increased future flows to the Regional WTP.

8.2 SHORT-TERM USE OF THE ENVIRONMENT VERSUS LONG-TERM PRODUCTIVITY

Short-term uses of the environment include the commitment of substantial material resources for the development of project facilities, and the adverse impacts associated with construction. The future use of land resources at the subregional sites and along the pipeline corridors would be encumbered by easements and entitlements. At the same time, there would be short-term increases in construction-related employment during the phased implementation of project elements with indirect and secondary repercussions for the larger economy in the VVWRA service area.

Over the long-term, project implementation would contribute to long-term productivity largely through the increased reliability of water resources and reduced pressure on the groundwater basin. As recognized in numerous state laws and policies (see discussion in §4.2.1.7), the environmental benefits associated with this outcome are substantial and varied and range from a general furtherance of the health and safety and welfare of California residents (per Water Code §13511) and safeguarding of potable supplies for domestic uses. For the project area, the successful development of a recycled water program would provide a key tool for protection and rehabilitation of the quantity and quality of water supplies available in the Mojave River groundwater basin.

8.3 SIGNIFICANT UNAVOIDABLE ADVERSE IMPACTS

8.3.1 WATER QUALITY

Based on the foregoing analyses, it is concluded that the proposed VVWRA Subregional Facilities Project may have a significant, unavoidable, adverse impact on water quality objectives for TDS, chloride, sodium, sulfate and nitrate, and on some designated beneficial uses, and on some regulatory standards and policies. The mitigation measures provided above would serve to reduce the magnitude of these potential impacts but would not assure that the resulting effects are less than significant based on the thresholds set forth in §4.3.

8.3.2 AIR QUALITY

Mitigation would reduce potential direct impacts on regional air quality to less than significant levels. However, because the Mojave Desert Air Basin has not achieved adopted standards for ozone and PM-10, the cumulative impacts of the proposed Subregional Facilities Project on air quality would be significant, unavoidable and adverse.