CV-SALTS Salt and Nitrate Management Plan and Basin Plan Amendments: *Final CEQA Assessment Work Plan*

Introduction

BACKGROUND

On November 7, 2014 the Central Valley Salinity Alternatives for Long-Term Sustainability (CV-SALTS) Executive Committee (EC) authorized release of a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) for the remainder of the technical work to be completed by CV-SALTS. The CDM Smith/Robertson-Bryan Inc. (RBI) Team responded to the RFQ on December 19, 2014 and based on the CV-SALTS Selection Committee's recommendation, on February 20, 2015 the EC accepted the CDM-Smith/RBI Team as qualified firms to receive proposal requests for remaining CV-SALTS technical work. At the EC Administration meeting on November 6, 2015, the EC authorized the CDM Smith/RBI Team to develop a work plan to complete the required California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) analyses to support the Central Valley Salt and Nitrate Management Plan (SNMP).

The Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board (Central Valley Water Board or Board) is developing an SNMP and related policies to address existing and future potential accumulations of salt and nitrate in surface and ground waters in the Central Valley region. Implementation of the SNMP will occur through the adoption of policies and amendments to the Central Valley Water Board Water Quality Control Plans for the Sacramento River and San Joaquin River Basins and Tulare Lake Basin (collectively, Basin Plans).

The Central Valley Water Board amends its Basin Plans through a structured process involving peer review (as necessary), public participation, and environmental review. The Board must comply with CEQA (Pub. Res. Code, § 21000 et seq.) when amending its Basin Plans. However, the Secretary of Natural Resources has certified the Board's basin planning process as exempt from the CEQA requirement to prepare an environmental impact report because a sufficiently rigorous environmental review is incorporated into the basin planning process itself. (Pub. Res. Code, § 21080.5.; Cal. Code Regs., tit. 14, § 15251(g).) Before adopting amendments to the Basin Plans, the Board prepares and circulates a substitute environmental document or "SED", rather than an environmental impact report. In the SED, the Board analyzes any potential adverse environmental effects associated with the proposed amendment(s).

The CDM Smith/RBI Team has developed this Work Plan to define the scope of work, schedule, and budget for preparing the CEQA assessment of the Basin Plan amendments that could be adopted by the Central Valley Water Board to implement the SNMP and related policies. The CEQA assessment to be completed by the CDM Smith/RBI Team will be conducted concurrent with work being done by the Larry Walker Associates (LWA) Team for the antidegradation analysis and economic analysis of the SNMP. The CEQA assessment, antidegradation analysis, and economic analysis will require evaluation of the effects that SNMP implementation would have on the physical environment. Thus, the CDM Smith/RBI and LWA Teams will coordinate closely throughout development of the CEQA assessment,

antidegradation analysis, and economic analysis to ensure consistency in approach and assumptions, as further described in the Scope of Work.

OVERVIEW OF THE PROPOSED PROJECT

The goals and implementation approach for the SNMP is summarized below to provide context for the Scope of Work in this Work Plan.

The SNMP goals are to:

1. Assure a safe drinking water supply,
2. Achieve balanced salt/nitrate loading within a managed area, and
3. Implement a managed aquifer restoration program where needed to reduce salinity/nitrate concentrations in groundwater.

To achieve these goals, the SNMP will include an implementation framework that provides a mechanism to implement alternative water supplies, means to authorize discharges from modern agricultural practices, strategy to prevent further degradation of salt and nitrate in surface and groundwater, and planned actions to restore degraded groundwater where it is reasonable, feasible, and practicable to do so. The formation of local management zones will facilitate the implementation of these actions on a local scale. Participating dischargers within the management zones become responsible for meeting the requirements of the SNMP within their groundwater management zone. The implementation of the SNMP is expected to be phased over time so that the highest priority efforts addressing health risks (e.g., providing alternative water supplies) can be implemented first, followed by actions to achieve salt and nitrate balance, and finally restoration actions to restore groundwater quality where achievable.

Implementation of the SNMP is intended to be supported through adoption of Basin Plan amendments that incorporate recommendations into new policies and modifications to existing policies. These policies are listed below.

- Management Zone Policy
- Nitrate Permitting Strategy
- Exceptions Policy
- Offsets Policy
- Secondary Maximum Contaminant Level Policy
- Agricultural Beneficial Use (AGR) Policy
- Salinity Permitting Strategy
- Conservation and Drought Policy
- Maximum Benefit Guidance
- Assimilative Capacity Guidance

Following the Basin Plan amendments that incorporate the SNMP and its supporting implementation framework and policies into the Basin Plan, commitments for implementation of the recommended actions necessary to achieve the SNMP goals will be achieved through modified discharger Waste Discharge Requirements (WDRs) and Conditional Waivers.

The CEQA assessment will evaluate how implementation of the SNMP through Basin Plan amendments and modified WDRs and Conditional Waivers may directly or indirectly cause existing environmental conditions to change and, if so, whether the anticipated environmental changes will have less than significant, significant, or beneficial impacts on the various resource categories assessed. The resources applied to the assessment of potential impacts to surface water versus groundwater will depend on the

degree to which elements of the final SNMP and related polices focus on those resources and the degree to which changes to these environments are expected to occur.

Scope of Work

The Scope of Work consists of four tasks:

- Task 1 – Management and Coordination Activities
- Task 2 – Prepare Regulatory and Environmental Settings
- Task 3 – Define Proposed Project and No Project Alternative
- Task 4 – Prepare CEQA Assessment

The Scope of Work addresses the accelerated timeframe under which the CEQA assessment must be completed through incorporation of intermediate deliverables prior to completion of the final report. Coordination with the LWA Team and the Project Committee is incorporated into each task to receive timely feedback and avoid substantial late revisions near the project deadline.

TASK 1 – MANAGEMENT AND COORDINATION ACTIVITIES

Due to the compresses schedule for this work, it will be important for the CDM Smith/RBI Team to communicate and exchange information effectively and efficiently with the LWA Team and CV-SALTS management to coordinate the activities, maintain a clear focus on the assignments, clearly communicate progress on the necessary technical information, and apply the collective knowledge effectively.

Specific activities under this task will include project management and administration activities, including project start up, technical coordination meetings invoicing, budget and schedule monitoring, reporting, and project closeout. Implementation of these activities will be closely coordinated with the CV-SALTS Technical Project Manager (TPM) for this project (Roger Reynolds) and CV-SALTS Program Manager (Pam Buford). CDM Smith will prepare a monthly progress report for submittal along with each invoice that describes the work completed each month by its Team.

Throughout the duration of the project CDM Smith and RBI will periodically have internal Team calls to discuss project progress. In addition, RBI and/or CDM Smith will participate in bi-weekly conference calls, as needed, with the LWA Team to ensure that the CEQA assessment work is highly coordinated with the antidegradation and economic analyses. These meetings are budgeted to be no more than one (1) hour in length.

The CDM Smith Team will also work closely with the Project Committee (PC)[1] established by CV-SALTS. Deliverables from Tasks 2, 3 and 4 will be submitted to the PC for review and comment. Deliverables for PC review will provided in as timely a manner as possible, but at least two business days before comments are requested. To the extent practical, the TPMs for the CEQA/Economics/Antidegradation Analysis Projects will provide notice to the PC as early as possible to keep them apprised of upcoming review needs and to schedule meetings. Up to four meetings with the PC to discuss project deliverables are included in this Scope of Work. These meetings will be held by teleconference. Typically, they will be attended by up to two RBI team members and one CDM Smith team member.

[1] Casey Creamer, South San Joaquin Water Quality Coalition; Daniel Cozad, CVSC Executive Director; Debbie Webster, CVCWA; David Cory, SJVDA; J.P. Cativiela, Dairy Cares; Jeanne Chilcott, Central Valley Water Board; Phoebe Seaton, LCJA; Roger Reynolds, Summers Engineering; and Tess Dunham, Somach, Simmons & Dunn

Deliverables:

- Monthly progress reports and invoices. Monthly progress reports will document:
    - Internal CDM Smith/RBI Team calls to discuss project elements; progress on tasks.
    - Weekly or bi-weekly coordination calls, as needed, with LWA Team.
    - Coordination activities with the PC.
- Participation in up to six (6) bi-weekly coordination meetings with the LWA Team.
- Coordination with the TPM and CV-SALTS Program Manager as needed.
- Up to four (4) meetings with the PC via teleconference.

TASK 2 – PREPARE REGULATORY AND ENVIRONMENTAL SETTINGS

The Regulatory Setting establishes the regulations that are in effect presently, including water quality objectives, and thus provides a baseline against which the effects of adopting and implementing the SNMP and its associated policies and recommendations are evaluated. The Regulatory Setting will focus on Central Valley Water Board water quality objectives, programs of implementation, and policies that would be changed by the SNMP, or otherwise relate to implementation of the SNMP (e.g., WDRs and Conditional Waivers). To ensure completeness, the CDM Smith/RBI Team will develop a list of regulatory plans and policies, or specific aspects of plans and policies, which should be addressed in the Regulatory Setting. Because this information will to some degree also be applicable to the economic and antidegradation analyses being conducted concurrently, this effort will be closely coordinated with the LWA Team to ensure consistency between the CEQA, antidegradation, and economic assessments. The final list of plans and policies to be included in the Regulatory Setting will be shared with the PC for review and input. With the list of plans and policies to be included defined, the CDM Smith/RBI Team, in coordination with the LWA Team, will develop brief descriptions of the relevant plans and policies, including a description of how they are currently implemented to address salt and nitrate levels in surface and groundwater, for the Regulatory Setting portion of the CEQA assessment.

Similarly, the Environmental Setting establishes the affected environment and baseline or existing conditions against which changes to the affected environment resulting from implementation of the SNMP are assessed. For the resource category of water quality, the CDM Smith/RBI Team will again work closely with the LWA Team to compile available information developed through the CV-SALTS process that characterizes the existing salt and nitrate conditions throughout the Central Valley basins. Information for other constituents that may be affected by the proposed project (e.g., constituents with secondary maximum contaminants levels) also will be addressed. The quantitative information to be included for these constituents will use readily available data analyses and summaries (due to the time constraints and budget limitations, no new data analyses are included as a part of this Work Plan), as needed, to support the programmatic level of assessment. The baseline or existing conditions defined will be used for both the CEQA assessment and antidegradation analysis. For other resource categories (e.g., biological resources, hydrology), the baseline will be identified as the existing conditions that occur within the basins at the time of preparation of the CEQA assessment.

Draft Regulatory and Environmental Settings will be prepared and submitted to the PC for review and comment. Final Regulatory and Environmental Settings will be prepared based on PC input.

Deliverables:

- Draft and Final Regulatory Setting section of CEQA assessment
- Draft and Final Environmental Setting section of CEQA assessment

- Conference call with PC to discuss PC comments on the Draft sections

TASK 3 – DEFINE PROPOSED PROJECT AND NO PROJECT ALTERNATIVE

Under this task, the CDM Smith/RBI Team will work with the PC and the LWA Team to define the specific elements of the Proposed Project and the No Action Alternative for CEQA assessment purposes. It is critically important to have both the Proposed Project and the No Project Alternative clearly defined so that the CEQA assessment effectively and clearly addresses how the environment would be changed as a result of implementing either the Proposed Project of the No Project Alternative. By so doing, decision makers can clearly see the environmental ramification of implementing the Proposed Project versus not doing so (i.e., implementing the No Project Alternative). In addition, if directed by the PC, other alternatives identified by CV-SALTS, in addition to the Proposed Project and No Project Alternative, will be defined under this task, to the extent they constitute distinct CEQA alternatives to the Proposed Project, as defined by CEQA guidelines and definitions. Conversely, if the alternatives identified by CV-SALTS are not alternatives to the Proposed Project as defined by CEQA, but rather modifications of specific aspects of the SNMP and its associated policies and guidance, then they will be described as such and considered appropriately in the CEQA assessment.

As discussed above, implementation of the SNMP will be supported through the adoption of Basin Plan amendments that incorporate recommendations in the following related policies that are being developed in conjunction with the SNMP:

- Management Zone Policy
- Nitrate Permitting Strategy
- Exceptions Policy
- Offsets Policy
- Secondary Maximum Contaminant Level Policy
- Agricultural Beneficial Use (AGR) Policy
- Salinity Permitting Strategy
- Conservation and Drought Policy
- Maximum Benefit Guidance
- Assimilative Capacity Guidance

The project description that is developed would define the goals of the SNMP and the objectives of each supporting policy, identify the recommended actions directed by the SNMP and its supporting policies, and identify how the plan and policies are proposed to be implemented. The project description will clearly identify the aspects of the above policies that would result in Basin Plan amendments or otherwise result in new regulation of water quality that could result in changed conditions in the environment.

A definition of the No Project Alternative would similarly be developed in coordination with the PC and the LWA Team. The focus of the No Project Alternative definition would be to describe the resulting regulatory condition from not adopting the SNMP and associated policies and resulting actions that the discharger community would be expected to take to comply with existing regulations. This No Project Alternative definition would then be the basis for identifying physical changes to the environment that could occur relative to the baseline (existing) conditions.

The draft descriptions of the Proposed Project and No Project Alternative developed (along with any other CEQA alternatives identified by the PC for assessment) will be submitted to PC for review and comment. Because the descriptions of the Proposed Project, the No Project, and any true Alternatives

to the Proposed Project (consistent with CEQA's definition of a project Alternative) set up the basis for the CEQA assessment (and antidegradation and economics analyses), obtaining concurrence on these descriptions will be essential and will be the critical path item for the CEQA assessment. Final descriptions will be developed based on comments received from the PC and CEQA's definition of project alternatives.

Deliverables:

- *Draft and Final Description of Proposed Project*
- *Draft and Final Description of No Project Alternative*
- *Draft and Final Description of Other Alternatives (if authorized by PC for analysis, and meet the CEQA definition of a project Alternative)*
- *Teleconference with PC to discuss Draft Descriptions*

TASK 4 – PREPARE CEQA ASSESSMENT

RBI of the CDM Smith Team will lead the preparation of the CEQA assessment for the SNMP. The CEQA documentation for the Proposed Project will consist of the CEQA Environmental Checklist Form with narrative address of each question in the checklist to provide the basis for the impact determination made for each resource category and subcategory assessed, which will include the following.

- Aesthetics
- Agricultural and Forestry Resources
- Air Quality
- Biological Resources
- Cultural Resources
- Geology and Soils
- Greenhouse Gas Emissions
- Hazards and Hazardous Materials
- Hydrology and Water Quality
- Land Use and Planning
- Mineral Resources
- Noise
- Population and Housing
- Public Services
- Recreation
- Transportation and Traffic
- Utilities and Service Systems

The CEQA assessment of the Proposed Project also will address "Mandatory Findings of Significance," including a discussion of impacts that are individually limited (i.e., less than significant), but cumulatively considerable.

The CEQA assessment of the Proposed Project will be programmatic in nature and will be sufficiently broad in its scope and coverage to accommodate the need for future refinements to the SNMP and its supporting policies and recommended actions prior to their incorporation into the Basin Plans via the actual Basin Plan amendments. In approaching the CEQA assessment in this broad programmatic manner, it will allow for such refinements and the resulting modified project will likely remain within the scope of the environmental assessment, assuming the goals of the SNMP and the objectives of the Basin Plan amendments and modifications of WDRs and Conditional Waivers that ultimately occur remain

consistent with those defined in the Project Description of the CEQA document. This approach provides Board staff with substantial flexibility to make refinements to the project, as needed, which will not necessarily require any additional CEQA assessment. Should future changes to one or more elements of the SNMP or its supporting policies occur such that the resulting environmental conditions may no longer fall within the scope and coverage of the CEQA assessment performed, then a supplemental CEQA assessment could be performed, as needed, to address such substantial changes to the project, and the resulting environmental changes that are determined to be outside the scope of those assessed originally. Finally, any recommended actions that themselves, when implemented, may result in significant environmental impacts, and are not defined at a sufficient level of detail at the time this CEQA assessment is performed to enable a project-level assessment, will require separate project-specific CEQA assessment in the future.

In addition to the assessment of the SNMP, RBI of the CDM Smith Team will address the potential effects of the No Project Alternative and along with any other CEQA alternatives identified by the PC for assessment. The No Project Alternative assessment will address impacts that would occur from dischargers taking actions to comply with existing Central Valley Water Board regulations, policies and permitting practices. Assessment of alternatives to a Proposed Project for CEQA is only required when the Proposed Project would have significant environmental impacts. If implementation of the SNMP is not expected to result in any significant environmental impacts assessment of alternatives to the Proposed Project would not be necessary. Nevertheless, assessment of a No Project Alternative will inform decision makers of the environmental consequences of not adopting the SNMP, even if the SNMP itself does not result in significant environmental impacts. In addition, the development of the SNMP through the stakeholder process may involve consideration of various alternative components to the SNMP. The CEQA document will include a discussion of alternative elements and/or policies that were considered by CV-SALTS, but not included in the final SNMP, as identified by the PC for assessment.

The water quality impact assessment of the Proposed Project and No Project Alternative will rely primarily on the Antidegradation Analysis being prepared by the LWA Team, which will assess anticipated changed water quality conditions and degradation that would be expected to occur under the Proposed Project and No Project conditions. The changes to salt and nitrate, as well as other constituents that may be affected, such as those with secondary MCLs, will be described in qualitative terms for both the Proposed Project and No Project Alternative conditions.

The Scope of Work and Budget assumes a single round of review and comment by the PC on the draft CEQA Assessment to prepare the Final CEQA Assessment.

Deliverables:

- *Draft CEQA Assessment Report to PC*
- *Final CEQA Assessment Report to PC*
- *Teleconference with PC to discuss comments on the Draft CEQA Assessment*
- *Response to Comments Matrix*

Budget and Schedule

The budget and general schedule for completing the CEQA assessment defined in this Work Plan is provided below in Table 1. Figure 1 illustrates the schedule as it will be coordinated with the LWA Team, PC, and CV-SALTS activities. Due to contractual obligations, all work must be completed by October 3,

2016; thus, work on the CEQA Assessment beyond this date is not authorized and thus not covered by this work plan. It is assumed that a notice to proceed will be received on or about July 12, 2016. In recognition of the aggressive schedule under which the work must be completed, proposed completion dates for interim deliverables are provided in Table 1 and Figure 1. Meeting these interim deadlines will be key to completing the entire CEQA assessment by October 3, 2016. The CDM Smith/RBI Team's ability to meet the schedule provided below is directly dependent upon the ability of the PC, TPM, and CV-SALTS Program Manager to provide timely coordination and input that supports this aggressive schedule.

Table 1. SNMP CEQA Assessment Budget and Schedule

Task	Budget[1]	Proposed Completion Date
Work Plan Development[2]	*$10,000*	*Ongoing*
Task 1 – Management and Coordination Activities	$25,000	Ongoing
Task 2 – Regulatory and Environmental Settings	$25,000	July 25, 2016
Task 3 – Definition of Proposed Project and No Project Alternative (and other alternatives, if authorized by PC that meet the CEQA definition of a Project Alternative)	$40,000	August 19, 2016[3]
Task 4 – Administrative Draft CEQA Document / Final CEQA Document	$90,000	September 19, 2016 / October 3, 2016
Total (including Work Plan development)	**$190,000**	

[1] The budget currently assumes assessment of a No Project and Proposed Project alternative only. If additional Project Alternatives are identified for analysis by the PC, the CDM Smith/RBI Team will evaluate the impact of the additional work, if any, on the budget and report back to the TPM.

[2] The development of the Work Plan was previously authorized by CV-SALTS in November 2015. However, the development of this Work Plan was delayed due to additional time necessary to develop the Central Valley SNMP.

[3] This date is based on the CV-SALTS Executive Committee finalizing policies and identifying any alternatives for analysis at its August 11, 2016 Policy meeting.

Should certain tasks require additional time (which may occur for a variety of reasons), the CDM Smith/RBI Team will take all reasonable measures to accommodate the changes while minimizing disruption to other schedule elements. However, delayed completion of schedule elements can cause delays in completion of other related work. The Team will, in all instances, promptly identify the best possible manner to rectify the schedule and communicate a revised schedule to the TPM, in coordination with LWA (as needed).

Figure 1. Illustration of Project Schedule, including Coordination with LWA Team, Project Committee and CV-SALTS

	CEQA, Economic, Antidegradation Work Plans	Week of Each Month														
		July				Aug					Sept				Oct	
		4	11	18	25	1	8	15	22	29	5	12	19	26	3	10
	Work Plan Development															
	CV-SALTS Approval of Work Plans															
1	Management and Coordination Activities															
2	Current Regulatory and Water Quality Setting															
	Draft Deliverable															
	Call with PC (Anticipated 2 day review)															
	Final Deliverable															
3	Define No Project and Proposed Project Alternatives															
	Draft Deliverable[1]															
	Call with PC (Anticipated 2 day review)															
	Final Deliverable															
4	Conduct Analysis (Econ/Antideg Work Only)															
4/5	SED & Economics/Antidegradation Combined Report															
	Draft Deliverable															
	Call with PC (Anticipated 2 day review)															
	Final Deliverable (Submit Oct 3)															
Finalize CV-SALTS Policy and SNMP Implementation Documents																
	Approval of CV-SALTS policies (August 11 Policy Meeting)															
	Revised SNMP (September 15 CV-SALTS Policy Meeting)															

[1] This date is based on the CV-SALTS Executive Committee finalizing policies and identifying any alternatives for analysis at its August 11, 2016 Policy meeting

LWA Team and/or CDM Smith/RBI Team

CV-SALTS Input

Project Committee Reviews/Meetings