



## Board Report

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**File #:** WRA RES 15-007, **Version:** 1

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Consider:

- a. Finding that the Salinas River Lagoon Winter 2015-16 Sandbar Management Plan (Plan) is statutorily exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) under CEQA Guidelines Section 15269(c) for emergency projects;
- b. Approving the Salinas River Lagoon Winter 2015-16 Emergency Sandbar Management Plan (Plan);
- c. Authorizing the General Manager to obtain the required permits and fully implement the Plan, if needed, throughout the 2015/2016 rainy season to alleviate flooding; and,
- d. Adopting a resolution finding the Plan is statutorily exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) under CEQA Guidelines Section 15269(c) for emergency projects.

### RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the Monterey County Water Resources Agency Board of Supervisors:

- a. Approve the Salinas River Lagoon Winter 2015-16 Sandbar Management Plan (Plan);
- b. Find that, should the thresholds in the Plan be met, actions taken to implement the Salinas River Lagoon Winter 2015-16 Sandbar Management Plan (Winter Plan) are statutorily exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) under CEQA Guidelines Section 15269(c) for emergency projects;
- c. Authorize the General Manager to obtain the required permits and fully implement the Plan, if needed, throughout the 2015/2016 rainy season to alleviate flooding; and,
- d. Adopt a resolution finding the Plan is statutorily exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) under CEQA Guidelines Section 15269(c) for emergency projects.

### SUMMARY:

Salinas River Lagoon is located at the mouth of the Salinas River, in the unincorporated County north of Marina. It is bounded by privately owned agricultural lands, the Salinas River State Beach, and the Salinas River Lagoon National Wildlife Refuge. The Salinas River Watershed experiences extreme variations in seasonal and yearly flow discharge rates with the Lagoon being the final point before discharging into Monterey Bay. Developed residential and agricultural areas surrounding the Lagoon within the 100 year floodplain suffer from periodic flooding from high river flows and ocean storms, in some areas nearly annually and in some cases multiple times in one year.

### DISCUSSION:

In 2009, NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service re-established the Salinas River Lagoon Management Working Group (Group) to address the many issues surrounding the Salinas River Lagoon, including sandbar management activities. The Working Group met from 2009 through 2013 but with current drought conditions the need for meetings dwindled. In April 2015 MCWRA reconvened the Group and the most recent meeting was on October 23, 2015 to discuss the Winter 2015/2016 Sandbar Management Plan Project Description (attached) regarding measures to be taken this winter to reduce the risk of flooding.

The general concept is to conduct mechanical breaching of the lagoon sandbar during emergency situations to alleviate flooding. Before management of the sandbar occurs, MCWRA shall implement all measures of flood protection available to it to reduce the flood potential to the greatest extent feasible.

The Regional Water Quality Control Board must issue a California Water Board Section 401 Water Quality Certification for the Plan, and projects that discharge into water bodies of the state are subject to CEQA and are required to have environmental documentation completed prior to commencement. Some of the permitting agencies will not process an emergency permit application until 24-48 hours before an event and may not interpret flooding in the Salinas Lagoon as an emergency since it occurs regularly. However, staff considers approval of the Plan to be an action necessary to prevent or mitigate an emergency under CEQA Guidelines Section 15269(c) because the Plan would be implemented only in case of emergency and imminent threat to property. The Plan is for the upcoming winter only and does not take the place of a project to provide a long-term solution.

#### OTHER AGENCY INVOLVEMENT:

The Salinas River Lagoon Management Working Group regularly consists of the MCWRA, NOAA Fisheries, US Fish and Wildlife Service, CA State Parks, local landowners and Special Interest Groups (Monterey Dunes Colony, The Nature Conservancy, and Point Reyes Bird Observatory, Monterey Coastkeeper/The Otter Project). Other participants include the Corps of Engineers, CA Coastal Commission, CA Fish and Wildlife, and Trout Unlimited. Staff has reached out to Monterey County Resource Management Agency for assistance identifying needed permits and environmental documents due to RMA's experience with the Carmel Lagoon.

At its regular meeting on October 26, 2015, the Monterey County Water Resources Agency Board of Directors received this report and recommended that the Monterey County Water Resources Agency Board of Supervisors approve the Salinas River Lagoon Winter 2015-16 Emergency Sandbar Management Plan and adopt a resolution finding the Plan is statutorily exempt from CEQA.

#### FINANCING:

FY 2015/2016 budget in Fund 116 9940 is \$41,625 for staff; \$15,011 for administrative staff; \$11,000 for services and supplies; and, \$19,000 for consultants.

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Approved by:

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Attachments:

Draft Resolution

Draft Salinas River Lagoon Winter 2015-16 Sandbar Management Plan

MCWRA Executed Board Order