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Common Response 13: Recreation and Recreational Opportunities

Overview

This Common Response addresses the common themes raised in public comments on Chapter 16, *Recreation*. Specifically, this Common Response discusses potential impacts on specific recreation uses and specific recreation opportunities that could result from the construction, operation, and maintenance of the Delta Conveyance Project (project) and the analysis of recreation resources in the Environmental Impact Report (EIR), including survey methods used for both site observations and interviews.

Evaluation of Recreational Opportunities

Comments discussed potential impacts on specific recreation uses and specific recreation opportunities that could result from the project's construction, operation, and maintenance. The *Description of Existing Conditions in the Study Area* section of Chapter 16 offers a description of recreation activities and opportunities in the study area and a summary of recreation use areas and facilities. The activities associated with each of these areas and facilities are enumerated in the Recreation Amenities column of the Chapter 16 table titled Developed Recreation Areas Nearest to Proposed Project Features and also discussed in the sections titled *Water-Based Recreation Activities* and *Land-Based Recreation Activities*.

The discussions of recreation activities in the study area are important to the impact assessment of physical environmental impacts on recreation resources and to the consideration of whether and how the project would affect recreation resources. For recreation resources, the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines Appendix G environmental checklist provided a framework to address recreation topics relevant to Delta recreation resources (also see Common Response 1, *CEQA Process, General Approach to Analysis, and Other Environmental Review Issues*, regarding the appropriate use of Appendix G and the development and application of thresholds). Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines, and thus the recreation impact analysis, focuses on changes to the physical environment because it is a requirement of CEQA to evaluate and disclose potentially significant physical environmental impacts. As outlined in the *Methods for Analysis* section of Chapter 16, the resource analysis considered those recreational activities that would be affected by the project. Part of this analysis involved determining whether project construction or operation would increase the use of existing neighborhood and regional parks or other recreational facilities in and around the Delta region, which would then result in, or accelerate, a substantial physical deterioration of these facilities. Similarly, the analysis also considered whether project construction or operation would displace some recreational activities, which would lead to an increase in visitation to other recreational facilities both inside and outside the Delta or neighboring communities and, in turn, potentially result in, or accelerate, physical deterioration of those facilities (see Impact REC-1: *Increase the Use of Existing Neighborhood and Regional Parks or Other Recreational Facilities Such That Substantial Physical Deterioration of the Facility Would Occur or Be Accelerated* in Chapter 16). Thus, the recreation impact analysis appropriately analyzes construction and operation of the project in the context of physical effects on recreation facilities.

Other considerations related to recreation, such as the potential for diminished quality of recreation experiences or opportunities due to construction, are discussed further in Chapter 17, *Socioeconomics*, and are not considered physical environmental impacts (refer to ECON-5: *Changes*

in *Recreational Economics in the Statutory Delta and Project Area* in Chapter 17). As noted in the *Thresholds of Significance* section in Chapter 16, recreation quality considerations are analyzed in Chapter 17 because they relate to social and economic factors in choices and experiences associated with recreation resources. Based on the evidence referenced in the discussion of ECON-5, as well as in the Chapter 16 conclusions, the effects of project construction on recreation activities would not be substantial and would not lead to physical changes to the environment. Although certain recreationists would experience minor localized disruption, the overall effect would be low because numerous similar locations within the Delta are currently not overused, making them readily available to recreationists (see Impact REC-1: *Increase the Use of Existing Neighborhood and Regional Parks or Other Recreational Facilities Such That Substantial Physical Deterioration of the Facility Would Occur or Be Accelerated* in Chapter 16) Furthermore, project designs minimize potential effects on recreational opportunities by minimizing in-water work activities, building separate project access roads to help reduce construction- and operation-related traffic on public roads, and also developing a traffic management plan to help minimize the potential for disruption of traffic, which includes recreational users accessing Delta recreation sites. Additionally, by posting signage that provides periodic updates during construction, California Department of Water Resources (DWR) would inform recreationists of ongoing and upcoming construction activities and provide safety information about potential hazards in the areas of the intakes (Clarksburg Public Boat Launch) and Bethany Reservoir Discharge Structure. (See Environmental Commitment EC-16: *Provide Notification of Construction and Maintenance Activities in Waterways*, discussed in Appendix 3B, *Environmental Commitments and Best Management Practices*.) Such notifications would promote safety and help recreationists avoid areas affected by noise or other factors that could diminish the quality of their recreational experiences.

Surveys and the Recreation Analysis

Comments questioned the survey methods for both site observations and interviews that were used for the recreation analysis. Some commenters asked why a recreation user survey was not conducted.

Recreation user surveys can be used to understand demand and use levels and can often help understand current and recent recreation use patterns and trends. Typically, the type of information gathered from a recreation user survey informs recreation planning efforts. It is sometimes used to inform effects analysis. The information needed in the project analysis is where, when, and what types of recreational use traditionally occurs in the various physical locations potentially affected by the project to then describe potential environmental impacts resulting on recreation facilities from project construction. The information is not needed for the purpose of planning for new resources or managing existing and future recreation resources.

As described in Chapter 16, the baseline, or characterization of the environmental setting, was based on numerous sources of information, including recent and past recreation surveys. Several existing recreation user surveys are included and evaluated in the EIR analysis, as discussed in the *Description of Existing Conditions in the Study Area* section of Chapter 16. Multiple recent and widely available reports characterize the Delta region's recreation areas, use, and trends. As described in Chapter 16, the field reconnaissance survey that was conducted was used to verify locations because, due to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, recent field and survey work was limited and recreation use patterns had not been typical. The reconnaissance survey was undertaken to verify public access routes as well as locations and physical evidence of recreation use at dispersed recreation sites. This information was used to characterize existing recreation conditions and trends in the Delta and surrounding areas because it confirmed existing locations,

1 public access routes, and recreation use trends. Survey and interview documentation is provided in
2 Appendix 16A, *Recreation Resources Inventory Update and Data Collection Documentation*.

3 DWR did undertake interviews in support of the EIR in lieu of conducting a recreation user survey
4 (see the *Methods for Analysis* section of Chapter 16 and Appendix 16A). These interviews included
5 public agency staff involved in a variety of roles in recreation resources management and
6 representatives from a resort and sporting club who helped characterize the variety of recreation
7 uses and specific areas of the study area where existing documentation could be supplemented.
8 Importantly, recreation managers were interviewed to gather information about recreation use,
9 dispersed or informal use areas, recreation management, and safety on Delta waterways. These
10 interviews of informed parties supplemented abundant and readily available published reports,
11 including existing results of user surveys, that DWR used to help verify site-specific information
12 related to the project's potential effects. Interviewee selection was based on the interviewees' area
13 of management responsibility or oversight and knowledge about representative recreation
14 activities, particularly dispersed activity locations that are less documented in existing
15 documentation; recommendations and availability were also factors in the selection. In addition,
16 several interviews with recreation managers were conducted to verify reported trends and obtain
17 more recent site-specific information for some locations that would be proximate to construction
18 activities. All of this information supplements and supports the recent and abundant Delta-specific
19 recreation information from Delta Protection Commission, including recent focus group interviews,
20 past recreation-specific studies, and sustainability plan updates.

21 **References Cited**

22 None.