



Conclusions and Recommendations

CHAPTER 4

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The primary objectives of Phase 3 of the Pajaro River Watershed Study were to:

- Delineate the Soap Lake floodplain
- Evaluate alternatives for preserving the Soap Lake foodplain
- Complete the CEQA documentation for the preservation alternatives
- Identify land acquisition needs
- Enhance stakeholder outreach activities
- Integrate and coordinate with other watershed studies.

Conclusions and recommendations for each of these objectives are described below.

Floodplain Delineation

In Phase 3, the Authority delineated and documented the Soap Lake floodplain. To delineate the floodplain, a hydraulic model was created and applied to create floodplain maps for five different event magnitudes. The 2-year floodplain generally follows the water features closely. The floodplain is only about 750 acres. The 10-year floodplain is significantly larger and extends about 5,500 acres. The incremental difference in the 25-, 50- and 100-year floodplains is relatively small in comparison with the 100-year floodplain reaching over 9,000 acres. Table 4-1 shows each of these flood events and the corresponding acreage.

Table 4-1: Floodplain areas of the 2-, 10-, 25-, 50-, and 100-year flood events.

Event	Floodplain Area
2-Year	740
10-Year	5,480
25-Year	7,320
50-Year	8,450
100-Year	9,110

Facilities such as bridges, roads, and railroads within the floodplain were identified. These facilities would continue to be affected during flood events. Projected flood damages to existing facilities would therefore be maintained by this project. However since new development would be limited under the project, damage to new facilities would be limited.

Methods to Preserve the Soap Lake Floodplain

Potential methods to preserve the floodplain and maintain current levels of Soap Lake flood attenuation were explored and analyzed. The recommended alternative is land acquisition through fee title purchase or flood conservation easements. This method was selected because of the multiple benefits (agricultural and open space conservation, potential restoration benefits, and public acceptance) and permanence. A number of other methods could also be applied in the short term or in combination with land acquisition. These other alternatives include zoning and General Plan land use designation changes and enforcement, floodplain management ordinances, incentive programs, and mitigation banking. Maintaining the flood attenuation capability of Soap Lake can be achieved

through other methods as well. The Soap Lake Floodplain Preservation Project does not include these alternate methods but does not preclude them either.

CEQA Documentation

Programmatic CEQA documentation for the Soap Lake Floodplain Preservation Project has been completed. CEQA “applies to projects proposed to be undertaken or requiring approval by State and local government agencies.”⁴ An initial study and negative declaration (IS/ND) was prepared documenting that there were no significant environmental impacts from the proposed project and no mitigation measures were proposed at this time. The IS/ND was circulated for public review and comment, and will be finalized in early 2005. In addition to placing notices in 4 newspapers and hosting a public meeting for the Project, a notice of availability of the IS/ND was mailed to over 300 agencies, individuals and organizations.

Many of the letters and comments received stated their support for the project and understand the importance of Soap Lake. At the time of this report the public comment period has closed with no comments of opposition. Several letters also requested that more specific information be included on how the Soap Lake Floodplain Preservation Project will be implemented and who will be responsible for it. These questions form the basis of some of the goals of the next phase of the Pajaro River Watershed Study.

Land Acquisition Needs

The Soap Lake Floodplain Preservation Project consists, for the most part, of acquiring and preserving land. There are three areas of land acquisition need that were explored generally in this phase of work:

- A strategy for land acquisition
- Identifying the most suitable buyer of land
- Estimating the cost of the parcel acquisitions

Prioritizing parcels for purchase involves balancing a number of different factors including flooding frequency, proximity to existing development, proximity to other preserved areas of land, and any other considerations such as proposed regional trails or wetlands. The most suitable land buyer will likely be determined on a case-by-case basis since different groups will have different priorities for parcel acquisition and different funding options and timelines. The envelope of floodplain costs is between about \$45 million and \$175 million though it is likely that the actual cost will be at the lower end of the estimate.

Stakeholder Consensus

Stakeholder consensus has been a key part of the success of the Pajaro River Watershed Study. Members, associate members, and interested groups have been consulted or have been involved in all decisions and the direction of the study. The public is invited to attend and take part in the Authority Board meetings. Special presentations have also been made to groups interested in learning more about the Authority’s work.

⁴ http://ceres.ca.gov/topic/env_law/ceqa/summary.html. November, 2004.

To increase the visibility of the Authority and facilitate distribution of information, a website has been developed. The site, www.PajaroRiverWatershed.org, provides an overview of the Authority structure and purpose and a centralized location for document downloads and public and contact information. This website is considered to be dynamic as it is able to develop and change as additional information and studies are developed.

Keeping the key stakeholders involved must be considered a priority of the Authority. Coordination among the agencies and organizations make the recommendations, work products, and actions of the Authority more significant and meaningful. Consensus will ultimately lead to better fulfillment of the Authority's mission of flood protection on a watershed basis.

Coordination with Other Studies

The Authority is in a prominent position to play a significant role in watershed activities. The most immediate opportunity is to continue supporting the Lower Pajaro River Project by maintaining flood levels. Implementing the Soap Lake Floodplain Preservation Project will continue to make the Lower Pajaro River Project feasible and allow the levees and floodwalls to contain the 100-year flood as they are designed to do. Depending on Corps of Engineers restrictions and timing of the work, there is also the possibility of leveraging the work performed and funds allocated for the Pajaro River Watershed Study as part of a Corps sponsored watershed study. The Corps watershed study would help to satisfy State and Federal regulatory and resource agencies' concerns about environmental impacts of the Lower Pajaro River Project. Should the Corps not be able to accept the Study work products and funds as a local match, the Authority should examine other ways to act as the local sponsor to the Corps watershed study.