

Chapter 2. Proposed Project and Project Alternatives

PROPOSED PROJECT AND PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The proposed project evaluated in this EIR consists of:

- # the establishment and maintenance of instream flow requirements in the Mono Lake tributaries from which the City of Los Angeles diverts water; the instream flow requirements will be established in compliance with California Fish and Game Code Sections 5937 and 5946 and a court mandate to release sufficient water to reestablish and maintain fisheries that existed in these streams prior to the city's diversions; and
- # the establishment and maintenance of water elevation requirements in Mono Lake to provide appropriate protection for public trust resources and beneficial uses of Mono Lake.

SWRCB will incorporate the appropriate instream flow requirements, lake-level requirements, and mitigation measures into the City of Los Angeles' water rights licenses for diversions from Mono Basin.

PROJECT ALTERNATIVES

This EIR evaluates the full range of water rights alternatives, each of which represents a lake level target and projected volume of water export based on assumed stream diversion rules. The alternatives range from imposing no new restrictions on diversion to ending all diversions. The definition of alternatives is based primarily on differing lake levels rather than on the quantity of water needed to provide instream fishery flows. Whatever fishery flows are eventually determined by the SWRCB to be appropriate will be associated with some net quantity of inflow to Mono Lake and a corresponding lake level. The range of alternatives defined in the EIR is sufficiently broad to cover any potential level of inflow that would result from those fishery flows.

Seven alternatives have been defined. The No-Restriction and No-Diversion Alternatives define the full range of possibilities, but the No-Restriction Alternative cannot meet the project objectives. Five intermediate alternatives have been formulated that can meet project objectives to varying degrees. Lake-level, water-export, and streamflow regimes that would result under each alternative were simulated for the EIR using the Los Angeles Aqueduct Monthly Planning (LAAMP) model developed by SWRCB

consultants. Version 2.0 of LAAMP was used for the data presented and used in the draft EIR. In response to several comments raised during the review period (see the responses to Comments A1 and A2 in Chapter 4A), Version 3.3 of LAAMP was developed and applied to some of the alternatives. The results of the two versions are similar and validate the assumptions used in the draft EIR (see response to Major Issue A1 in Chapter 4). Data from LAAMP 2.0 runs and revised drought scenarios (see response to Major Issue A5) are used in the following alternatives characterization:

- # No-Restriction (No-Project) Alternative - No new restrictions would be placed on the diversions of water by the city under its water rights licenses; minimum streamflows and lake levels would not be required. The lake surface would be expected to gradually fall to an average elevation of about 6,355 feet and fluctuate about 21 feet, depending on actual runoff. Approximately 85 thousand acre-feet per year (TAF/yr) (73%) would be exported from Mono Basin and 32 TAF/yr (27%) would be released to Mono Lake from the four streams, on average.
- # 6,372-Ft Alternative - This target elevation corresponds to the lowest lake level that the lake has reached in historical time, occurring at the end of 1981 after 40 years of streamflow diversions. The lake surface would normally fluctuate about 6.5 feet in elevation, depending on actual runoff, and would have an average elevation of 6,375 feet. Occasionally, the lake surface would rise as high as about 6,379 feet. During extreme drought, the lake surface might fall as low as about 6,370.6 feet. Approximately 64 TAF/yr (51%) would be exported from Mono Basin and 61 TAF/yr (49%) would be released to Mono Lake, on average.
- # 6,377-Ft Alternative - This target elevation corresponds to that level beneath which no diversions are currently allowed under the court's preliminary injunction. It is the interim minimum target lake level, intended to maintain the status quo until action can be taken by SWRCB. The lake surface would normally fluctuate about 6.5 feet in elevation, depending on actual runoff, and would rise to an average elevation of 6,379 feet. Occasionally, the lake surface would rise as high as about 6,383 feet. During extreme drought, the lake surface might fall as low as about 6,373 feet. Approximately 52 TAF/yr (41%) would be exported from Mono Basin and 74 TAF/yr (59%) would be released to Mono Lake, on average.
- # 6,383.5-Ft Alternative - This target elevation corresponds to the midpoint of the range of lake levels (6,390-6,377 feet) recommended by the USFS in its management plan for the Mono Basin National Forest Scenic Area. The lake surface would normally fluctuate about 6 feet in elevation, depending on actual runoff, and would eventually rise to an average elevation of 6,385.7 feet after 5-10 years. Occasionally, the lake surface would rise as high as about 6,389 feet. During extreme drought, the lake surface might fall as low as about 6,377 feet. Approximately 44 TAF/yr (35%) would be exported from Mono Basin and 82 TAF/yr (65%) would be released to Mono Lake, on average.

- # 6,390-Ft Alternative - This target elevation corresponds to the upper lake level recommended in the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) management plan. The lake surface would normally fluctuate about 6 feet in elevation and would eventually reach an average elevation of 6,391.6 feet. Occasionally, the lake surface would rise as high as 6,395 feet and, during extreme drought, fall as low as 6,382 feet. After equilibrium was attained, exports would be approximately 37 TAF/yr (29%) and lake releases would be 89 TAF/yr (71%).

- # 6,410-Ft Alternative - This target elevation corresponds to an intermediate elevation between the 6,390-Ft Alternative and the No-Diversion Alternative, providing an alternative that could reflect substantial streamflows if required by SWRCB to protect public trust resources. The lake surface would normally fluctuate about 7 feet in elevation, depending on actual runoff, and would eventually reach an average elevation of 6,410.8 feet in about 80 years. Occasionally, the lake surface would rise as high as 6,415 feet and, during extreme drought, fall as low as 6,398-6,399 feet. After equilibrium was attained, exports would be approximately 22 TAF/yr (17%) and lake releases would be 104 TAF/yr (83%).

- # No-Diversion Alternative - Diversions of the four tributary streams would be entirely curtailed. Streamflow and lake level would be determined by natural weather events and patterns, and the lake surface would rise toward or beyond the prediversion level. After a transition period of more than 100 years, the lake surface would eventually reach an estimated average elevation of about 6,425 to 6,430 feet and would normally fluctuate about 10 feet in elevation thereafter, depending on actual runoff. No water would be exported from Mono Basin.

List of Acros

Los Angeles Aqueduct Monthly Planning (LAAMP) 1
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