

Shafter~Wasco Irrigation District

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January 22, 2024

Mr. Wade Crowfoot
Secretary for Natural Resources
California Natural Resources Agency
715 P Street, 20th Floor
Sacramento, CA 95814

Subject: Request for Suspension of the California Environmental Quality Act under Executive Order N-7-22 for Proposed Land Clearing and Groundwater Recharge Activities

Shafter-Wasco Irrigation District (District) respectfully requests that the Secretary of the California Natural Resources Agency make a determination that the activities proposed herein are eligible to be conducted under the suspension of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) (Public Resources Code, Division 13) pursuant to paragraph 5 Executive Order N-7-22 (Executive Order).

The District is a California Irrigation District organized and existing under and by virtue of the Irrigation District Law, Division 11, of the California Water Code. The District was formally organized in 1937 and provides for the delivery of surface water primarily from the United States Bureau of Reclamation's (USBR) Central Valley Project (CVP) Friant-Kern Canal to District landowners for irrigation and groundwater recharge.

The District also serves as the Shafter-Wasco Irrigation District Groundwater Sustainability Agency (GSA) within the Kern Subbasin of the San Joaquin Valley Groundwater Basin (Kern Subbasin), which, was designated as subject to conditions of critical overdraft by the California Department of Water Resources Bulletin 118 – Interim Update (2016). Since adopting the Kern Groundwater Authority Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) on December 2019, the District has been taking action to avoid undesirable results by increasing groundwater recharge activities to support sustainable management of the Kern Subbasin by 2040.

Responding to the 2023 season's excess water conditions, the District fully utilized existing recharge facilities and recognized that the District's conveyance system had unused capacity during the flood season. The District has identified landowners willing to provide additional land

for recharge basins. Additional recharge basins would capture additional flood flows for recharge and would reduce flooding along Tulare Lake tributaries and in Tulare Lake, downstream of the Friant-Kern canal. This will promote drought resiliency within the severely overdrafted Kern groundwater Subbasin, and benefit downstream disadvantaged communities along the tributaries, including the communities of Shafter and Wasco.

With the support of the Executive Order and furtherance of the Shafter-Wasco GSA goals, the District intends to clear agricultural plantings and construct groundwater recharge basins on parcels APN 072-210-09 and APN 026-220-01 within the District located in Kern County.

The parcels have been in agriculture production for more than 100 years and are currently planted with approximately 58 acres of grape vines and 115 acres of almonds as identified in Exhibit A (Request for CEQA Suspension Locations) and Exhibit B (Vicinity Map). Prior to the District's purchase of these two parcels, the crops will be removed and cleared from the lands by the landowner. It is anticipated that the proposed recharge basins would provide a minimum of 18,000 acre-feet of groundwater recharge based on an assumed infiltration rate of 1.0 foot per day for approximately 90 days. In addition, taking the recharge basin land out of irrigated agriculture would conserve approximately 600 acre-feet of water per year. Thus helping to promote drought resiliency within the Kern Subbasin by increasing water storage and reducing the pumping of groundwater. This proposed activity would also provide a direct benefit to the region by reducing the risks of local catastrophic flooding in the Tulare and Kern Subbasins.

Consistent with that intent, subject in part to your determination that the activities described in this letter are eligible to proceed under paragraph 5 of the Executive Order, the District will:

1. Conduct assessment of historic land use including the potential for soil contamination.
2. Construct groundwater recharge basins and install turnout facilities. The District will utilize an earthwork contractor to grade the property and construct basin levees (not to exceed 6-feet in height) and levee keyways. The District will self-perform the installation of turnout gates and piping from the District distribution system and adjacent ponds to divert floodwater into the recharge basins.
3. Fallow the lands on which the groundwater recharge basins will be constructed.
4. Divert available CVP Friant-Kern canal system water into the recharge basins utilizing the District's Friant-Kern water rights and other agreements.
5. Monitor and report groundwater levels and quality in accordance with the District's groundwater monitoring program.
6. Use District funds, Bureau of Reclamation Water SMART funds and Flood Emergency Funding Agreement with the Department of Water Resources to cover costs of the project.

Without the suspension of CEQA under paragraph 5 of the Executive Order, the District would have to ensure CEQA compliance (estimated at 6 months) prior to carrying out the proposed activities. A determination that the proposed activities fall within paragraph 5 of the Executive Order would

facilitate the construction of the recharge basin to capture and recharge floodwater coming this winter and spring.

Granting this request would give the District the opportunity to fast track the project to provide the critically overdrafted Kern Groundwater Subbasin with a vital asset in a location that would best serve the water resource needs of the region and the local disadvantaged communities within and nearby Shafter and Wasco.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. If you have any questions or require additional information, please do not hesitate to contact Kris Lawrence at klawrence@swid.org or (661) 758-5153.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kris Lawrence', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Kris Lawrence
General Manager

cc: Nancy Vogel, California Natural Resources Agency
Christopher Calfee, California Natural Resources Agency
Stephanie Shimazu, California Natural Resources Agency
Steven Springhorn, California Department of Water Resources
Dane Mathis, California Department of Water Resources

Enclosures:

Exhibit A Request for CEQA Suspension Locations
Exhibit B Vicinity Map

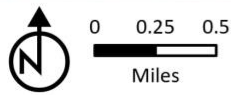
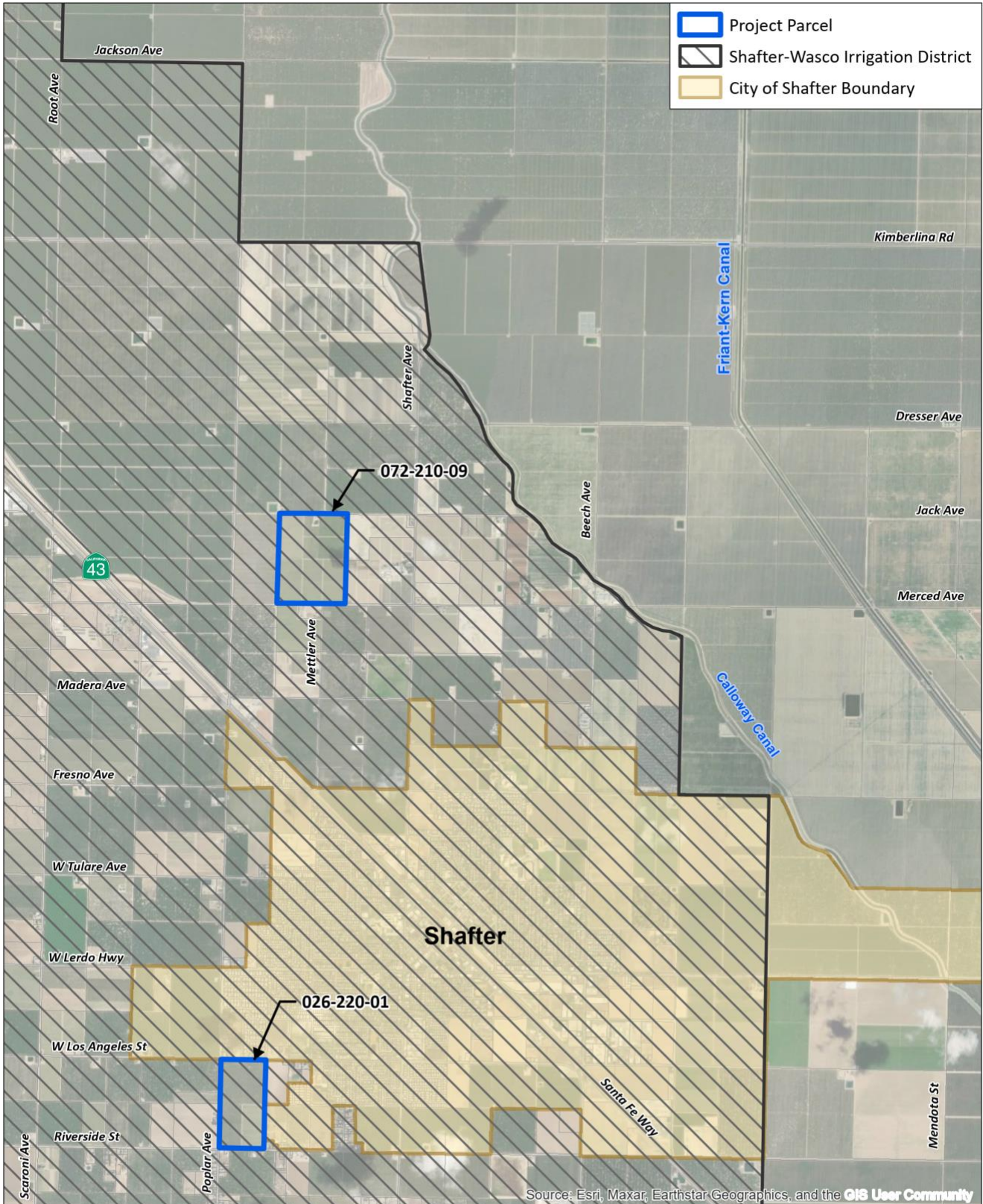


Exhibit A - Request for CEQA Suspension Locations

Shafter-Wasco Irrigation District

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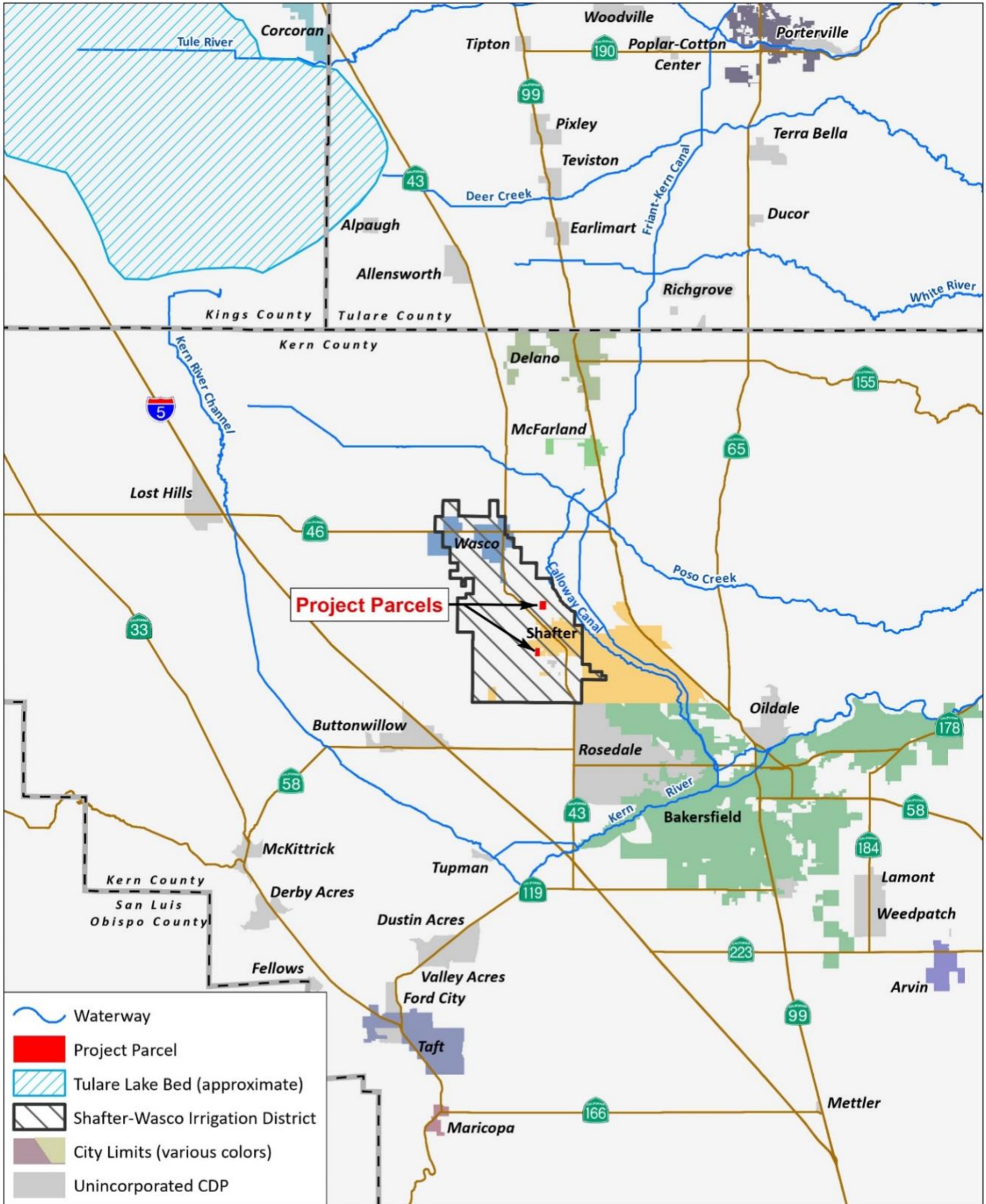


Exhibit B - Vicinity Map
Shafter-Wasco Irrigation District

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