Inyo County Water Department
135 S. Jackson Street
P.O. Box 337
Independence, California 93526

Notice of Preparation

To: Agencies, Organizations, and Interested Individual

From: Inyo County Water Department
135 S. Jackson Street
P.O. Box 337
Independence, California 93526

Subject: Notice of Preparation for a Draft Environmental Impact Report for the Owens River Water Trail Project

This Notice of Preparation (NOP) has been prepared to notify agencies and interested parties that the County of Inyo Water Department is preparing an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) for the proposed Owens River Water Trail Project (ORWT or proposed project). We need to know the views of your agency as to the scope and content of the environmental information that is germane to your agency's statutory responsibilities in connection with the proposed project as well as the views and comments of any additional interested parties. Your agency will need to use the EIR prepared by our agency when considering your permit or other approval for the project.

The project description, location, and the potential environmental effects are included in Attachment A. A copy of the Initial Study (___is _X_ is not) attached.

Due to the time limits mandated by State Law, your response must be sent at the earliest possible date but not later than 30 days after receipt of this notice. The comment period associated with this Notice of Preparation begins on the release date of **May 24, 2018** and concludes on **June 25, 2018.** A public Scoping Meeting will be held on **June 11, 2018 at 6:00 p.m. at Statham Hall, 138 N. Jackson St., Lone Pine, CA 93545.**

Please send your response to Larry Freilich, Mitigation Manager, at lfreilich@inyocounty.us; Inyo County Water Department, PO Box 337, Independence CA, 93526. Please include the name(s) of the contact person(s) for your agency.

Project Title: Owens River Water Trail

Project Applicant, if any: N/A

Date: 5/22/2017

Signature: _____
Title: Mitigation Manager
Phone: (760) 878-0011; (760) 920-1169

Reference: California Code of Regulations, Title 14, (CEQA Guidelines) Sections 15082(a), 15103, 15375

Attachment A

Project Title:	Owens River Water Trail Project
Lead Agency Name and Address:	Inyo County Water Department 135 S. Jackson Street Independence, CA 93526
Contact Person and Phone Number:	Larry Freilich Mitigation Manager County of Inyo, Water Department (760) 878-0001

Project Location: The proposed project would extend along 6.3 miles of the Lower Owens River in the Eastern Sierra, just east of Lone Pine, California, as shown in **Figure 1**. The proposed project would encompass the 6.3-mile stretch of the Lower Owens River between Lone Pine Narrow Gauge Road and Highway 136, as shown in **Figure 2**.

General Plan Designation: Natural Resources (NR)

Zoning Designation: Open Space – Recreational (OS-R)

Project Description: Since 1913, 62 miles of the Owens River has been a mostly dry channel due to diversion of river flow by the City of Los Angeles into the Los Angeles Aqueduct. Prior to diversion, the City of Los Angeles' Hydrographers recorded flow in the river of 425 cubic feet-second (cfs) on average, with peak flows at well over 3,000 cfs. In December 2006, the City of Los Angeles and Inyo County jointly initiated the Lower Owens River Project (LORP), which reestablished a perpetual regulated flow down the dry channel. The LORP guarantees a minimum flow of 40 cfs with additional springtime water releases indexed to forecasted snowmelt runoff. In years when runoff from snow melt is predicted to be normal or higher, a 200 cfs flushing flow is sent down the river in the late spring.

The proposed project would provide recreational access to a 6.3-mile section of the newly rewatered, 62-mile Lower Owens River (**Figure 2**). The aim of the proposed project is to develop facilities for recreational users to enter and exit the river and allow unimpeded navigation for non-motorized watercrafts, such as kayaks, standup paddle boards, and canoes. Specifically, the project's objectives are to provide all-abilities access to the ORWT, provide recreational and education opportunities, and be consistent with the habitat, environmental, and social goals of the LORP.

Currently, sections of the ORWT river corridor are non-navigable due to the channel being partially or fully obstructed by emergent aquatic vegetation and associated sediment accumulation, and large and small woody debris. In order to establish the ORWT for non-motorized watercraft, the proposed project would remove river channel occlusions by manual and machine methods. While the proposed project would require clearing activities, the project would keep the river channel in its natural form as much as possible and would remove the minimum amount of vegetation required to allow for the passage of watercrafts.

Manual and mechanical equipment would be used to open up an estimated 2.5 to 2.75 miles of blocked river channel. Existing roadways would be used to access the river. Manual clearing would be accomplished from the water by workers equipped with saws, sickles, rakes, and winches. Mechanical construction activities using an all-terrain excavator and an all-terrain truck would occur from the shore of the channel and/or would be water based using an Aquamog or similar vessel and a waste barge. Emergent vegetation would be cut at the basal bud, or the entire rhizome would be pulled from the bottom. Tule islands, which are river obstructions 30 feet or less in length, would be removed. Large woody debris that is submerged and is a hazard to navigation would be moved from the channel and secured into emergent vegetation to provide habitat for invertebrates and to create fish cover. Small woody debris would also be secured in emergent vegetation. Dredged materials would be pulverized and spread adjacent to the river, spread at the edge of the floodplain, or stockpiled, dried and removed from the floodplain, likely trucked to nearby locations. In all cases dredged material would be stabilized with native vegetation seeding. Construction equipment would be stored out of the floodplain in accordance with standard industry best management practices. Overall, these river improvements would be as minimally intensive as feasible to continue to maintain the existing natural landscape.

In addition to clearing the river channel, the proposed project would also construct water entry and exit structures along the river bank (**Figure 2**). The water entry and exit structures would allow safe access to the ORWT for people of all abilities, including the disabled. The water entry point would be located along the east side of the river off of Lone Pine Narrow Gauge Road. A graded, all-weather driveway and turnaround would be constructed to allow access to the river and form a turnaround loop with a radius large enough for a vehicle with a kayak/canoe trailer to navigate. Nearest the river, a staging pad would allow all-abilities loading and unloading of water craft. An inlet would be designed to provide a still-water entry and exit point. A gently sloping launch pad would allow all-abilities entry at water surface elevations corresponding to flows from 40 cfs to 200 cfs. Parking would be available along the Lone Pine Narrow Gauge Road at the top of the ORWT. To support the water entry access site, a prefabricated vault toilet, trash cans, and weather resistant signage at the river entry to provide interpretive information would be installed. Water safety information, rules, emergency contacts, and interpretative information would also be provided. Fencing would be installed to separate the entry point from grazing activities. A cattle guard would be installed at Lone Pine Narrow Gauge Road and the eastside river road.

Approximately 6.3 miles downstream of the water entry point, the water exit point would be constructed either in a largely disturbed area just west of the Keeler Bridge abutment, or at an appropriate location just upriver. A turnaround loop would be graded, and a natural surface or all weather road would be installed depending on final site design. A staging pad would be constructed by expanding the road to the river launch. A bay inlet would be constructed to allow a still-water river exit. A ramp similar to the launch would be constructed to allow an all-abilities water exit at flows ranging from 20 cfs to 200 cfs. The water exit point would be constructed to allow vehicle access for recreational users to retrieve boats and equipment at the end of the trail. Site selection preference will be for existing disturbed areas in order to minimize impacts to native vegetation and grazing lands. Similar to the water entry point location, public amenities would be installed for recreational users of the ORWT. Small parking areas with gravel surfaces would be constructed near both of the water access locations. Pedestrian paths between parking and staging areas and the water entry and water exit structures would also be constructed. As with the entry point, cattle exclusion fencing would be installed.

Once construction of the OWRT has been completed, ongoing maintenance activities are anticipated to maintain the integrity of the river channel as well as the water entry and exit facilities. Manual work, as described above, and/or mechanical clearing activities using watercraft, such as a Truxor 5000, would be implemented on an as-needed basis to remove emergent vegetation from the channel in order to maintain an open channel and allow passage of recreational watercraft.

Surrounding Land Uses and Setting: The project area, defined by the perimeter of the floodplain from Lone Pine Narrow Gauge Road south to Highway 136, is largely a natural setting. The floodplain varies in width from 0.12 to 0.33 miles. Dominant floodplain vegetation includes salt-grass meadow and tree and shrub willow woodland. A number of unpaved roads parallel the river on sandy chalky bluffs, where a few dirt roads enter the floodplain from the bluff. In 2013, a large fire swept through about 50 percent of this floodplain. The land directly adjacent to the river channel is owned by Los Angeles Department Water and Power (LADWP). The project area is leased for cattle grazing.

Other Public Agencies Whose Approval may be Required:

- Los Angeles Department of Water and Power
- California Department of Fish and Wildlife
- Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board
- State Water Resources Control Board
- U. S. Army Corps of Engineers

Environmental Factors Potentially Affected: The EIR will assess and disclose the reasonably foreseeable direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts that would likely result from the construction and operation of the proposed project. Potential impacts to resources listed in Appendix F and Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines include, but may not be limited to, those summarized below. The EIR will identify mitigation measures if necessary to avoid, minimize, and offset potentially significant impacts of the project. The EIR also will evaluate alternatives to the proposed project that would avoid, minimize, and offset potentially significant impacts of the project.

- **Aesthetics:** The proposed project would remove vegetation within the river channel and would develop low-lying structures for the water entry and exit facilities. The Draft EIR will describe the existing scenic vistas and visual character of the project area, including scenic highways. Impacts associated with construction and operation of the project will be assessed, although the project facilities are not expected to be visible from scenic roadways to obstruct scenic views. The proposed project would provide recreational users access to scenic vistas of surrounding mountains and rural areas from the vantage of the water trail.

- **Air Quality and Greenhouse Gas Emissions:** The proposed project is located in the Owens Valley PM-10 Planning Area and approximately 0.9 miles from the closest sensitive receptor. Operation of equipment during project construction and maintenance would cause air emissions, including criteria pollutants. The Draft EIR will describe the existing air quality setting in the project area and use the California Emissions Estimator Model (CalEEMod) to calculate air emissions associated with the project, including greenhouse gas emissions. Air quality impacts will be assessed in accordance Great Basin Unified Air Pollution Control District requirements, including fugitive dust control measures.

- **Biological Resources:** The proposed project would potentially remove aquatic vegetation, wetland vegetation, and upland vegetation from the river channel and floodplain, including the areas to be developed for the water entry and exit facilities. The Draft EIR will describe the existing conditions of biological resources in the project area, including special-status/native/migratory plants, wildlife and fishes, sensitive natural communities, riparian and wetland habitats and evaluate the potential temporary and permanent impacts associated with construction and operation of the project.

- **Cultural Resources and Tribal Cultural Resources:** The proposed project would result in ground disturbance during construction of the proposed facilities for vegetation removal, mobilization and staging of construction equipment, and installation of water entry and exit facilities. The water exit facilities may be located near a trestle embankment that supported a train over the Keeler Bridge, which may be a historic resource. The Draft EIR will describe the existing conditions regarding known (and potential for unknown) historic, archaeological, paleontological, and tribal resources in the project area. The Draft EIR will evaluate potential impacts to these resources associated the proposed ground disturbance and construction activities. The Draft EIR will also describe the County of Inyo's consultation with Tribes in the project area, as required by Assembly Bill (AB) 52 and CEQA.

- **Geology and Soils:** The proposed project would result in the excavation and removal of soils to construct the water entry and exit facilities. The Draft EIR will identify the types of soils adjacent to the river channel and assess the potential impacts of project development on soils and soil stability hazards such as erosion, lateral spreading, subsidence, liquefaction and collapse. The project design would include specifications based on soil type and site conditions to minimize the potential for such hazards to occur.

- **Hydrology and Water Quality:** The proposed project would result in removal of occlusions from the Owens River channel to eliminate constriction in flow and removal of emergent vegetation to widen the channel to allow for passage of non-motorized watercraft; widening is estimated at 10-15 feet maximum. These actions may slightly alter hydraulics of the channel and its morphology. Taking into consideration the highly regulated flow of the Lower Owens River within the project area, the Draft EIR will describe the existing conditions of the river hydrology and water quality, including flow and flood patterns. The Draft EIR will evaluate potential impacts caused by construction and operation of the project, including water quality, erosion, siltation, sedimentation, and flooding.

- **Land Use and Planning:** The proposed project would be developed on lands owned by the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power. The County land use designations for the project area are Open Space zoning and a General Plan designation of Natural Resources. Currently the project area is leased for grazing. The Draft EIR will evaluate the project's consistency with existing land use designations and the continued use of surrounding lands for grazing, as well as the goals of the Lower Owens River Project and the Draft Recreation Use Plan and the LORP Mitigation and Monitoring Program.

- **Recreation and Parks:** The proposed project includes construction and operation of a new recreational area. Once completed, the proposed project could draw new recreational visitors and generate greater demand on existing parks and campgrounds throughout Inyo County. The Draft EIR will evaluate the potential environmental impacts associated with the use of this new recreational attraction.

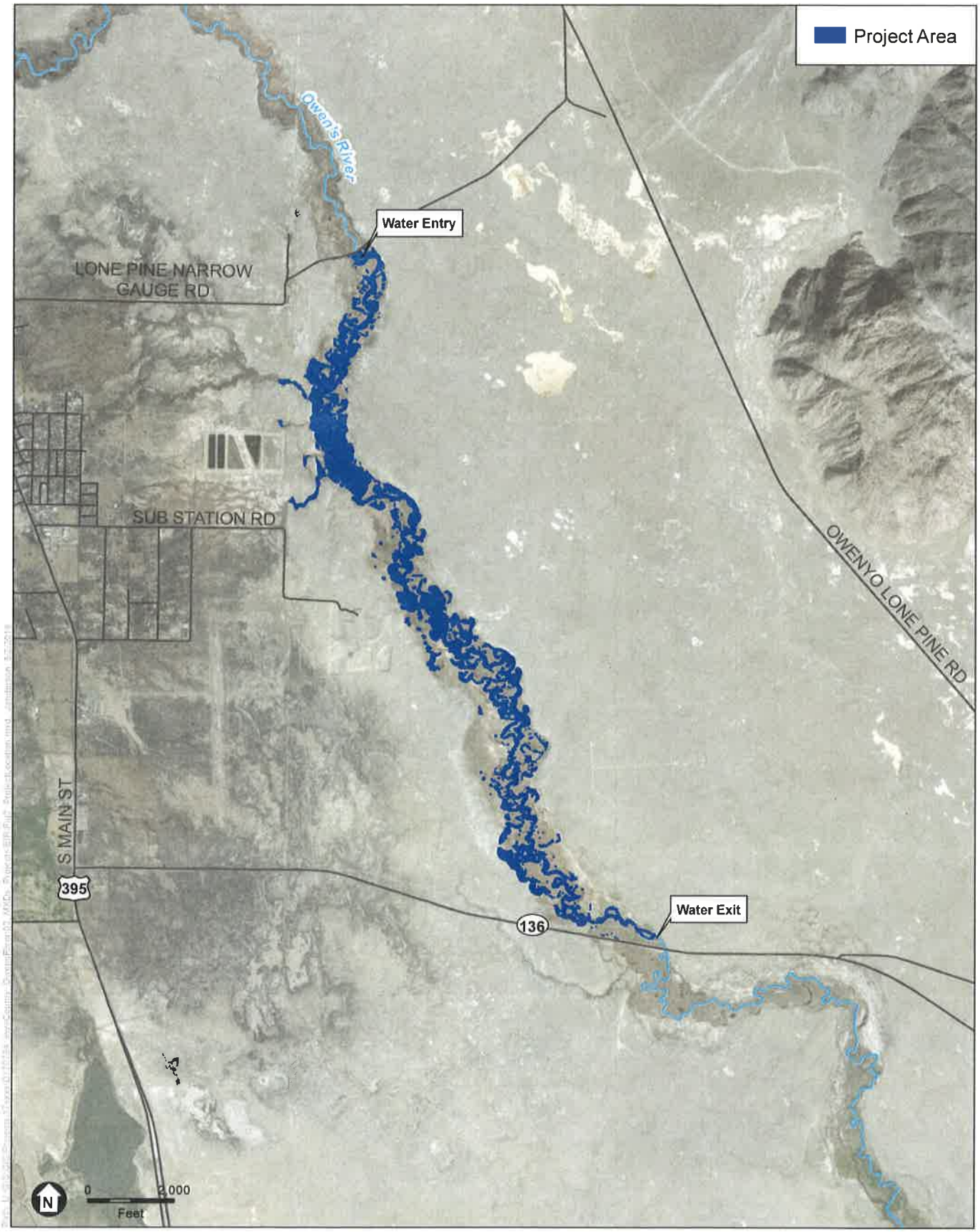
SOURCE: ESRI

Owens River Water Trail

Figure 1
Regional Location

ESA

18-00016



SOURCE: ESRI

Owens River Water Trail

Figure 2
Project Location

ESA

18-00016