9. Water Resources

9.1 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

9.1.1 The Basin Plans

Each of the nine Regional Water Quality Control Boards in California establishes the beneficial uses of the waters within the region in a Water Quality Control Plan. The plan contains numeric and/or narrative *water quality objectives* and spells out a program by which the objectives can be achieved within their boundaries. The Ventura County area is subject to Water Quality Control Plans of Region 3 (Central Coast Region), Region 4 (Los Angeles Region), and Region 5 (Central Valley Region), which are collectively referred to in this section as the *Basin Plans*.

9.1.2 Groundwater

Groundwater is water that occurs beneath the land surface and occupies the pore spaces and fractures of the alluvium, soil, or rock formation in which it is situated. Groundwater quality shall be determined in relationship to the *water quality objectives* and beneficial uses set by the *Basin Plans* and/or applicable *Groundwater Sustainability Plans (GSPs)*. A GSP is a plan providing a roadmap for how a specific groundwater basin, as defined by the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act, will reach long-term sustainability.

9.1.3 Surface Water

For purposes of this section, surface water is defined as all above-ground water bodies within Ventura County as identified in the *Basin Plans*, including water present on the bed surface of streams, canals, channels, lakes, reservoirs, estuaries, and harbors usually generated by precipitation and base flow conditions. Surface waters also consist of discharges from urban sources. The Pacific Ocean is considered part of the surface water resources in Ventura County. The surface water quality must be suitable to meet all *water quality standards* as derived through the application of principles as outlined in the *Basin Plans*.

Additional information on the existing conditions of groundwater and surface water in Ventura County are provided in Section 10 of the Ventura County General Plan Background Report.

9.2 THRESHOLDS OF SIGNIFICANCE

The determination of significance shall be made on a case-by-case basis and evaluated using the following thresholds of significance as specified below.

WAT-1 A project may have a significant impact if it would directly or indirectly decrease the net supply of groundwater in an overdrafted *groundwater basin* by one *acre-foot* or more per year.

WAT-2 A project may have a significant impact if it would result in net groundwater extraction in *groundwater basins* that are not overdrafted, and/or not hydrologically or hydrogeologically continuous with an *overdrafted basin*, that could cause the basin to become overdrafted.

WAT-3 A project may have a significant impact if it would result in a net increase in groundwater extraction of one *acre-foot* or more per year from *groundwater basins*, *hydrologic units*, and/or *hydrogeologic units* that are not well documented or show evidence of overdraft.

WAT-4 A project may have a significant impact if it would degrade groundwater quality, or cause it to exceed groundwater quality objectives set by the *Basin Plans* and/or applicable *GSP*.

WAT-5 A project may have a significant impact if it would increase surface water consumptive use (demand) in a fully appropriated stream reach as designated by the State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) or where unappropriated surface water is unavailable, or by diverting or dewatering downstream reaches that would result in an adverse impact to one or more of the beneficial uses listed in the *Basin Plans*.

WAT-6 A project may have a significant impact if it would directly or indirectly impact surface water quality or stormwater quality, causing it to exceed surface *water quality objectives*, *water quality standards*, and/or *water quality-based effluent limitations* of an applicable *Basin Plan*, *Municipal Separate Storm Sewer Systems ("MS4") Permit*, *National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Permit*, or result in failure to obtain coverage or comply with *Waste Discharge Requirements (WDRs)*.

9.3 IMPACT ANALYSIS

Guidance on addressing the questions from the Initial Study Checklist is provided below. In order to determine whether project impacts meet or exceed the criteria of the thresholds of significance in Section 9.2, the level of impact shall be evaluated based on the appropriate assessment methodologies as outlined below.

(a) Would the project directly or indirectly decrease the net supply of groundwater in an overdrafted groundwater basin by one acre-foot or more per year?

Compare the project's annual groundwater demand to the historical groundwater demand to determine whether there would be a net increase. Historical groundwater demand is defined as the average annual groundwater demand as calculated for the 15-year period ending two years prior to project application (private projects) or Initial Study preparation (public projects). Consult with the appropriate groundwater sustainability agency or water agency, supplier, and/or purveyor to determine whether an alternative method of calculating historic groundwater extraction may be used for unusual or unique circumstances. Chapter 10 of the Background Report contains lists of water agencies, suppliers, and purveyors within the major watersheds identified as Ventura River, Cuyama, Santa Clara River, and Calleguas Creek, and Malibu Creek.

Determine if the project would reduce groundwater recharge. The PWA~~,~~ will evaluate the project's estimated amount of groundwater usage, as well as the goals, objectives, policies, and/or development standards that apply to the project to determine the level of impact based on the identified thresholds of significance.

If the net ~~decrease~~ increase in groundwater demand is less than one *acre-foot* per year, then the project-specific and cumulative impact shall be considered less than significant. If the project's groundwater demand would increase by more than one *acre-foot* per year and/or decrease groundwater recharge that would cause a net decrease in groundwater supply in the *overdrafted*

basin, then the project shall be considered to have a potentially significant project-specific and cumulative impact.

The project applicant, in consultation with the Resource Management Agency Planning Division and PWA, shall review past, present, and reasonably foreseeable probable future projects, including those in the cities, if applicable, that are located within the same *groundwater basin* as the project, to assess the project's contribution to cumulative impacts on groundwater supply.

(b) Would the project result in net groundwater extraction in groundwater basins that are not overdrafted, and/or not hydrologically or hydrogeologically continuous with an overdrafted basin, that could cause the basin to become overdrafted?

Compare the proposed groundwater extraction quantity to the total groundwater extractions from the *groundwater basin* and/or *hydrologic unit* or *hydrogeologic unit*. This evaluation requires a review of any supporting data, including estimates of annual groundwater withdrawals from the basin and or *hydrologic unit* or *hydrogeologic unit*, estimates of the project's proposed groundwater use, and evaluation of groundwater levels over time. If no data is available, consult with the appropriate groundwater sustainability agency or water agency, supplier, and/or purveyor to identify the *groundwater basins*, *hydrologic units*, and/or *hydrogeologic units* where basin conditions are not well known or documented and historical water levels in the basin shall be evaluated for trends. If the comparison shows that the project has the potential to cause overdraft, then the project-specific and cumulative impact shall be considered potentially significant.

(c) Would the project result in a net increase in groundwater extraction of one acre-foot or more per year from groundwater basins, hydrologic units, and/or hydrogeologic units that are not well documented or show evidence of overdraft?

PWA shall identify the *groundwater basins*, *hydrologic units*, and/or *hydrogeologic units* where basin conditions are not well known or documented.

Historical water levels in the basin shall be evaluated for trends. The project-specific and cumulative impact shall be considered less than significant if the project would result in less than one *acre-foot* per year in groundwater extraction. If the evaluation determines that declining water levels indicate a net deficit in groundwater storage and the project would result in an increase in groundwater extraction of one *acre-foot* or more per year, then the project shall be considered to have a potentially significant project-specific and cumulative impact.

(d) Would the project degrade groundwater quality, causing it to exceed groundwater quality objectives set by the Basin Plans?

Groundwater quality objectives set by the *Basin Plans* and/or applicable GSP are numerical objectives that, if exceeded, indicates an impairment of a beneficial use of groundwater.

Determine whether the project is located within an area with an impacted or non-impacted *groundwater basin*. A non-impacted *groundwater basin* contains *hydrogeologic units* where all groundwater *constituents* currently meet the *water quality objectives* of the *Basin Plans*. A *groundwater basin* is considered an impacted basin if it currently exceeds one or more *water quality objectives* of the applicable *Basin Plan*.

Projects proposing the use of onsite wastewater treatment systems such as, but not limited to, septic tanks, leach fields, and seepage pits, or animal husbandry or animal boarding facilities in basins known to be impacted by concentrations of nitrates exceeding *water quality objectives* shall

be reviewed by the Ventura County Resource Management Agency (RMA) Environmental Health Division and the appropriate groundwater sustainability agency, if applicable. The Regional Water Quality Control Board may also be consulted, if necessary. The Ventura County RMA Environmental Health Division may impose project conditions or recommend measures to reduce the project's potential for nitrate loading.

The project applicant, in consultation with the Ventura County RMA Planning Division and PWA, shall review past, present, and reasonably foreseeable probable future projects, including those in the cities, if applicable, that are located within the same *groundwater basin* as the project in order to assess the project's contribution to cumulative impacts on groundwater quality.

PWA shall evaluate the project's estimated potential contribution to groundwater quality impacts, as well as the goals, objectives, policies, and/or development standards that apply to the project to determine the level of impact based on the thresholds of significance.

Preparation of Initial Study Checklist

A project shall be considered to have a **Less Than Significant Impact (LS)** if it:

- Will not cause the *hydrogeologic unit* within a non-impacted basin to exceed *water quality objectives* of the *Basin Plans*;
- Will not contribute to further exceedance of *water quality objectives* within an impacted basin;
- Will not result in the discharge of materials known to be and/or classified as hazardous by the State of California;
- Will provide provisions for the implementation of preventative measures and Best Management Practices (BMPs), including but not limited to spill and leak prevention, training, appropriate material storage and disposal, and spill and leak response and reporting. For purposes of this section, BMPs are practices, physical devices, or systems designed to prevent or reduce pollutant loading from stormwater or non-stormwater discharges to receiving waters.

Projects that could be considered to have a potentially significant impact but have identified mitigation measures reviewed and approved by PWA to reduce impacts to a less than significant level, shall be considered **Less Than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated (LS-M)**. Mitigation measures shall be developed on a case-by-case basis when a determination of LS-M has been identified.

A project shall be considered to have a **Potentially Significant Impact (PS)** and further analysis shall be addressed in an EIR if there is *substantial evidence* that it would:

- Cause the *hydrogeologic unit* within a non-impacted basin to exceed *water quality objectives* of the *Basin Plans*;
- Contribute to further exceedance of *water quality objectives* within an impacted basin;
- Result in the discharge of materials known to be and/or classified as hazardous by the State of California;
- Does not provide provisions for the implementation of preventative measures, BMPs, including but not limited to spill and leak prevention, training, appropriate material storage and disposal, and spill and leak response and reporting.

(e) Would the project increase surface water consumptive use (demand) in a fully appropriated stream reach as designated by the SWRCB or where unappropriated surface water is unavailable, or by diverting or dewatering downstream reaches that would result in an adverse impact to one or more of the beneficial uses listed in the Basin Plans?

The following outlines the process to be used in completing the Initial Study in consultation with PWA.

1. Review topographic maps, drainage studies, and other geographic resources to determine whether surface water resources occur on or near the project site. Describe where the project occurs in relationship to natural and artificial surface water bodies and the hydrologic relationship to those bodies.
2. Evaluate the project's impacts to any identified surface waters. Determine whether the project would substantially increase or decrease supply either individually or cumulatively, in these surface waters. Evaluate how this change in surface water flow would affect surface water beneficial uses for Ventura County as listed in the Basin Plans.
3. Evaluate the project's potential to substantially increase surface water consumptive use or demand. If the project utilizes surface water for construction or long-term operation, the source of the water must be disclosed and the potential use quantified.
4. Determine whether the surface water for the project would be from a fully appropriated stream reach as designated by the State Water Resources Control Board. Determine whether unappropriated surface water is available for the project.
5. If the water used for the project is from a municipal source, the source and supply of surface water from that municipal source must be disclosed and evaluated to determine whether the project would result in a substantial increase of surface water use. Evaluate and disclose the potential impacts of this increase in surface water use.
6. When determining cumulative impacts, obtain a list from the Lead Agency of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable probable future projects, including adjacent cities, if applicable, that are located within the vicinity of the project site, in order to assess the project's contribution to cumulative impacts on surface water supply.

~~Determine the project's geographical relationship to natural and artificial surface water bodies and the hydrologic relationship to those bodies. Evaluate the project's impacts on surface waters, and whether the project will increase or decrease the quantity of surface water either individually or cumulatively. If the project utilizes surface water for construction or long-term operation, the source of the water should be disclosed and the potential use quantified. In addition, if the project utilizes surface water from a municipal provider, the source of the surface water from that provider must be disclosed and evaluated. Determine whether surface water for the project would be from a fully appropriated stream reach as designated by SWRCB or if unappropriated surface water is available for the project. Evaluate whether any changes in surface water flow would adversely affect beneficial uses or the source of the water.~~

(f) Would the project directly or indirectly impact surface water quality or stormwater quality, causing it to exceed water quality objectives, water quality standards, and/or water quality-based effluent limitations of an applicable Basin Plan, MS4 Permit, NPDES Permit, or result in failure to obtain coverage or comply with WDRs?

PWA shall evaluate projects for compliance with the relevant *MS4 Permit* and/or whether projects are subject to coverage under any other *NPDES Permit*s or *WDRs*, as applicable. Pursuant to Water Code Section 13260(a), any person discharging waste or proposing to discharge waste within any region, other than to a community sewer plant, that could affect water quality, shall be required to provide a report of waste discharge (also referred to as an application) to obtain coverage under *WDRs* or a waiver of *WDRs*.

If the project is determined to be subject to the *MS4 Permit*, standard conditions shall be imposed on the project in order to comply with the *MS4 Permit*. If the project requires coverage under any other *NPDES Permit*(s) or *WDRs*, standard conditions shall be imposed on the project to obtain and maintain required coverage. Projects within areas subject to a Total Maximum Daily Load program (see Section 9.4), which drain to impaired waterbodies documented in the 303(d) List of Impaired Waters under the federal Clean Water Act, will be required to implement BMPs to comply with required *water quality standards* and *water quality-based effluent limitations*.

If after all applicable standard conditions are imposed on the project to minimize impacts, the project would still cause water quality or stormwater quality to exceed established *water quality objectives* or *water quality standards* set forth in the applicable *Basin Plan*, *MS4 Permit*, *NPDES Permit*, or *WDRs*, the project shall be considered to have a significant impact.

9.4 RESOURCES & REFERENCES

Source	Managing Agency/Organization	Online Access
Resources		
Ventura County CEQA Implementation Manual	Ventura County Resource Management Agency (RMA) Planning Division	PDF | Website
Ventura County Initial Study Assessment Guidelines: Introduction	Ventura County RMA Planning Division	PDF | Website
Ventura County Initial Study Checklist	Ventura County RMA Planning Division	PDF | Website
References		
303(d) List of Impaired Waters	United States Environmental Protection Agency	Website
Municipal Stormwater Program (MS4 regulation)	State Water Resources Control Board	Website
National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES)	United States Environmental Protection Agency	Website
Groundwater Sustainability Plans	California Department of Water Resources	Website
State and Regional Water Boards	State Water Resources Control Board	Website
Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA)	California Department of Water Resources	Website
Total Maximum Daily Load Program	State Water Resources Control Board	Website

Source	Managing Agency/Organization	Online Access
Ventura County General Plan Background Report, Chapter 10	Ventura County RMA Planning Division	PDF | Website
Ventura County Groundwater Resources	Ventura County Public Works Agency (PWA)	Website
Ventura County Stormwater Program	Ventura County PWA	Website
Water Quality Control Plans (Basin Plans)	State Water Resources Control Board	Website
Waste Discharge Requirements Program (WDRs)	State Water Resources Control Board	Website