VOLUME I

RESPONSE TO COMMENTS

RESPONSE TO COMMENTS

This document provides responses to comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Report (Draft EIR) for the City of Hollister Domestic Wastewater System Improvements and San Benito County Water District Recycled Water Facility Project (Proposed Project). Changes to the text of the Draft EIR that have been identified in response to comments are included in Volume II, and the separately bound appendices included in Volume III.

The Draft EIR was submitted to the State Clearinghouse (SCH#2006022055) and released for public and agency review for a 45-day review and comment period on July 26, 2006. The comment period closed on September 11, 2006. A total of twelve written comment letters were received by the City of Hollister in response the Draft EIR. These comment letters are included as **Attachment A** of Volume I. The list of commentators is provided below:

LIST OF COMMENTORS

Letter	Name, Title	Affiliation	Date
1	Karl Schumaker, Environmental Specialist	State Water Resources Control Board	September 11, 2006
2	Ruth Erickson	Hollister Airmen's Association	September 11, 2006
3	John S. Gregg, District Manager/Engineer	San Benito County Water District	September 11, 2006
4	Harriet & William Brin		September 11, 2006
5	Scott Fuller, General Manager	San Juan Oaks Golf Club	September 11, 2006
6	Dennis J. O'Brien, Program Manager	Department of Conservation, Division of Resources Protection	September 11, 2006
7	Jean Getchell, Supervising Planner, Planning and Air Monitoring Division	Monterey Bay Unified Air Pollution Control District	September 11, 2006
8	John S. Gregg, District Manager/Engineer	San Benito County Water District	September 15, 2006
9	Terry Roberts, Director	State of California Governor's Office of Planning and Research, State Clearinghouse and Planning Unit	September 19, 2006
10	Terry Roberts, Director	State of California Governor's Office of Planning and Research, State Clearinghouse and Planning Unit	September 19, 2006
11	Paul Breen		September 19, 2006
12	Pat Loe, Chair	San Benito County Board of Supervisors	October 3, 2006

Additionally, a public meeting was held on August 15th at the Veteran's Memorial Building in the City of Hollister. A transcript of this meeting is included as **Attachment B** of Volume I.

Neither the comments received on the Draft EIR nor the responses thereto indicate new significant impacts or significant new information that would require recirculation of the Draft EIR pursuant to CEQA *Guidelines* Section 15088.5. Comments received in written letters and provided at the public meeting are summarized and responded to below:

LETTER 1. KARI SCHUMAKER, ENVIRONMENTAL SPECIALIST – STATE WATER RESOURCES CONTROL BOARD

Comment 1-1

The commenter states that the State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) has reviewed the Draft EIR and is providing comments as an agency with jurisdiction by law to enhance and restore the California water resources. The commenter states that the City of Hollister may want to pursue the State Revolving Loan program to provide funding for future construction of the project, and refers the City to the SWRCB website for more information.

Response 1-1

The comment regarding the SWRCB's review of the Draft EIR has been noted. The City appreciates the SWRCB's input on the Proposed Project.

Comment 1-2

The commenter states that the language of Mitigation Measure 4.4-17 part (e), which is intended to minimize effects to the California red-legged frog, should be changed to make the action mandatory and not permissive.

Response 1-2

The comment regarding Mitigation Measure 4.4-17 (e) has been noted. The language of the measure has been revised as suggested to make the action of the mitigation mandatory. This change is reflected in **Section 4.4** of the Final EIR (Volume II).

Comment 1-3

The commenter states that a program for reporting and monitoring mitigation measures must be adopted when an agency makes its findings on significant effects identified in an EIR. The commenter states that

a mitigation and monitoring program was not included in the Draft EIR. The commenter requests that a mitigation and monitoring program be included in the Final EIR.

Response 1-3

A mitigation monitoring and reporting program for the project shall be adopted when the City of Hollister approves findings upon certification of the Final EIR. At this time, the City of Hollister and/or San Benito County shall make the mitigation monitoring and reporting program available for agency and public review.

Comment 1-4

The commenter states that the Initial Study mentions that potential impacts to agricultural resources and mineral resource extraction will be addressed in the EIR, however, these issue areas are not analyzed under their own headings. The commenter states that the EIR should specify which sections include an analysis of impacts to agricultural and mineral resources, to clarify that they have been addressed within the document.

Response 1-4

The Initial Study included as **Appendix C** of the Final EIR has been revised to specify which chapters in the EIR discuss impacts associated with agricultural resources and mineral resource extraction. Specifically, the Initial Study clarifies that impacts to agricultural resources are evaluated within the Land Use and Planning Chapter, and impacts associated with mineral resources extraction are evaluated within the Geology and Soils Chapter.

Comment 1-5

The commenter notes that a copy of the NAHC correspondence is not included with the Draft EIR, and is incorrectly referenced on page 4.5-8 of the document as being included in Appendix G. The commenter requests that a copy of the NAHC correspondence and contact logs be included as part of the Final EIR.

Response 1-5

As stated, the NAHC correspondence and contact logs were not included in the appendices of the Draft EIR. The NAHC correspondence is included as **Appendix I** of the Final EIR. Additionally, the incorrect reference to **Appendix G** in **Section 4.5** of the Final EIR has been deleted from the text.

Comment 1-6

The commenter states that the Draft EIR does not discuss population projections in relation to California's State Implementation Plan (SIP). The commenter requests specification as to whether the project is sized to meet the needs of the current population projections contained in the SIP for air quality.

The commenter requests information quantitatively indicating how the proposed capacity increase was calculated using population projections.

Response 1-6

The State of California SIP is a compilation of air quality management plans submitted by individual air quality management districts throughout the state. As a result, projected population growth contained in the SIP for a specific region would be identical to projections utilized by the regional air quality management district. The project site is located within the Monterey Bay Unified Air Pollution Control District (MBUAPCD) which utilizes population projections forecasted by the Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments (AMBAG) when preparing regional air quality management plans. Therefore population projections for the project area contained in the SIP are identical to existing AMBAG forecasts.

As discussed in **Section 2.5.3** of the Draft EIR, growth rates used by the City of Hollister in identifying the appropriate treatment capacity of the DWTP are based on the City of Hollister 2005 General Plan projections. Section 2.5.3 goes on to explain that population projections contained in the Hollister General Plan EIR are slightly below AMBAG population forecasts for the year 2023. Specifically, AMBAG predicts 158 more resident than projected in the City of Hollister General Plan EIR. In a recent letter, AMBAG indicated that because the growth enabled in the General Plan for the year 2023 would not exceed the applicable five year increment forecasted in AMBAG's 2004 Forecasts, the Hollister General Plan and Proposed Project were determined to be consistent with the AQMP. This consistency determination has been included as **Appendix L** of the Final EIR. Therefore, because the population projections contained in the SIP are the same as AMBAG forecasts, and because the Hollister General Plan projections were determined to be consistent with the AQMD, the Proposed Project is sized consistent with current population projections utilized in the SIP.

With respect to information quantitatively indicating how the proposed capacity increase was calculated, EIR Section 2.5.3 explains that the design of the Proposed Project is based upon the projected increase in population within the Hollister Service Area, which includes the City of Hollister, Sunnyslope County Water District (CWD), and surrounding areas in unincorporated San Benito County that are within and adjacent to the City's Planning Area. (EIR Figure 2-4.) The City of Hollister General Plan projects a population of 55,192 by 2023, or an average annual population increase of 2.6 percent. The General Plan assumed commercial growth at 2.9 percent. Taking into account the proportional contribution of residential and commercial wastewater flows, the weighted average annual increase in wastewater flows from the City of Hollister is estimated to be 2.67 percent. This weighted average of 2.67 percent also was applied to wastewater flows from the unincorporated portion of the Hollister Service Area, with the exception of the Sunnyslope CWD; flow projections from the Sunnyslope CWD are based on an initial

flow of 0.25 million gallons per day (MGD) and a 4.2 percent annual growth rate. Based on these growth rates, projected wastewater flows for the Hollister Service Area were determined.

As shown in **Table 2.1** of the Draft EIR, wastewater flows are expected to increase from 2.97 MGD in 2008 to 4.5 MGD for the planning horizon year of 2023 contained in the City of Hollister General Plan. As discussed in Section 3.5, the ultimate design treatment capacity of 5.0 mgd was selected for the DWTP to allow for 10 percent inflow and infiltration above the projected 2023 average dry weather flow of 4.5 MGD.

LETTER 2. RUTH ERICKSON – HOLLISTER AIRMEN'S ASSOCIATION

Comment 2-1

The commenter states that there are various hazards associated with irrigation and sprayfields at the Hollister Municipal Airport that are not discussed in the Draft EIR. The commenter states that the high salt content in the treated wastewater could be detrimental to aircraft. The commenter states that irrigation and spraying at night would not resolve this issue as aircraft fly in at all hours of the night.

Response 2-1

Potential adverse effects that could occur as a result of operation of sprayfields at the Hollister Municipal Airport are discussed under Impact 4.6.10 of the Draft EIR. The language of this impact has been revised to specify that potential detrimental effects could occur as a result of recycled water coming into contact with the surfaces of aircraft utilizing the airport runways. These potential adverse effects would be mitigated through implementation of Mitigation Measure 4.6.10 of the Draft EIR. Implementation of Mitigation Measure 4.6.10 of the Draft EIR would eliminate the potential for wind driven overspray through the installation of a subterranean irrigation system within 25 feet of all airport runways. This would ensure that recycled water would not come into contact with airport runways and subsequently aircraft surfaces.

Comment 2-2

The commenter states that existing ditches between runways and taxiways at the Hollister Municipal Airport are intended to prevent standing water and flooding, and should not be altered. The commenter states that turf between runways should be mitigated so that the ground is not wet, grass cutting does not leave ruts, and the watering is subterranean.

Response 2-2

No changes to ditches located on turf between runways and taxiways at the Hollister Municipal Airport would occur as a result of development of sprayfields at the Hollister Municipal Airport. The existing drainage system at the airport would be maintained. This language has been added to **Section 3.4.1** to

clarify this aspect of the project within the project description. Implementation of Mitigation Measure 4.6.10 would ensure that all irrigation within 25 feet of runways and taxiways would be subterranean, and operation of sprayfields would be such that standing water would be kept to a minimum.

Comment 2-3

The commenter notes that although the Draft EIR explains that fences would be maintained to keep deer and large animals out of the airport, burrowing animals such as ground squirrels and gophers would not be deterred. The commenter states that water entering into burrowing animal holes could cause damage to runways and taxiways. The commenter states that water attracts insects and birds, including raptors, which could cause hazards to pilots and aircraft.

Response 2-3

Based on recent direct communications with airport managers, Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) staff, and California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) Aviation Division, several airports throughout California were identified as using some type of irrigation system on airport premises. The primary concern expressed regarding on-site irrigation practices is potential wildlife (birds and deer) hazards. However, the majority of airports that experience problems with birds or other wildlife have retention ponds or open ditches for irrigation. Retention ponds and open ditches will not be used at the Hollister Airport site. Implementation of Mitigation Measure 4.6.10 of the Draft EIR would ensure that the operation of sprayfields and watering cycles would be such that standing water would be kept to a minimum. This would minimize the attraction of birds and insects.

As stated above in Comment 2-3, perimeter fences surrounding the airport would not be sufficient to prevent burrowing animals from entering the airport property. To ensure safety hazards associated with damaged runways from burrowing holes or the attraction of raptors do not occur, a detailed Wildlife Habitat Plan and project proposal will be prepared and submitted to the FAA for their review and approval. Implementation of this plan would be the responsibility of the City of Hollister Engineering Department in coordination with airport staff. This measure has been added to Mitigation Measure 4.6.10 of the EIR and is reflected in Section 4.6 of the Final EIR.

Comment 2-4

The commenter questions how long sprayfields would be operational at the Hollister Municipal Airport, and who would be responsible for the management and maintenance after the temporary period is over.

Response 2-4

As discussed in **Section 3.4** and illustrated in **Table 3-1** of the EIR, the development of disposal sprayfields at the Hollister Municipal Airport would take place during Phase 1 of the project, which is

projected to take place between the years 2008 and 2013. Section 3.4 further explains that it is anticipated that disposal sprayfields, including those at the Hollister Municipal Airport, would likely be phased out during Phase II of the project as the quality of the treated effluent improves and the use of recycled water transitions to irrigation of high quality crops. Although specific timelines have not been developed, phase II of the project is projected to occur between the years of 2014 and 2023. Management of sprayfields at the airport would be provided by the City of Hollister Engineering Department.

Comment 2-5

The commenter states that the safety guidelines set by the Federal Aviation Administration and the State of California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) Division of Aeronautics should be followed during operation of the project.

Response 2-5

The comment has been noted. As discussed in Section 3.4 of the EIR, the development of sprayfields at the Hollister Municipal Airport would require consultation with the FAA. Additionally, Section 3.4 explains that development of sprayfields would require an update to the existing Airport Layout Plan, which is subject to review and approval by the FAA. Mitigation Measure 4.6.10 has been revised to ensure that the project is consistent with safety guidelines provided by the FAA as well as the Caltrans Division of Aeronautics. This revision is provided in **Section 4.6.3** of the Final EIR.

LETTER 3. JOHN S. GREGG, DISTRICT MANGER/ENGINEER – SAN BENITO COUNTY WATER DISTRICT

Comment 3-1

The commenter states that the San Benito County Water District (District) requests an extension of the comment period for the Draft EIR until September 15, 2006.

Response 3-1

The comment has been noted. As requested, the comment period was extended to accommodate the request made by the District. The District provided a letter on September 15, 2006. This letter is provided as Letter 8.

LETTER 4. HARRIET & WILLIAM BRIN

Comment 4-1

The commenter states that the FAA and the Caltrans Division of Aeronautics have strict requirements for the operation of sprayfields near airports that should be considered during the development of sprayfileds at the Hollister Municipal Airport.

Response 4-1

The comment regarding safety guidelines that should be considered during the development of sprayfields at the Hollister Municipal Airport has been noted. Refer to Response 2-5 provided above.

Comment 4-2

The commenter states that the proximity of sprayfields near runways could cause salty spray to come into contact with aircraft and result in detrimental effects to aircraft finishes and components.

Response 4-2

The comment has been noted. Refer to Response 2-1 provided above.

LETTER 5. SCOTT FULLER, GENERAL MANAGER – SAN JUAN OAKS GOLF CLUB

Comment 5-1

The commenter states that San Juan Oaks Golf Club is considered as a potential location for sprayfield development, and has provided several comments in response to the Draft EIR.

Response 5-1

The comment has been noted. The City of Hollister shall consider all comments submitted on behalf of San Juan Oaks Golf Club.

Comment 5-2

The commenter states that the Draft EIR incorrectly states that San Juan Oaks Golf Club owns approximately 1,820 acres. The commenter states that San Juan Oaks actually owns approximately 1,993 acres.

Response 5-2

The comment has been noted. The Final EIR has been revised to reflect the correct acreage of San Juan Oaks Golf Club throughout the document. Refer to **Section 3.4.2** of the Final EIR.

Comment 5-3

The commenter states that the EIR describes the expansion of San Juan Oaks Golf Club and estimates the City's potential for use of treated effluent at the site as 135 acre feet per year (AFY). The commenter states that the Draft EIR does not specify whether or not the described use of treated effluent considers San Juan Oak's own use of recycled water from its planned on-site treatment facility. The commenter

states that at full buildout of the planned expansion, San Juan Oaks would need to dispose of approximately 110 acre feet per year of recycled water through irrigation of the exiting golf course which typically accepts 365 acre feet of water per year. Additionally, the commenter states that the Draft EIR assumes the construction of an 18 hole golf course and a 9 hole golf course within irrigation calculations, however these developments are subject to market conditions and their availability for recycled water use is uncertain.

Response 5-3

Based on the analysis contained in Appendix E, the EIR assumes that the amount of recycled water that could be used for irrigation purposes at San Juan Oaks Golf Club would be 135 AFY (100-year wet weather season). This assumption does not consider future recycled water disposal needs generated by San Juan Oaks Golf Club's planned on-site wastewater treatment facility (110 AFY). However, recycled water provided by the Golf Club's planned wastewater treatment facility would likely have a lower salinity than the Hollister DWTP treated effluent; thus the use of recycled water from the Golf Club's on-site treatment facility would not directly offset potential Hollister DWTP recycled water use on a one to one ratio. It is recognized that implementation of the Golf Club's recycled water project or improvements to the quality of City of Hollister treated effluent would influence the recycled water demand at the San Juan Oaks golf course, and the City is committed to working with the Golf Club to address these issues. The City also recognizes that development of the golf course is subject to market conditions and that the future demand for recycled water will be determined by the extent of facilities developed.

Comment 5-4

The commenter states that the Draft EIR indicates that treated water would be delivered to San Juan Oaks Golf Club and blended with CVP water to achieve a TDS concentration of 500 mg/L. The commenter states that before a TDS concentration of 500 mg/L is considered acceptable for irrigation of turfgrass and other common landscape areas, San Juan Oaks must conduct a study to analyze the potential long term effects of constituents and other elements that are potentially toxic to turfgrass when they accumulate in the soil.

Response 5-4

The comment has been noted. Prior to implementation of irrigation projects, the City of Hollister will work with San Juan Oaks Golf Club to ensure that the concentration of TDS levels and other constituents present in the treated effluent are considered acceptable for use as an irrigation source for specific types of vegetation present on the San Juan Oaks property. This issue is discussed further in Response 8-23 and Response 8-24.

Comment 5-5

The commenter states that the irrigation system constructed at San Juan Oaks was designed to comply with recycled water use, and that San Juan Oaks looks forward to working with the City of Hollister and SBCWD to bring recycled water to the site.

Response 5-6

The City of Hollister appreciates the comments submitted by San Juan Oaks Golf Club and looks forward to working with the Golf Club in planning recycled water use at their facilities.

LETTER 6. DENNIS J. O'BRIEN, PROGRAM MANAGER – DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION, DIVISION OF RESOURCES PROTECTION

Comment 6-1

The commenter, states that the Department of Conservation (DOC) Division of Resources Protection (Division), monitors farmland conversion on a statewide basis and administers the California Land Conservation Act (Williamson Act) and other agricultural programs. The commenter states that the Division has reviewed the Draft EIR and has submitted several comments.

Response 6-1

The comment has been noted. All comments submitted by the Department of Conservation's Division of Resource Protection have been considered by the City of Hollister during the preparation of this Final EIR.

Comment 6-2

The commenter provides a summary of the project description. The commenter states that treated effluent would initially be restricted to specific crops and urban irrigation. The commenter states that with implementation of the Salt Management Program, the range of irrigable crops would be broadened.

Response 6-2

The comment has been noted.

Comment 6-3

The commenter states that the potential for the project to convert approximately 445 acres of Prime Farmland and Farmland of Statewide Importance is mitigated to a less than significant level through implementation of mitigation measures included within the Draft EIR. The commenter states that the development of sprayfields and the use of agricultural land for effluent disposal are considered less than significant as the use of the land would not change. The commenter states that the Final EIR should

clarify whether the lands crop capability would be artificially limited by its use as a sprayfield and what the impacts of such a limitation would be considering the potential to involve Prime Farmland and Farmland of Statewide Importance. The commenter states that growth inducing impacts are mitigated to less than significant through implementation of Hollister General Plan policies and cumulative effects are mitigated to a less than significant level by avoiding Prime Farmland and Farmland of Statewide Importance when locating the storage basin and evaporation ponds.

Response 6-3

As discussed in Section 3.4 of the Draft EIR, the use of recycled water as an irrigation source would be limited to compatibility with specific crops, environmental constraints, and other concerns. As such, sprayfield and irrigation sites would be selected and managed to limit the potential for environmental impacts. As discussed in Section 4.1.2, crop capability classifications are associated with the types and quality of soils found on particular sites. The discussion in the Final EIR regarding the potential for degradation of soil quality to occur as a result of irrigation with high salinity water has been expanded and is included under Impact 4.2.5 of the Final EIR. Additionally, the potential for this impact to occur has been added to the discussion of land use conflicts related to implementation of sprayfield projects included under Impact 4.1.7. Mitigation Measure 4.2.5 has been included in the Final EIR to ensure that adverse effects do not occur to crop capability of selected irrigation and sprayfield sites. This measure primarily addresses the potential effects of salt accumulation in the soil.

Comment 6-4

The commenter states that the Department of Conservation believes that the development of a storage basin and evaporation ponds would not be consistent with the principles of compatibility with Williamson Act contracts. The commenter believes development of a storage basin or evaporation ponds on Williamson Act contracted land would require contract termination by nonrenewal, cancellation, annexation under specific conditions, or public acquisition. The commenter states that the Department of Conservation does not consider statutory compliance in prematurely terminating a Williamson Act contract to be appropriate mitigation. The commenter states that termination of a Williamson Act contract is considered a potentially significant impact under CEQA and although the City may follow statutory requirements in terminating a contract, the impact of the termination is not reduced. The commenter suggests that the Final EIR provide an evaluation of the impacts that would result from potential Williamson Act terminations for this project.

Response 6-4

The comment regarding the significance of terminating a Williamson Act contract has been noted. This impact is discussed under Impact 4.1.10 in the EIR. In response to the Department's comments, the significance of potential impacts to Williamson Act lands has been changed to potentially significant within the EIR. Additionally, Mitigation Measure 4.1.10 has been added to the EIR to ensure that the

development of the storage basin and evaporation ponds would not involve the termination of a Williamson Act contract, thereby reducing the impact to a less than significant level.

Comment 6-5

The commenter states that the Department of Conservation looks forward to receiving a response to it's comments and a copy of the Final EIR pursuant to Public Resources Code Section 21092.5(a).

Response 6-5

The comment has been noted. The City of Hollister appreciates the comments submitted by the Department of Conservation's Division of Resource Protection. All comments received have been considered by the City of Hollister during the preparation of this Final EIR. The City shall provide a copy of the Final EIR to the Department of Conservation.

LETTER 7. JEAN GETCHELL, SUPERVISING PLANNER – MONTEREY BAY UNIFIED AIR POLLUTION CONTROL DISTRICT

Comment 7-1

The commenter states that the Hollister General Plan identified significant and unavoidable impacts from growth, including traffic. The commenter states that traffic can result in significant impacts associated with air quality. The commenter states that mitigation measures to ensure that the project is not expanded beyond the capacity to serve planned growth in the Hollister service area would not address the air quality impacts of the Proposed Project. The commenter states that the air quality impacts of the project must be addressed and quantified in the application for an Authority to Construct permit.

Response 7-1

As discussed in the Growth Inducing Impacts section, Section 5.1, the EIR incorporates the significant and unavoidable impacts identified in the Hollister General Plan EIR, as the project would allow for this growth to take place. However, the evaluation of air quality impacts in the General Plan EIR concluded that impacts associated with air quality as a result of buildout of the General Plan would be less than significant. This conclusion is supported by the fact that buildout of the Hollister General Plan would not significantly exceed AMBAG population projections, and would therefore be consistent with the Clean Air Plan. Additionally, buildout of the Hollister General Plan would support regional transportation control measures, and implementation of roadway improvements consistent with the General Plan would improve traffic congestion and levels of service (LOS) along roadways throughout the City. The General Plan EIR also notes that implementation of land use strategies in the General Plan would result in an improved jobs/housing balance for the City that could reduce the overall regional trip generation.

As the comment notes, EIR Section 5.1, which addresses the Proposed Project's growth-inducing impacts, determined that the Proposed Project could result in additional growth beyond that anticipated under the Hollister General Plan by allowing for growth within the unincorporated service area. (EIR p. 5-12.) In response to these potential growth-inducing impacts, Mitigation Measure 5.1 is proposed, which would require the preparation of annual wastewater demand reports that include updated timetables for plant expansions matching service area demands, to ensure that the DWTP is not expanded beyond capacity needed to serve planned growth in the service area. (*Id.*) However, because the Proposed Project would accommodate planned growth, the associated contribution to secondary environmental effects of such growth would be significant and unavoidable. (*Id.*)

To be distinguished from the Proposed Project's growth-inducing impacts, the air quality impacts of the Proposed Project are addressed in EIR Section 4.8, which analyzes the project's construction impacts and operational impacts. The analysis determined that construction activities, including construction of the recycled water pipelines and disposal areas, would result in the generation of ROG, NO_x, and PM_{10} emissions, a potentially significant impact. (DEIR pp. 4.8-16 - 4.8-20.) Mitigation Measure 4.8.1 is proposed to reduce the identified impacts to a level below significant. (*Id.*) All other construction-related air quality impacts would be less than significant. (*Id.*)

As to the Proposed Project's operation impacts, the EIR determined that dust created during the removal of salt concentrate from evaporation ponds could impact sensitive land uses, a potentially significant impact. (DEIR pp. 4.8-26 - 4.8-27.) Mitigation Measure 4.8.11 is proposed to reduce the identified impacts to a level below significant. All other air quality impacts related to project operation would be less than significant. (DEIR 4.8-20 - 4.8-27.) In addition, the Proposed Project would be required to comply with District Rule 216, which requires that new or modified wastewater treatment facilities be consistent with the adopted AQMP. Therefore, further mitigation measures are unnecessary because compliance with Rule 216 ensures consistency with the AQMP.

With implementation of mitigation measures recommended in this EIR and the General Plan EIR, the air quality impacts resulting from buildout of the Proposed Project would be less than significant. The City of Hollister and San Benito County will work with the Monterey Bay Unified Air Pollution Control District during the subsequent permitting process to ensure compliance with all requirements.

Comment 7-2

The commenter requests that Mike Sheehan of the Districts Compliance Division be contacted if any structures or load bearing supports are demolished during construction.

Response 7-2

The comment has been noted and the City will inform Mr. Sheehan of the Monterey Bay Unified Air Pollution Control District (MBUAPCD) if any structures or load-bearing supports are demolished.

Comment 7-3

The commenter requests that mitigation be provided to reduce impacts associated with emissions of NO_x, ROG, and PM_{10}, as these emissions would not be addressed through implementation of Mitigation Measure 4.8.1.

Response 7-3

The EIR air quality impacts analysis determined that emissions of ROG and NO_x associated with all construction activities, including emissions from construction equipment, would not exceed the applicable thresholds of significance and, therefore, project construction would not result in potentially significant impacts. See EIR Table 4.8-5. For that reason, mitigation to reduce construction-related ROG and NO_x emissions is not necessary.

With respect to PM_{10} emissions associated with construction equipment operation, EIR Tables 4.8-5 and 4.8-6 have been revised to distinguish PM_{10} emissions associated with engine exhaust from those associated with fugitive dust emissions. As shown on revised Table 4.8-5, PM_{10} emissions associated with construction equipment operation (exhaust) would not exceed the applicable threshold of significance. Therefore, no mitigation is necessary to address the potential impacts associated with these emissions; mitigation is necessary only to address fugitive dust PM_{10} emissions.

However, in response to the District's comment, Mitigation Measure 4.8-1 has been revised to add certain requirements that would further reduce the potential impacts associated with ROG and NO_x emissions. For example, mitigation for on-road vehicles includes the use of aqueous diesel fuel and the use of cooled exhaust gas. This is projected to result in a 14% reduction of NO_x emissions and a 90% reduction in ROG emissions. Additionally, the use of lean-NO_X and diesel oxidation catalysts were added to further reduce ROG and NO_X emissions.

Comment 7-4

The commenter states that before an Authority to Construct (ATC) permit is issued by the MBUAPCD, the MBUAPCD will require information specified in Section 3.2 of Rule 216, Permit Requirements for and Sewage Treatment facilities. The commenter states that this information needs to include the nature and amounts of emissions from construction and operation of the facility, and direct and indirect emissions of population served, industrial growth and induced wastewater expansion of emission sources.

Response 7-4

The comment has been noted. The City of Hollister shall work with the MBUAPCD to ensure all required information is submitted to the MBUAPCD in it's ATC permit application.

Comment 7-5

The commenter states that Rule 216 requires that wastewater and sewage treatment facilities serve populations consistent with growth forecasts contained in the Air Quality Management Plan (AQMP). The commenter requests that the Final EIR include a consistency determination issued by AMBAG for the population to be served in Hollister and the unincorporated area of the County.

Response 7-5

Population growth that could potentially be inconsistent with the local AQMP is discussed in detail in Section 2.5.3 and under Impact 4.8.8 of the Draft EIR, and in the Response to Comment 1-6 above. This analysis explains that the AQMP uses the population growth projected by AMBAG. As discussed under Response 1-6 above and Section 2.5.3 of the Draft EIR, the proposed capacity of the DWTP is based on population projections and related growth rates derived from the City of Hollister General Plan EIR. Population projections contained in the Hollister General Plan EIR are slightly below AMBAG population forecasts for the year 2023. In a recent letter, AMBAG indicated that because the growth enabled in the General Plan for the year 2023 would not exceed the applicable five year increment forecasted in AMBAG's 2004 Forecasts, the Hollister General Plan and Proposed Domestic Wastewater were determined to be consistent with the AQMP. As requested, this consistency determination has been included as **Appendix L** of the Final EIR.

Comment 7-6

The commenter states that Impacts and Mitigation Measures 4.8.4 through 4.8.8 would be addressed in the application for a MBUAPCD ATC, so no additional comment is provided.

Response 7-6

The comment is noted.

Comment 7-7

The commenter requests that Lance Ericksen of the MBUAPCD Engineering Division be contacted to confirm whether or not additional regulatory requirements would be required for the proposed emergency diesel generators and the 175 HP diesel generator.

Response 7-7

As suggested, Lance Ericksen of MBUAPCD was contacted regarding additional regulatory requirements for diesel generators. At his advice, all diesel emergency generators at the facility will obtain a MBUAPCD ATC permit to operate. Impact 4.8.9 and Impact 4.8.10 of the Final EIR have been revised to describe this requirement.

Comment 7-8

The commenter requests that Jean Getchell of the Planning and Air Management Division of MBUAPCD be contacted to discuss a dust abatement program for the collection and trucking of salt concentrate from evaporation ponds to avoid impacts on residences, schools, or businesses.

Response 7-8

The comment has been noted. As discussed in Section 3.4 of the Draft EIR, development of evaporation ponds would take place with implementation of demineralization during Phase II of the Salt Management Program. Phase II is expected to take place approximately eight years after project initiation. When this component of the project is initiated, the City of Hollister shall contact the Planning and Air Management Division of MBUAPCD to gain input and advice during the design and preparation of the dust abatement program to mitigate impacts resulting from the development of evaporation ponds.

Comment 7-9

The commenter states that individual counties are classified only for carbon monoxide, while other classifications are made on a basinwide basis.

Response 7-9

The discussion regarding attainment status for criteria pollutants is included in the Draft EIR under Section 4.8.1. As explained in the text, the EPA classifies air basins, or portions within air basins, as attainment or nonattainment for criteria pollutants. Table 4.8-2 illustrates the attainment status of San Benito County, as it falls within the North Central Coast Air Basin (NCCAB). The language of the text has been revised to clarify that San Benito County is classified individually for CO attainment only, and the classifications for the remaining criteria pollutants are provided for the County as it falls within the NCCAB. These changes are included within **Section 4.8.1** of the Final EIR.

Comment 7-10

The commenter requests that a complete URBEMIS work product be included in the application for the ATC permit. In regards to Impact 4.8.1, the commenter states that a distinction between PM_{10} emissions from exhaust and fugitive dust should be documented.

Response 7-10

As requested, the City of Hollister shall provide the commenter with a complete URBEMIS work product. This product shall also be included in the application for the ATC permit. The URBEMIS model determines the total PM-10 emissions and also provides a breakdown of the PM-10 emissions from exhaust and fugitive dust. This distinction has been added to Table 4.8-5 and Table 4.8-6 of the Final EIR and the corresponding text of Mitigation Measure 4.8.1.

Comment 7-11

In regards to Impact 4.8.3, the commenter requests that the indirect and growth inducing impacts of the project be described and quantified.

Response 7-11

The growth inducing and indirect air quality impacts of the Proposed Project are described in Section 5.1 of the EIR. As discussed in this section, implementation of the Proposed Project would allow projected growth included in the Hollister General Plan planning area to take place. The growth inducing impacts of the Proposed Project are incorporated from the Hollister General Plan EIR. Specific to air quality, the analysis included in the General Plan EIR evaluated the General Plan's consistency with the Clean Air Plan and Transportation Control Measures included within the Clean Air Plan. The Hollister General Plan EIR determined that implementation of the General Plan would not have a significant effect on air quality and thresholds of significance for air toxics and odors would be met with implementation of mitigation measures included in the General Plan EIR. Please also see Response 7-1.

Section 5.1 also determined that the Proposed Project could result in additional growth beyond that anticipated under the Hollister General Plan by allowing for growth within the unincorporated service area. (EIR p. 5-12.) Mitigation Measure 5.1 would require the preparation of annual wastewater demand reports that include updated timetables for plant expansions matching service area demands, to ensure that the DWTP is not expanded beyond capacity needed to serve planned growth in the service area. (*Id.*) As to secondary or indirect growth inducing impacts, EIR Section 5.1.4 addresses the secondary environmental impacts of growth. The section incorporates and summarizes the analysis presented in the City of Hollister General Plan EIR, and describes the potentially significant environmental impacts that are expected to occur as the result of buildout of the General Plan as related to land use, agriculture, geology, hydrology, biological resources, cultural resources, public services and facilities, noise, visual resources, and traffic. (See, DEIR pp. 5-3 to 5-11) As to air quality, the EIR explains that the Hollister General Plan EIR determined that no significant impacts to air quality would result fro General Plan buildout. Therefore, no further description or quantification of secondary impacts is required. However, because the Proposed Project would accommodate planned growth, the contribution to the secondary environmental effects of such growth would be significant and unavoidable. (*Id.*)

As previously discussed under Comment and Response 7-1, the City of Hollister shall work with the MBUAPCD during the ATC permitting process to ensure compliance with all requirements.

Comment 7-12

The commenter requests that the operational impacts of the Proposed Project would likely be cumulatively considerable and should be discussed in the Cumulative Impact Assessment of the Draft EIR.

Response 7-12

Cumulative air quality impacts of the Proposed Project are discussed in **Section 5.2** of the Final EIR. This section discusses operational and construction emissions from the project. The discussion focuses on potential construction emissions as the operational emissions of the project are expected to be less than significant. As suggested, the discussion of this impact has been expanded to provide more detail regarding the operational cumulative impacts of the project. These changes are provided in **Section 5.2** of the Final EIR.

LETTER 8. JOHN S. GREGG, DISTRICT MANGER/ENGINEER – SAN BENITO COUNTY WATER DISTRICT

Comment 8-1

The commenter, the San Benito County Water District (District), suggests that the Phase I project does not address local groundwater issues including: adequate treatment and disposal of wastewater; elimination of water quality degradation from wastewater disposal at the City of Hollister Industrial Wastewater Treatment Plant (IWTP) and Domestic Wastewater Treatment Plant (DWTP); imbalances in groundwater levels; accumulation of salts and nitrates in the basin; and management of local water supplies. In addition, the District is concerned that the Phase I project continues to burden the surrounding area with the impacts of growth.

Response 8-1

The City of Hollister (City) appreciates the comments provided by the District. The District's comments and the following responses are part of an extensive cooperative effort in the planning and environmental review process undertaken for the Proposed Project. The Proposed Project is a joint effort undertaken with the District to address groundwater issues. The component projects and programs that constitute the Proposed Project have been identified by the City, the District and other agencies as necessary to address groundwater quality problems and local imbalances in groundwater levels. Key components of the Proposed Project were first identified in the *Groundwater Management Plan Update for the San Benito County Portion of the Gilroy-Hollister Groundwater Basin*, which was prepared by the Water Resources Association of San Benito County, an association that includes both the District and the City.

Components identified in the *Groundwater Management Plan* include recycling wastewater effluent, and groundwater treatment and disposal. As such, the Proposed Project includes the development of specific projects and programs that are essential in accomplishing the objectives of the *Groundwater Management Plan*.

The District's introductory comment suggests that Phase I of the Proposed Project does not address local groundwater issues. The City, however, must emphasize that Phase I is a critical first step in addressing local groundwater problems. Without the improvements to the DWTP included in Phase I, the recycling of DWTP effluent will not be possible. It should be noted that these improvements are not only necessary to accomplish the objectives of the *Groundwater Management Plan*, but the improvements are necessary to comply with orders of the Regional Water Quality Control Board and to fulfill its responsibilities as a public agency. While Phase I is an essential step, the City is committed to implementing Phase II components of the Proposed Project, specifically the demineralization of the municipal water supply or treated effluent to meet water quality objectives. The City's commitment to achieving water quality objectives has been memorialized within the memorandum of understanding (MOU) entered into by the City, District and San Benito County for the development of the Hollister Urban Area Water and Wastewater Management Plan. The goal of demineralization is to provide DWTP effluent of a quality that enables its reuse for agricultural irrigation. This goal cannot be met without the proposed Phase I improvements to the DWTP.

The District also suggests that the City continues to burden the surrounding area with the impacts of growth in the City's population. The Proposed Project, however, has been specifically designed to mitigate existing impacts to groundwater quality and to improve the management of groundwater. The Phase I improvements will immediately improve effluent quality, and will expand options for addressing local groundwater level imbalances. Phase II will accomplish the water quality objectives agreed to by the City and the District in order to facilitate recycled water use for agricultural irrigation. It should be noted that the City is committed to managing future growth. In 2001, the City Council adopted its Growth Management Program, which imposes a limit of 244 new residential units per year for the first five years after the capacity of the DWTP is increased. The Growth Management Program identifies criteria for establishing growth limits for subsequent five-year periods. These criteria include consideration of: the City's regional fair share housing needs; environmental, public facility and service constraints including the availability of sewer and water facilities and services, the City's fiscal ability to support additional residential development, and protection of the public health, safety and welfare. Additionally, the City is committed to working cooperatively with the District in developing treated effluent disposal sites to limit or avoid impacts from treated effluent disposal. The Draft EIR identifies as mitigation an annual Comprehensive Effluent Disposal Plan (to be developed by the City and the District) that must identify adequate disposal capacity. The measure requires that "no new wastewater service connections shall be permitted unless adequate disposal capacity is identified to handle additional flows" (Mitigation Measure 4.3.8(b) Draft EIR pg. 4.3-53). The EIR identifies extensive mitigation to address

environmental impacts for the specific projects identified in the Proposed Project that would be developed by the City and District. These measures must be adopted and implemented by the City, District, and San Benito County in order to fulfill their respective requirements under CEQA. The EIR also incorporates the environmental analysis of the EIR prepared for the *Groundwater Management Plan*, which was certified by the District and City to address the impacts of recycling wastewater effluent, and groundwater treatment and disposal. The City is committed to avoiding or reducing impacts to the greatest extent feasible and appreciates the opportunity to work with the District in addressing local groundwater issues.

Comment 8-2

The District suggests that the EIR address the strong reliance upon Phase II water quality improvements to avoid significant water quality impacts, the impact of delay in implementing water quality improvements, the maintenance of sprayfield disposal capacity, the maximum quantities of wastewater to be disposed of at the DWTP and the IWTP, and inconsistencies between the project description and groundwater modeling assumptions. The District also suggests that the thresholds of significance for water quality should be reviewed and supported, and notes that groundwater modeling assumptions appear to be different than the project description and the City of Hollister and San Benito County General Plans.

Response 8-2

The six issues identified in this comment summarize detailed comments made later in the District's letter. These issues are addressed in response to specific comments. Assumptions regarding the implementation of Phase II (Issues 1 and 2) are addressed in Response 8-35. Issue 3, implementation of mitigation measures to address impacts to water and soil quality from sprayfield operation, is addressed in Responses 8-23 and 8-24. The consistency of the project description with the environmental analysis (Issue 4) is addressed in Responses 8-32 and 8-38. Thresholds of significance for water quality (Issue 5) are discussed in Responses 8-33, 8-35 and 8-36. Groundwater modeling assumptions (Issue 6) are discussed in Response 8-32.

Comment 8-3

The District suggests that the EIR address existing groundwater degradation and subsurface flow conditions in the vicinity of the City of Hollister IWTP and DWTP. The District suggests using conditions detailed in the City of Hollister Hydrogeologic Report, May 2004.

Response 8-3

The results of the City of Hollister Hydrogeologic Report (Geomatrix, 2004) have been summarized in the Final EIR. This study evaluated water quality data from groundwater wells in the DWTP/IWTP area and the surrounding area to determine the extent of impacts from wastewater percolation at the DWTP and IWTP. Please see **Section 4.3.2** of the Final EIR (Volume II) for details.

Comment 8-4

The District summarizes its concerns regarding the need to provide additional support for alternatives evaluation, certain significance thresholds, certain impacts, monitoring action levels, and mitigation. In addition, the District suggests the EIR is unclear as to which project components are covered at a project level and which are covered at a program level of detail.

Response 8-4

The issues identified in this comment summarize detailed comments made later in the District's letter. These issues are addressed in response to specific comments. The evaluation of alternatives is addressed in Responses 8-47 to 8-50. Significance criteria are discussed in Responses 8-33, 8-35 and 8-36. Mitigation of impacts is addressed in Responses 8-23 to 8-25. The analysis of project components on either a project level or program level is discussed in Responses 8-6 to 8-8.

Comment 8-5

The District suggests that subsequent documents related to the project be submitted for its review.

Response 8-5

The City will continue to provide the District with documents related to the Proposed Project.

Comment 8-6

The District suggests that the executive summary never specifically mentions that this is a program- and project-level EIR. In addition, the District reiterates Comment 8-4 regarding the clarity of project- and program-level analysis in the Draft EIR.

Response 8-6

Sections 1, 2 and **3** of the Final EIR have been revised to clarify the program- and project-level analysis provided. Specifically, in **Section 1, Table 1-1** has been revised to identify that all Phase I project components are analyzed on a project-level, with the exception of additional sprayfields and recycled water projects the location of which has not been identified. **Table 1-1** identifies that all other project components, including all Phase II components are analyzed at a program-level. In **Section 2, Table 2-1** has been created which identifies project phasing and the level of analysis provided for each component in Phase I and II. In **Section 3, Table 3-1** (which is identical to **Table 1-1**) has been revised to clarify level of analysis provided. As noted in **Section 2.4.1** of the EIR, State CEQA Guidelines Section 15168.c states that subsequent activities in the program which would result in effects not examined in the Program EIR may require additional environmental documentation. Documentation could take the form of a Notice of Exemption, Negative Declaration, or an EIR. The more comprehensive and detailed the

analysis contained in the original document, the more likely that subsequent activities will be found to be within the scope of the original Program EIR, thus eliminating the need for further documentation. However, environmental setting changes, changes in the planned faculties, and the need for site-specific assessment may still warrant additional CEQA documentation.

Comment 8-7

The District suggests the level to which project components are analyzed in the EIR is unclear, and the EIR (**Table 1-1**) should reflect specifically which Phase I components are analyzed at a project level of detail. In addition, the District notes that reverse osmosis (RO) treatment is analyzed at the project level, but is an infeasible alternative in the project.

Response 8-7

Table 1-1 of the Final EIR has been amended to clarify the program- and project-level analysis provided. With regards to RO treatment, this process is considered a feasible option for demineralizing groundwater, and is a component of the Proposed Project. As proposed, the brine produced as a waste product of RO treatment would be concentrated by evaporation and periodically transported to the Watsonville wastewater treatment plant, or to a landfill or salt processor for disposal (see **Section 3.4.2** of the Final EIR for details). However, RO treatment and the deep injection of the brine into the earth were together considered as a project alternative. This alternative was found to be infeasible due to problems associated with the deep injection of the brine, and not because RO treatment was considered infeasible. **Section 6** of the Final EIR has been revised to clarify the feasibility of RO treatment.

Comment 8-8

The District suggests that the EIR's list of project components analyzed at project level do not list any Phase II components, and are inconsistent with **Tables 1-1** and **3-1**.

Response 8-8

The Final EIR, including **Section 2.4** and the referenced tables, has been revised to clarify the program- and project-level analysis provided. Please refer to Response 8-6 for additional details.

Comment 8-9

The District suggests that the EIR figure showing the proposed Phase I sprayfield irrigation boundary (**Figure 3-3**) should include a legend with labels for Zone 6 and the sprayfield irrigation boundary.

Response 8-9

Figure 3-3 of the Final EIR has been amended to include the requested information.

Comment 8-10

The District suggests that a table should be created showing achievement of project objectives by phase.

Response 8-10

A table linking the attainment of objectives by phase has been provided in **Section 3.3** of the Final EIR.

Comment 8-11

The District suggests that the maximum quantity of wastewater to be disposed of at the DWTP and IWTP be stated (**Tables 1-1** and **3-1**), and that the location of additional disposal sprayfields be identified.

Response 8-11

The maximum quantities of DWTP effluent disposed of by percolation at the DWTP and IWTP have been added to **Tables 1-1** and **3-1**. The Proposed Project includes the development of sprayfields at the Hollister Municipal Airport, and recycled water use at San Juan Oaks Golf Club. Additional sprayfields would be developed by the City and District. The Pacific Sod Farm and the eastern portion of the Flint Hills have been identified as feasible areas for recycled water use; however, additional sites may also be identified in the future. Because specific sites have yet to be developed, these additional sites are addressed on a program level in the EIR. Additional CEQA review will be required prior to development of additional sprayfields.

Comment 8-12

The District claims that additional sprayfield development at the Pacific Sod Farm is a Phase II component but is discussed as a Phase I component, and that the level of analysis (project vs. program) of Phase I and II components is confusing.

Response 8-12

The potential use of recycled water at the Pacific Sod Farm is identified in the EIR as a Phase I project, however it is addressed at a program level because specific project details have not been developed. Please refer to **Sections 2** and **3** of the Final EIR for additional details.

Comment 8-13

The District suggests that the irrigated acreage for the Hollister Municipal Airport listed in **Table 3-6** conflicts with the acreage being considered in the City of Hollister, San Benito County and District's Disposal Site Selection process.

Response 8-13

The acreage available for irrigation at the Hollister Municipal Airport was estimated to be 195 acres in the Draft EIR. It has since been determined that approximately 39 acres that is currently farmed could be made available for sprayfield irrigation. If this area is included, the total sprayfield area would be 234 acres, including approximately 161 acres of sprayfields and 73 acres of turf. These acreage assumptions include a reduction of 10% to account for buffers, roads, and other non-irrigated areas. The sprayfield area is estimated to be 195 to 234 acres depending on whether the area currently farmed is developed as a sprayfield. The Final EIR provides the revised acreage estimate. Please refer to **Section 3.4.1** and **Table 3-6** of the Final EIR for additional details. The potential groundwater impacts associated with irrigation at the airport has been revised to account for the change in the acreage estimate. Please refer to **Section 4.3** of the Final EIR for details.

Comment 8-14

The District suggests that the EIR identify the location of the demineralization facility and evaporation ponds, and how the facility would operate (power consumption and infrastructure needs). In addition, the District suggests the EIR disclose the potential costs of the RO plant construction and operation, and how it would be funded.

Response 8-14

As discussed in the Draft EIR, the location of the demineralization facility has not been identified. Siting of the demineralization facility would be determined in part on whether demineralization is provided to treat the municipal groundwater supply or to treat wastewater at the DWTP. Whether treatment is provided to the water supply or to the DWTP effluent would be a significant factor in the size, infrastructure, cost and power requirements for the facility. Because these parameters have yet to be determined, demineralization is analyzed at a program level in the EIR. The development of the demineralization facility will therefore require additional CEQA review.

Comment 8-15

The District suggests that in order for the EIR to analyze construction related impacts, the section entitled Project Construction and Operation should address assumptions of construction/timing for all facilities in Phases I and II, not just in Phase I.

Response 8-15

The section referenced in the comment was provided to specifically address the phasing of the Phase I improvements to the DWTP that will replace the existing treatment process. This discussion (**Section 3.5**) has been revised in the Final EIR to clarify this purpose. The discussion addresses other components of Phase I including the development of pipelines and sprayfields. Construction timing of Phase II

components is not described in this section. For details on the timing of Phase II components please see **Sections 3.4.2** and **3.4.4** of the Final EIR.

Comment 8-16

The District suggests that the description of impacts from any mitigation measures for the intended use of the Emergency Storage Basins (ESBs) is not apparent. In addition, the District suggests reference should be made to the Stipulation For Order Granting Preliminary Injunction and Order Thereon, San Benito County Water District, plaintiff, vs. City of Hollister, defendant, Case Number: CVPT 0228735; Superior Court of the State of California in and for the County of San Benito.

Response 8-16

The use of the Emergency Storage Basins (ESBs) is discussed in **Section 3.5.1** of the EIR. The preliminary injunction mentioned in the District's letter pertains to the City's construction of the ESBs in 2002. The injunction required that the City utilize the ESBs only on an emergency basis, required the City to complete CEQA compliance and required the City to involve the District and San Benito County in the CEQA process. The injunction also required that following completion of interim improvements the ESBs be abandoned, or that any continued use be treated as a new project and additional CEQA review be completed. The City complied with the injunction through the completion of an Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration in 2003. Impacts associated with the temporary use of the ESBs to provide treated effluent storage through the construction phase of the DWSI project has been clarified in the Final EIR (Impact 4.3-8).

Comment 8-17

The District suggests that the description of impacts from any mitigation measures for the construction and operation of the MBR basins and foundation are not apparent.

Response 8-17

As indicated in the project description of the EIR (**Section 3.4.1**), the critical MBR facilities would be supported on stone columns or driven piles to provide adequate stability. Impacts associated with the development of the columns or piles, in particular the potential impact to groundwater, have been clarified in the Final EIR. Please see Impact 4.3-16 in the Final EIR.

Comment 8-18

The District suggests that existing water quality conditions in the vicinity of the IWTP, DWTP, and San Juan Sub-Basin are not adequately addressed and that the discussion of water quality impacts of the project needs to take into account existing water quality. The District also notes that the cumulative

effects of the project when combined with the disposal of industrial wastewater and stormwater at the IWTP are not addressed.

Response 8-18

The discussion of the existing water quality in the vicinity of the DWTP, IWTP and adjacent San Juan Sub-Basin has been expanded and clarified in the Final EIR. Additionally, the discussion of impacts has been expanded and clarified in the Final EIR with respect to existing water quality and operation of the IWTP. Please see **Section 4.3.2** for additional information on existing water quality, Impacts 4.3.1 and 4.3.3 for project-related impacts from disposal at the DWTP and IWTP, and **Section 5.2** for additional information on cumulative water quality impacts.

Comment 8-19

The District notes that reliance on RO/demineralization is used to assert a less than significant impact in evaluating consistency with objectives of the Hollister Urban Area Water and Wastewater Master Plan MOU.

Response 8-19

As identified in the project description of the EIR (**Section 3.4.2**), demineralization would be implemented by 2015 to reduce TDS levels in DWTP effluent to a target level of 500 mg/L (not to exceed 700 mg/L). This is consistent with the time frame for quality objectives of DWTP effluent provided in Section 2.2.3 of the MOU. As a result, the project is considered consistent with this MOU objective and a less than significant impact is identified.

Comment 8-20

The District suggests that unique farmlands need to be added to the Soil Resources Map (**Figure 4.1-4**) and the discussion of farmland impacts.

Response 8-20

Figure 4.1-4 has been revised in the Final EIR to include unique farmlands. The discussion of farmland impacts (Impact 4.1.9) has been revised to include impacts to unique farmland.

Comment 8-21

The District suggests that the Final EIR explore the feasibility of avoiding important farmland impacts in the siting of proposed facilities.

Response 8-21

Mitigation Measure 4.1.9 identifies that storage basins and evaporation ponds be sited to avoid important farmland. It is expected that a 670-acre-foot storage basin and up to 400 acres of evaporation ponds would be developed in Phase II. The location of these facilities has not been identified. As discussed in Response 8-14, the location of the evaporation ponds associated with demineralization is dependent in part on whether demineralization is provided to treat the municipal groundwater supply or to treat wastewater at the DWTP. It is expected that adequate land is available near the City to allow the avoidance of important farmland.

Comment 8-22

The District suggests that condemnation of the Williamson Act contracts that may be needed to provide for Phase II storage basins and evaporations does not appear to be consistent with the intent of the Williamson Act.

Response 8-22

The assessment of impacts to Williamson Act contracts has been revised in the Final EIR (Impact 4.1.10). Mitigation has been identified to avoid parcels with Williamson Act contracts.

Comment 8-23

The District suggests that Waste Discharge Requirement mitigation measures would likely not be possible to implement as written. The District suggests that it would be more effective to establish the agronomic application rate, limit application to that rate, and establish standards.

Response 8-23

The mitigation measures have been revised in the Final EIR to provide specific standards for implementation. Please see Mitigation Measure 4.2.4 for details.

Comment 8-24

The District suggests that no facts are introduced to demonstrate that application of high salt load irrigation water would not affect soil/groundwater quality. In addition, the District questions what would occur if the demineralization/RO plant were delayed.

Response 8-24

Additional information has been added to the discussion of soil salinity impacts (Impact 4.2-5) and mitigation has been identified to ensure a less than significant impact would occur.

Comment 8-25

The District asks how "weak slopes" are defined, and suggests that a performance standard is needed for the implementation of the identified mitigation measures.

Response 8-25

Mitigation Measure 4.2.7 has been revised to provide specific standards for implementation. Please see the Final EIR text for details.

Comment 8-26

The District suggests that specific median groundwater objectives are presented without the requirements for application, and impacts of percolation of wastewater at the IWTP and DWTP must be evaluated based on the water quality naturally present at those sites.

Response 8-26

The discussion of Basin Plan objectives and the impacts of percolation of wastewater at the IWTP and DWTP have been revised to clarify the application of the objectives and existing groundwater quality. Please see **Section 4.3.2** for additional information on existing water quality and Impacts 4.3.1 and 4.3.3 for project-related impacts from disposal at the DWTP and IWTP.

Comment 8-27

The District states that it manages and distributes Central Valley Project (CVP) surface water supplies to agricultural, municipal, and industrial users.

Response 8-27

Clarification on this point has been added to **Section 4.3** of the Final EIR.

Comment 8-28

The District states that it is both a wholesaler and a retailer of CVP surface water through the San Felipe Distribution System.

Response 8-28

Clarification on this point has been added to **Section 4.3** of the Final EIR.

Comment 8-29

The District states that it does not deliver water from Hernandez or Paicines reservoirs to agricultural users. The District adds that water rights are for recreation and groundwater storage for later extraction.

Response 8-29

Clarification on this point has been added to **Section 4.3** of the Final EIR.

Comment 8-30

The District suggests that the legend in **Figure 4.3-2** should be corrected by changing "roundwater" to "groundwater."

Response 8-30

Figure 4.3-2 has been corrected in the Final EIR.

Comment 8-31

The District states that the groundwater model developed by the District and San Benito County was first developed in the early 1990s and was significantly modified and updated in 2001.

Response 8-31

Clarification on this point has been added to **Section 4.3** of the Final EIR.

Comment 8-32

The District suggests that the discussion of model scenarios does not clearly present assumptions regarding water use, including municipal irrigation associated with City and County General Plan growth, increases in agricultural irrigation, and increased groundwater pumping for urban and agricultural development. The District also questions whether analysis is presented on the failure to implement water quality improvements and recycling in Phase II.

Response 8-32

The model scenarios have been revised to address all aspects of the project and agricultural use and urban growth expected to occur during the 16-year planning horizon for the Proposed Project. Please see **Section 4.3.2** "Model Scenarios" for additional information. The potential impacts of failing to implement water quality improvements and recycling is addressed in the analysis of the No Project Alternative in **Section 6** of the EIR. Because demineralization is a project component, it has been included in the evaluation of groundwater impacts. Both Phase I impacts (without demineralization) and Phase II impacts (with demineralization) have been identified in the Final EIR. Please see Response 8-1 on implementation of Phase II.

Comment 8-33

The District states that the discussion of thresholds of significance is well done, but that the threshold of "statistically detectable over a period of several decades" is not supported and a more supportable threshold should be tied directly to standards and contributions.

Response 8-33

The discussion of the thresholds of significance for the basin-wide salt balance has been revised. Please see **Section 4.3.3** and Impact 4.3.1 in the Final EIR.

Comment 8-34

The District notes that **Table 4.3-1** and subsequent impact assessments are based on median values and not site-specific values as required by the Basin Plan.

Response 8-34

The impact of the Proposed Project on the basin-wide salt balance has been revised to clarify the application of Basin Plan objectives in light of the existing groundwater quality. Please see Impact 4.3.1 in the Final EIR.

Comment 8-35

The District questions what threshold of significance was used to determine the significance of salt loading and suggests providing more support for the conclusion that the project-related increase is not significant. In addition, the District suggests that the impact that would result if Phase II were not implemented should be assessed for all groundwater impacts.

Response 8-35

The discussion of the thresholds of significance and the impact discussion for the basin-wide salt balance (Impact 4.3.1) have been revised. Please see **Section 4.3.3** of the Final EIR. Demineralization, which is proposed to be implemented by 2015, would significantly improve the quality of DWTP effluent. Because demineralization is a project component, it has been included in the evaluation of groundwater impacts. Both Phase I impacts (without demineralization) and Phase II impacts (with demineralization) have been identified in the Final EIR.

Comment 8-36

The District suggests that the discussion of treated effluent disposal through sprayfields and irrigation projects is dismissive of large increases in salinity, and asks what the basis is of using the 3,000-mg/L TDS threshold presented in the Draft EIR. The District requests clarification of the standards or

beneficial uses that this threshold protects and whether this amount meets the requirements of the Basin Plan.

Response 8-36

The discussion of the thresholds of significance and the discussion of the groundwater quality impact of sprayfields (Impact 4.3.2) have been revised. Please see **Section 4.3.3** of the Final EIR.

Comment 8-37

The District questions whether Mitigation Measure 4.3.2, identified for impacts to groundwater quality from recycled water irrigation, is feasible. The District questions the type of wellhead treatment, and alternative water supplies referenced in the measures. The District questions whether blending, if utilized, would increase the irrigation quantity, and if so whether there is enough land to accommodate additional irrigation. The District suggests that the use of CVP water is impractical, since in most years it is fully allocated. The District repeats its question as to whether the 3,000-mg/L TDS threshold is supportable (see Comment 8-36).

Response 8-37

Clarification of the type of wellhead treatment and the source of alternative water supplies has been provided in the Final EIR (Mitigation Measure 4.3.2). Blending of recycled water with CVP water or groundwater may be used to reduce the salinity of irrigation water. If used, this would not increase the amount of irrigation, but would decrease the amount of recycled water disposed of at a specific sprayfield site. Mitigation Measure 4.3.8 (b) stipulates the need to provide adequate disposal capacity to address the lack of availability of CVP water. The District's comment on the 3,000 mg/L TDS threshold is addressed in Response 8-36.

Comment 8-38

The District suggests clarification of the proposed volumes of DWTP effluent to be percolated at the DWTP and IWTP. The District asks if the volumes presented by the City in the EIR and in the additional disposal site selection process are consistent and if the City assumes percolation to continue at existing levels. The District also asks if simulations include percolation from the proposed seasonal storage reservoir.

Response 8-38

The EIR assumes a maximum of 3,133 AFY of effluent will be percolated at the DWTP and that 796 AFY of DWTP effluent will be percolated at the IWTP. These volumes are based on existing disposal capacities. It should be noted that all additional effluent flows will be disposed of by sprayfields and recycled water uses developed at other locations. All flows that are in excess of the existing flows will

not be accommodated by increased percolation at the DWTP or IWTP. The Draft EIR identifies as mitigation an annual Comprehensive Effluent Disposal Plan (to be developed by the City and the District) that must identify adequate disposal capacity. The measure requires that "no new wastewater service connections shall be permitted unless adequate disposal capacity is identified to handle additional flows" (Mitigation Measure 4.8.3(b) Draft EIR pg. 4.3-53).

Comment 8-39

The District asks if groundwater measurements from simulations are consistent with those from a recent geotechnical investigation undertaken by the City of Hollister at the Hollister Municipal Airport.

Response 8-39

The groundwater model was revised to reflect data provided from a recent geotechnical investigation at the Hollister Municipal Airport. Assumptions on groundwater quality and elevations were updated to reflect the new information.

Comment 8-40

The District states that it does not maintain an encroachment permit process.

Response 8-40

Clarification on this point has been added to **Section 4.4** of the Final EIR.

Comment 8-41

The District suggests that obtaining a 404 permit is not mitigation, although there will likely be conditions required by the permit that serve as mitigation. In addition, the District suggests adding performance standards to the impact that discuses pipelines crossing jurisdictional waters of the U.S.

Response 8-41

Mitigation Measure 4.4.5 has been revised to provide specific standards for implementation.

Comment 8-42

The District suggests that mitigation presented for pipeline construction impacts to special-status species rely on unknown feasibility and therefore cannot be relied on to reduce impacts to a less than significant level.

Response 8-42

Mitigation Measure 4.4.6 has been revised to ensure that impacts are reduced to a less than significant level.

Comment 8-43

The District questions whether the mitigation measures identified to address impacts to special-status plant species from sprayfield development are feasible. The District specifically questions whether there is enough land to accommodate additional irrigation water if dilution is needed, and if there is enough land available to accommodate any buffers.

Response 8-43

As discussed in Response 8-1, the EIR identifies as mitigation an annual Comprehensive Effluent Disposal Plan (to be developed by the City and the District) that must identify adequate disposal capacity for the DWTP. (Mitigation Measure 4.8.3(b) Draft EIR pg. 4.3-53). Under the measure, no new wastewater service connections shall be permitted unless adequate disposal capacity is identified to handle additional flows. This will ensure that adequate disposal capacity is provided through the development of sprayfields and recycled water projects, and will necessarily factor in any limitations on that development, whether attributable to biological concerns or otherwise.

Comment 8-44

The District suggests that the EIR does not consider potential power requirements for operation of an RO facility or wellhead treatment, and states that even small RO plants typically require new substations.

Response 8-44

As discussed in Response 8-14, whether demineralization is provided to the water supply or to the DWTP effluent would be a significant factor in the power requirements for the facility. Because specific parameters on the size and energy requirements have yet to be determined, demineralization is analyzed at a program level in the EIR. The development of the demineralization facility will therefore require additional CEQA review, which will address energy supply and infrastructure requirements. Wellhead treatment is one option presented for mitigating impacts to adjacent groundwater wells. Due to the limited volume of water that would be treated, the power requirements are expected to be minimal.

Comment 8-45

The District suggests that the air quality analysis should be expanded to evaluate the construction and operation of a RO/demineralization facility. In addition, the District suggests that when considered cumulatively with operation of the MBR facility, there is a potential to exceed air quality thresholds.

Response 8-45

As discussed in Responses 8-14 and 8-44, the size and infrastructure of the proposed demineralization facility have yet to be determined. Because these parameters have yet to be determined, demineralization is analyzed at a program level in the EIR. Future CEQA review will address air quality impacts from construction and operation of the facility. However, air quality impacts from the operation of the evaporation ponds associated with demineralization are addressed in Impact 4.8-11.

Comment 8-46

The District suggests that the number of trips and associated air quality effects from vehicular traffic for biosolids disposal could be substantial for short-term disposal.

Response 8-46

Impact 4.8.3 of the Final EIR has been revised to include a discussion of the potential air quality impacts from traffic associated with biosolids disposal. Disposal would occur infrequently, once every 16 years, and would add less than 40 truck trips per day to the roadways for a 30-day period, resulting in less than significant air quality impacts. See Section 4.8.3 of the Final EIR.

Comment 8-47

The District suggests that the descriptions of the alternatives provides little justification for selecting the Proposed Project over other alternatives, and that including a matrix summarizing the screening criteria and results would be helpful. In addition, the District suggests arranging the analyses by alternative rather than resource area.

Response 8-47

While the District's preferences on the style of presentation are appreciated, Section 6 of the EIR provides a clear discussion of the alternatives. The alternatives analysis presents the range of alternatives examined by the City and District for the treatment and disposal of wastewater, the criteria used in screening the alternatives, and the basis of alternative selection. Additional reference to the evaluation of treatment and disposal alternatives provided in the LTWMP (Appendix D) has been provided in the Final EIR (Section 6).

With respect to the basis for selecting the Proposed Project over the other alternatives, EIR Sections 6.2.2 and 6.2.3 analyze the potential impacts of the Proposed Project relative to the wastewater treatment and effluent disposal alternatives for each environmental impact category. The EIR notes that the comparison of the treatment alternatives, including the EAS, Oxidation Ditch, and SBR systems, determined that each has a similar level of environmental impacts as the proposed MBR facility, although each produces a lesser quality effluent than the Proposed Project (DEIR p. 6-18). The comparison of the disposal method

alternatives, including a surface water discharge to the San Benito River and the construction of new percolation beds, determined that while each alternative would have lesser impacts to some environmental categories, both alternatives would increase impacts to hydrology and water quality, and biological resources (DEIR p. 6-19). Under the surface water discharge alternative, the discharge of the quantity of water anticipated could lead to increases to surface and groundwater levels, and possibly contaminants; and, would require an extensive permitting process (DEIR p. 6-19). Under the new percolation pond alternative, disposal of wastewater effluent could contribute to high TDS levels in the groundwater basin (DEIR p. 6-19). As to the No Project Alternative, analyzed in EIR Section 6.2.1, although implementation of this alternative would result in fewer adverse environmental effects than would occur under the Proposed Project and other alternatives, the overall degree of adverse impacts to water quality would be more significant (DEIR p. 6-19).

Comment 8-48

The District suggests that the alternative treatment processes and effluent disposal alternatives should reference Appendix D, where this information is derived, and matrices on pages 6-10 and 6-11, to clarity the selection of these particular alternatives for evaluation.

Response 8-48

As noted in Response 8-47, additional reference to the evaluation of treatment and disposal alternatives provided in the LTWMP (Appendix D) has been provided in the Final EIR (Section 6).

Comment 8-49

The District suggests that program-level components not specifically covered under a project level of analysis should be identified.

Response 8-49

Clarification on this point has been added to **Section 6.2.4** of the Final EIR.

Comment 8-50

The District suggests that **Section 6.3** of the EIR provides no information that shows how much less the difference is between the effluent quality of each alternative and that of the Proposed Project. The District suggests that additional information on the impacts of the alternatives be provided to support the identification of the environmentally superior alternative.

Response 8-50

Section 6.3 of the EIR identifies the environmentally superior alternative and explains the basis for the selection of the Proposed Project relative to the other alternatives. This discussion draws on the analysis

of alternatives presented in **Sections 6.2.2** and **6.2.3**, which characterize the relative impacts of the alternatives. Clarification on this point has been added to **Section 6.3** of the Final EIR. Please also see Response 8-47. Specific to effluent quality, see LTWMP (Appendix D), Section 6.3, Wastewater Treatment Alternatives, which evaluated the MBR and three other treatment alternatives and determined the MBR produces extremely high quality effluent, superior to the three alternatives (Appendix D, pp. 6-23. See also, pp. 6-11, 6-17, and 6-29).

LETTER 9. TERRY ROBERTS, DIRECTOR – STATE OF CALIFORNIA GOVERNOR'S OFFICE OF PLANNING AND RESEARCH, STATE CLEARINGHOUSE AND PLANNING UNIT

Comment 9-1

The commenter states that the State Clearinghouse submitted the Draft EIR to selected state agencies for review. The commenter states that the State Clearinghouse has enclosed a list of state agencies that reviewed the Draft EIR and the comments received from the responding agencies.

The commenter provides a list of state agencies that reviewed the Draft EIR in the first attachment to the letter. The commenter provides comments submitted by the State Water Resources Control Board in the second attachment to the letter.

Response 9-1

All comments received during the public review period have been considered and responded to by the City of Hollister during the preparation of this Final EIR. The comment letter submitted by the State Water Resources Control Board has been considered and responded to as Letter 1. Refer to the discussion of Letter 1 above.

LETTER 10. TERRY ROBERTS, DIRECTOR – STATE OF CALIFORNIA GOVERNOR'S OFFICE OF PLANNING AND RESEARCH, STATE CLEARINGHOUSE AND PLANNING UNIT

Comment 10-1

The commenter states that the State Clearinghouse has enclosed comments received from responding agencies after the close of the state review period on September 8, 2006. The commenter states that although CEQA does not require lead agencies to respond to late comments, the State Clearinghouse encourages that the enclosed comments be considered and responded to in the final environmental document.

The commenter provides comments submitted by the Department of Conservation, Division of Land Resources as an attachment to the letter.

Response 10-1

All comments received by the City of Hollister regarding the Draft EIR have been considered and responded during the preparation of this Final EIR. The comment letter submitted by the Department of Conservation, Division of Land Resources has been considered and responded to as Letter 6. Refer to the discussion of Letter 6 above.

LETTER 11. PAUL BREEN

Comment 11-1

The commenter states that, as a member of the of the Hollister farming community with property west of the city limits, he supports the proposed development of a wastewater solution for Hollister, and the expansion of the wastewater treatment plant. The commenter expresses concern regarding the costs of modifying existing irrigation practices to eliminate runoff waters in areas that accept reclaimed water. The commenter states the project should evaluate additional public use of reclaimed water, including public landscaped areas. The commenter suggests that the Draft EIR should include additional information on the economic impacts of the project to the community and proposed financing.

Response 11-1

The City appreciates the commenter's support and stated concerns. The costs of developing the Proposed Project have been considered by the City. Additionally, the City has engaged in a series of public meetings to inform residents of the increase in rates and to gather input form the community. Pursuant to CEQA requirements, the scope of environmental impact reports is limited to physical changes to the environment that could occur as a result of a project. Therefore, economic impacts are analyzed only to the extent that they would result in physical environmental consequences. As it is not expected that the economic impacts of the project would result in physical environmental changes, this issue area is not analyzed in the EIR.

With regards to the suggestion of utilizing recycled water to irrigate public facilities, including landscaped areas, the City has analyzed this possibility within the Proposed Project. As identified in Section 3.4.4, urban uses – including public facilities such as parks and schoolyards – are being considered for recycled water use.

With regards to the stated concerns of the costs of modifying existing irrigation practices to utilize recycled water, the City is aware that utilizing recycled water will require additional management. As the commenter states, precautions would be required to generally eliminate the runoff of recycled water. This

would require tailwater collection ditches, return pumps and other operational modifications. The City understands that there would be costs associated with these measures, but the recycled water is expected to provide a valuable source of irrigation that would offset these costs. As noted in Section 3.4.3 of the EIR, the location of irrigation projects would depend on landowner interest, infrastructure costs, feasibility and other concerns. The use of recycled water for irrigation would be voluntary.

LETTER 12. PAT LOE, CHAIR – SAN BENITO COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

Comment 12-1

The commenter, the San Benito County Board of Supervisors (Board), states that the Board has reviewed the Draft EIR and appreciates the overall examination of issues and the desire to improve water quality in the project area over time. The Board states concerns that Phase I sprayfields could potentially affect the quality and quantity of groundwater and is concerned that Phase II improvements are identified for implementation too far into the future. The Board suggests that unless concrete back-up plans are made in the event that water quality issues arise, the Draft EIR and project plans should be further developed as to a solution to move forward with Phase II more quickly and minimize concepts such as sprayfields in Phase I. The Board states that it does not want the City to make decisions that could lead to further damage to the County's groundwater and aquifers.

Response 12-1

The City appreciates the Board's comments and will continue to work with San Benito County to improve water quality. Through the lengthy planning process and the environmental review process the City has formulated a concrete plan that improves the manner in which treated wastewater will be disposed. The Proposed Project has been designed specifically to address existing impacts to water quality and quantity as a result of wastewater disposal. The City coordinated with the Water District and San Benito County during a lengthy evaluation of disposal alternatives. These evaluations led to the selection of the proposed Phase I disposal strategy, which involves the use of existing percolation and proposed sprayfield development, as the best interim solution to water quality concerns. All other options were eliminated due to a greater level of environmental impacts or because they were found to be infeasible. Through the CEQA process, the potential environmental impacts of sprayfield development have been carefully analyzed and mitigation measures have been identified for all potentially significant impacts. As shown in the EIR, with application of these measures, all impacts to groundwater will be mitigated to a less than significant level. Mitigation Measure 4.8.3(b) of the Draft EIR identifies as mitigation an annual Comprehensive Effluent Disposal Plan that is to be developed by the City in cooperation with the Water District. The measure requires that "no new wastewater service connections shall be permitted unless adequate disposal capacity is identified to handle additional flows." This disposal plan will require that adequate disposal capacity be identified prior to increasing the amount of wastewater treated at the DWTP. The language of this measure has been revised in the Final EIR to

ensure that San Benito County is consulted during development of the Comprehensive Effluent Disposal Plan. Please see Section 4.3.3, Mitigation Measure 4.8.3(b) of the Final EIR.

The City would like to emphasize that it has committed to an aggressive schedule for the implementation of demineralization in Phase II. The City would also like to point out that San Benito County was equally involved with development of the Phase II schedule and has agreed to that timing as a matter of policy. The proposed improvements to the DWTP would be operational in 2008, and City, San Benito County, and the San Benito County Water District have committed to implementing demineralization *by* 2015 only seven years later. It should be noted that demineralization that will require extensive facilities will take years to plan and build. The City is already actively engaged in planning these facilities through the identification and environmental review of demineralization facilities in this EIR. Demineralization is also being addressed through development of the Hollister Urban Area Water and Wastewater Master Plan, a joint planning effort being undertaken by the City, Water District, and San Benito County.

Comment 12-2

The Board questions whether the City has a plan in the event that Phase II of the Proposed Project can not be implemented. The Board questions how the schedule for implementation of Phase II would be affected if contamination of wells or other issues were to occur in Phase I of the project. The Board states that a plan should be developed for potential problems along with the cost of moving to Phase II sooner. The Board questions when the project will meet the water quality standards outlined in the MOU.

Response 12-2

The City's proposed strategy for wastewater disposal prior to implementation of Phase II includes the use of sprayfields in Phase I and continued percolation at the DWTP and IWTP. The impacts of Phase I have been exhaustively analyzed within the EIR and mitigation measures have been identified to protect groundwater quality. The EIR concluded that impacts to groundwater would be less than significant with implementation of recommended mitigation measures.

The EIR has specifically addressed the potential impacts to wells from the operation of sprayfields. Mitigation for the potential contamination of wells includes the installation of monitoring wells, groundwater monitoring, and measures to address any substantial increases in groundwater salinity. These measures include reducing or eliminating recycled water irrigation, blending recycled water with CVP water or groundwater to reduce the salinity of irrigation water, and providing an alternative water supply for affected wells (Mitigation Measure 4.3.2). It is concluded that with the implementation of Mitigation Measure 4.3.2, impacts to groundwater would be less than significant, and would not affect beneficial uses. Therefore, contamination of wells is not expected to affect the implementation schedule of Phase II of the Proposed Project. As identified in the EIR, the water quality standards detailed in the MOU would be met by 2015, with implementation of demineralization.

Comment 12-3

The Board states that the Draft EIR discusses the Phase I development of sprayfields at the Hollister Municipal Airport, the San Juan Oaks golf course, at the Pacific Sod Farm and areas north of Freitas Road, and the eastern portion of the Flint Hills. The Board states that they are concerned that the development of sprayfields at these locations in Phase I could result in damage to soils and groundwater. The Board notes that if heavy rainfall were to occur, salts would not be absorbed by plants and could leach into the groundwater. The Board states concern that Phase II may not occur, and that additional options should be considered to treat/disperse the salts to avoid groundwater problems.

Response 12-3

Impacts to soil and groundwater quality as a result of Phase I sprayfield developments are exhaustively addressed in the EIR. The impact analysis of soil and groundwater impacts fully accounts for the effect of rainfall in leaching salts into the groundwater. Section 4.3.2 and Section 4.3.3 of the EIR conclude that impacts to soil salinity and groundwater quality as a result of Phase I sprayfields would be less than significant with implementation of recommended mitigation measures. Specifically, potential impacts to soil will be addressed through monitoring and utilizing appropriate irrigation methods (Final EIR Mitigation Measure 4.2.5). Potential impacts to groundwater quality from sprayfields will be addressed through monitoring, reducing or eliminating recycled water irrigation and blending recycled water with CVP water or groundwater to reduce the salinity of irrigation water (Final EIR Mitigation Measure 4.3.2). It should be noted that the County was included and agreed to the use of sprayfields for Phase I disposal and that the County has been and will continue to be consulted in the selection of sites for sprayfield disposal.

Again, the City emphasizes its commitment to implementing demineralization and other components of Phase II. As discussed in Response 12-1, the City is actively planning for demineralization by the year 2015. This commitment is memorialized in the language of the MOU between the City, Water District, and San Benito County and has been adopted as policy by all three agencies.

Comment 12-4

The Board states that the amount of acreage to be used for Phase II sprayfield projects is unclear. The Board states that the determined acreage for Phase II of the Proposed Project should be consistent between the EIR and the Recycled Water Project documents.

Response 12-4

In Section 3.4.2, the EIR states that a maximum of 1,200 acres of sprayfields would be required by 2023. As noted, this figure does not take into account recycled water projects that would be developed in Phase I and II. Additionally, it is not possible to identify the exact quantity of acreage that will be utilized for disposal as this is dependant on a number of factors including crop types, soils types, and other

conditions. As described in the EIR, the use of sprayfields would be phased out as the agricultural use of recycled water becomes increasingly feasible with improved water quality from demineralization. It should be noted that the acreage that is identified to be available for recycled water use in the Recycled Water Feasibility Study far outweighs anticipated wastewater disposal needs.

Comment 12-5

The Board states that the discussion in Section 4.1 requires further investigation regarding whether or not public services can be implemented on Williamson Act contracted land. The Board states that the EIR should contain specific language stating whether or not there will be an issue or remedy associated with developing public facilities on Williamson Act contracted land.

Response 12-5

Impacts associated with the potential future location of an off-site storage basin and evaporation ponds on Williamson Act Lands are discussed under Impact 4.1.10 of the EIR. In response to comments received on the Draft EIR, it was determined that termination of a Williamson Act contract would be considered a potentially significant impact under CEQA and that although the City may follow statutory requirements in terminating a contract, the impact of the termination is not reduced. As a result, Impact 4.1.10 of the Final EIR was revised to state that potential impacts to Williamson Act lands resulting from the development of off-site facilities are considered potentially significant. Additionally, Mitigation Measure 4.1.10 has been added to the Final EIR to require that the development of the storage basin and evaporation ponds avoid parcels under Williamson Act contract, thereby reducing the impact to a less than significant level.

Comment 12-6

The Board states that the County is concerned that the existing wastewater treatment plants contribute to some of the water quality degradation in the San Juan Valley. The Board requests discussion and thoughts as to how this issue should be addressed in the EIR.

Response 12-6

The discussion of existing water quality impacts associated with the existing operation of the DWTP and IWTP has been expanded within the Final EIR. Refer to Section 4.3 of the Final EIR for detailed information on existing impacts to water quality as a result of operation of the DWTP and IWTP. The Proposed Project was designed to address existing impacts through improving the quality of the treated effluent and developing sprayfields and irrigation projects to decrease the amount of water that is being disposed of at the DWTP and IWTP.

PUBLIC MEETING, AUGUST 15, 2006

A public meeting was held to address questions and issues regarding the Draft EIR for the Proposed Project at the Veteran's Memorial Building in the City of Hollister on August 15th, 2006. Much of the discussion at this meeting was in regards to potential increases in sewage rates as a result of the proposed improvements at the DWTP. City staff was on hand to address these issues. However, this topic is not included within the scope of environmental review required by CEQA and is therefore not discussed further within this EIR. Relevant issues discussed at the public meeting that relate to environmental issues within the scope of this document are summarized and responded to below. These comments are numbered according to the order of discussion at the meeting. The complete transcript of the public meeting is provided as **Attachment B** of this Final EIR, Volume I.

Meeting Comment 1 – Hazardous Materials and Sludge Disposal

Several questions were raised regarding the production and disposal of hazardous waste and sludge resulting from the project. One commenter expressed concern regarding health risks associated with sludge disposal. *See discussion provided in the transcript page 2 line 2 through page 4 line 20.*

Response

Hazardous materials generated by the Proposed Project would be limited to minor amounts associated with the use of chemicals during operation of the plant, and potentially salt concentrate generated in evaporation ponds as a byproduct of demineralization in Phase II. Impacts associated with the handling of chemical substances and the disposal of salt concentrate are discussed in Section 4.6.3 of the Final EIR. The EIR concluded that impacts associated with hazardous waste would be less than significant with incorporation of recommended mitigation measures.

As discussed in the meeting and described in Section 4.6.2 of the Draft EIR, biosolids are considered a non-hazardous waste. On a ten to fifteen year basis, biosolids would be collected at the DWTP and disposed of at a certified location or reused for a beneficial purpose. Compliance with USEPA regulations would ensure human health hazards would not occur. Potential impacts to landfill operations associated with the disposal of biosolids are discussed under Impact 4.7.1. The EIR concluded that impacts would be less than significant.

Meeting Comment 2 – Wastewater treatment technologies

One commenter asked whether any wastewater treatment facilities similar to the Proposed Project are located in the general area, and what types of wastewater treatment technologies are being utilized in public facilities near the project area. *See discussion provided in the transcript page 4 line 21 through page 7 line 20.*

Response

As discussed in the meeting, membrane bioreactor (MBR) technology has been used for the treatment of wastewater at various public facilities in California for the last three or four years. The use of this relatively new technology is becoming increasingly common due to new state regulations and several advantages including the smaller footprint and amount of concrete required when compared to other types of treatment facilities. Some examples of California municipalities that utilize MBR technology for wastewater treatment include the City of American Canyon, the City of Corona, and the City of Redlands.

Meeting Comment 3 –Sprayfield selection and locations

One commenter questioned how sprayfield sites were selected and how far they would be located from the plant. *See discussion provided in the transcript page 7 line 21 through page 7 line 20.*

Response

The area identified for the potential development of sprayfield sites is shown in Figure 3.3 of the EIR. As discussed in the meeting and described in Section 3.4 of the EIR, San Juan Oaks Golf Course and the Hollister Airport are being evaluated at a project specific level for the development of sprayfield. Additional selection of sprayfield sites will consider factors such as crop suitability, proximity to the DWTP, and other environmental factors. In Phase II of the Proposed Project, it is anticipated that as the salinity level of the treated effluent improves, sprayfield sites will gradually be eliminated and treated wastewater would be used primarily for the irrigation of agricultural crops. This use would offset the use of CVP water.

Meeting Comment 4 – Sprayfield impacts to groundwater levels at the Hollister Airport

One commenter questioned how sprayfield sites would effect groundwater levels at the Hollister Municipal Airport. *See discussion provided in the transcript page 11 line 21 though page 13.*

Response

Potential impacts to water levels associated with development of Sprayfields at the Hollister Municipal airport are discussed under Impact 4.3-11 of the Final EIR. As discussed in the EIR, although the increase in groundwater levels as a result of sprayfield operation at the Hollister Airport is not expected to affect the root zone of plants or future construction activities, because groundwater levels are rising in the area mitigation has been recommended to avoid potential impacts. These measures will include measuring of groundwater levels at several monitoring wells down gradient of the sprayfields. If significant changes in groundwater levels are observed, increased pumping of municipal wells in the area would be used to bring the water table down.

Meeting Comment 5 –Capacity and location of seasonal storage basins

One commenter questioned where seasonal storage basins would be located, and what capacity of storage would be provided. *See discussion provided in the transcript page 15 lines 3-19.*

Response

As shown in Figure 3-1 of the EIR, the Proposed Project would include the construction of an on-site seasonal storage reservoir, which would be developed west of Highway 156 at the existing DWTP site. This reservoir would provide approximately 1,500 acre-feet of storage capacity for treated wastewater during the winter months when agricultural irrigation and sprayfield application is not feasible. Additionally, Phase II of the Proposed Project could potentially involve the development of a 670 acre foot capacity off-site seasonal storage reservoir. The location of this storage reservoir has not been identified. This aspect of the Proposed Project is evaluated on a programmatic level within the EIR as specific plans have not yet been developed. Construction of an off-site storage basin will involve additional environmental review.

Meeting Comment 6 – Odor of treated effluent

One commenter questioned whether or not the treated effluent would have an offensive odor. *See discussion provided in the transcript page 15 line 20 through page 17 line 21.*

Response

As discussed in the meeting and Section 4.8 of the EIR, the tertiary treated effluent that would result from the proposed MBR facility would be higher quality and produce a lower level of odor compared to the existing treatment process. A detailed discussion of odor related impacts associated with development of the Proposed Project is included under Impact 4.8.5 of the EIR. The EIR concluded that the proposed odor control technologies that would be developed with the MBR facility would be sufficient to reduce odors to a less than significant level.

Meeting Comment 7 – Groundwater quality improvements

One commenter questioned how long after implementation of the Proposed Project would it take to see an improvement in the groundwater quality of the San Juan Valley aquifer. *See discussion provided in the transcript page 17 line 24 through page 19 line 5.*

Response

Section 4.3.2 of the EIR provides a detailed discussion of existing impacts to water quality as a result of operation of the DWTP and percolation of treated effluent. Anticipated impacts as a result of implementation of the Proposed Project are discussed under Section 4.3.3 of the Final EIR. As discussed in the meeting, decreased percolation and improvements to the quality of the treated effluent that would

occur in Phase I would assist in improving the groundwater quality in the San Juan Valley aquifer. However, it is expected that quality of the treated effluent would significantly improve with demineralization in Phase II of the Proposed Project. At this time it is expected that a noticeable improvement to groundwater quality would occur.

Meeting Comment 8 – Phase II implementation

One commenter questioned when Phase II of the Proposed Project would occur and what would be accomplished during this time. *See discussion provided in the transcript page 19 line 7 through page 22 line 12.*

Response

A detailed description of Phase II of the Proposed Project is provided in Section 3.4.2, Section 3.4.4, and Table 3-1 of the EIR. As described in the EIR and discussed in the meeting, Phase II of the Proposed Project is expected to begin approximately in 2014, with implementation of demineralization occurring in the year 2015. Demineralization in Phase II is expected to improve the quality of the treated effluent to a level suitable for agricultural irrigation in the San Juan Valley and elsewhere. Additionally, demineralization combined with other elements of the Salt Management Program, including the proposed water softener ordinance, is expected to improve the quality of groundwater over time.

Phase II of the Proposed Project would also consist of upgrading the treatment capacity of the DWTP from 4.0 MGD to 5.0 MGD. The timing of this upgrade is dependent upon increased demand for treatment at the DWTP.

Meeting Comment 9 – Water quality standards

One commenter questioned what types of standards are provided for salt content in water. *See discussion provided in the transcript page 25, line 18 through page 27, line 5.*

Response

As stated in the meeting, the EPA sets federal standards for drinking water quality. These standards are reflected in the Basin Plan water quality objectives for San Benito County. The secondary standard for drinking water is 500 mg per liter. This is not considered a health standard, but rather an aesthetic standard. The salt content for agricultural irrigation purposes can be much higher. Additionally, the Water Quality Control Plan for the Central Coastal Basin (Basin Plan) provides water quality objectives to serve as a baseline for evaluating water quality management in the basin. The Proposed Project has been identified to comply with the Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board's requirements in implementing the Basin Plan. The proposed project's consistency with water quality objectives outlined in the basin plan is discussed under Impact 4.1.3 of the EIR. The EIR concluded that the Proposed

Project would be consistent with water quality objectives. A detailed discussion of water quality regulations is provided in Section 4.3.1 of the EIR.