

10.3 SIGNIFICANT IRREVERSIBLE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

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Section 15126.2(c) of the CEQA Guidelines requires a discussion of any potentially significant irreversible environmental changes that would be caused by the proposed project. Section 15126.2(c) states:

Uses of nonrenewable resources during the initial and continued phases of the project may be irreversible, since a large commitment of such resources makes removal or nonuse thereafter unlikely. Primary impacts and, particularly, secondary impacts (such as highway improvement which provides access to a previously inaccessible area) generally commit future generations to similar uses. Also, irreversible damage can result from environmental accidents associated with the project. Irretrievable commitments of resources should be evaluated to assure that such current consumption is justified.

Generally, a project would result in potentially significant irreversible environmental changes if:

- The primary and secondary impacts would generally commit future generations to similar uses;
- The project would involve uses in which irreversible damage could result from any potential environmental accidents associated with the project;
- The project would involve a large commitment of nonrenewable resources;
- The proposed consumption of resources is not justified (e.g., the project involves the wasteful use of energy).

Implementation of the proposed project would not directly commit future generations to similar uses because its primary effect is the reallocation of SWP water supplies. However, as discussed in Chapter 8, additional water supply that would be made available through average annual Table A deliveries to eight M&I contractors could support increased population in their service areas. Increased population can result in new development. However, at the statewide level, no change in population growth levels would result from the proposed project. Further, neither the California Department of Water Resources nor local water supply agencies make local decisions regarding growth and where it will occur. Cities and counties in the contractor service areas affected by the increased population are responsible for considering the environmental effects of their growth and land use planning decisions. Future urban development could commit future generations to similar uses because restoration back to a less developed condition is not generally feasible depending on the degree of disturbance and level of capital involvement.

The CEQA Guidelines also require a discussion of the potential for irreversible environmental damage caused by an accident associated with construction of groundwater storage facilities. While construction of such facilities could result in the use, transport, storage, and disposal of hazardous wastes, as described in Chapter 7.11, Hazardous and Hazardous Materials, all activities would comply with applicable state and federal laws related to hazardous materials, which significantly reduces the likelihood and severity of accidents that could result in irreversible environmental damage.

As discussed above, growth-inducing effects of the proposed project at the local level could result in the long-term commitment of resources to urban development. The most notable significant irreversible impacts are alteration of the visual character of a site (or area), increased generation of pollutants, and the short-term commitment of non-renewable and/or slowly renewable natural and energy resources. Operations associated with future urban development could also consume natural gas and electrical energy. Compliance with all applicable building codes, as well as mitigation measures, planning policies, and standard conservation features, would ensure that natural resources are conserved to the maximum extent possible. In addition, implementation of the proposed project would include the need for increased pumping of SWP water which would also require additional consumption of energy. It is assumed that the amount and rate of consumption of these resources would not result in the unnecessary, inefficient, or wasteful use of resources and would be accomplished in a manner consistent with applicable laws and regulations. It is also possible that new technologies or systems will emerge, or will become more cost-effective or user-friendly, to further reduce the reliance upon nonrenewable natural resources. Resources would also be consumed during the construction of groundwater storage facilities. Construction activities related to the proposed project would result in the irretrievable commitment of nonrenewable energy resources, primarily in the form of fossil fuels (including fuel oil), natural gas, and gasoline for automobiles and construction equipment.