

Decision Memo

Irvine Ranch Water District Special Use Permits

*Trabuco Ranger District, Cleveland National Forest
Manning Site: Section 29, Township 5 South, Range 7 West and
Harding Truck Trail Water Tank Site: Section 28, Township 5 South, Range 7 West
Orange County, California*

1. Background

Irvine Ranch Water District (IRWD) has requested that three special use authorizations, previously held by Santiago County Water District, be re-issued to IRWD, due to a merger between the two districts. The authorizations are for the Manning Water Treatment Plant, the Harding Water Tank, and the water tank access road. The re-issuance of these permits would bring them into compliance with Forest Service policy.

Manning Water Treatment Plant improvements are needed to improve the reliability of IRWD's water system during power outages, particularly when the outages are caused by fires. The current temporary generator is susceptible to damage by wildfires and is not permitted for permanent installation. IRWD needs a reliable back-up power source.

The old Harding Water Tank reached its useful lifespan years ago and has been out of service for a decade. IRWD believes it has become a safety hazard due to deterioration and, therefore, needs to be removed.

2. Decision

I have decided to re-issue two special use authorizations, previously held by Santiago County Water District to IRWD. The authorizations will be issued for the Manning Water Treatment Plant and the Harding Water Tank, including the access road, for a tenure not to exceed 10 years. The activities are described below. Full documentation of the activities, including engineering drawings, is in the project record filed at the Trabuco Ranger District office, 1147 E. Sixth St., Corona, CA 92879.

The authorization for the Manning Water Treatment Plant will include the following improvements: a permanent emergency generator with a diesel engine on a concrete pad, a reinforced concrete retaining wall, concrete flatwork, a masonry wall, installation of an ammonia system, and new piping and valve modifications.

The special use permit for the 1.4 million gallon above ground Harding Water Tank, access road, and appurtenances will be re-issued. The old 250,000 gallon above-ground Flemming water tank will be cut into pieces on-site and removed, along with the old water hydrant. All piping will be cut below grade. The old access road will be removed and restored. The site, as a whole, will be restored through grading and re-vegetation.

3. Rationale

Based on environmental analysis and input from Cleveland National Forest (Forest) resource specialists, I have determined that this action may be categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or an environmental assessment as per Chapter 30, Section 32.2 of Forest Service Handbook 1909.15. In particular, this action falls under **Category 3: Approval, modification, or continuation of minor special uses of National Forest System lands that require less than five contiguous acres of land.** The seven resource conditions that are considered in determining whether extraordinary circumstances related to the proposed action warrant further analysis and documentation in an environmental assessment or an environmental impact statement are discussed below. As per Chapter 30, Section 31.2 of Forest Service Handbook 1909.15, the mere presence of one or more of these resource conditions does not preclude use of a categorical exclusion.

- a. **Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species.**

Federally listed and sensitive wildlife species

There is no modeled habitat for federally-listed species at the project site. Determinations in the biological assessment/biological evaluation ("BA/BE") found that, due to the potential for the project to disturb or kill individual San Diego Horned Lizards, California Legless Lizards, and Coastal Rosy Boas, and the short time frame and limited ground disturbance associated with the project, authorization of the IRWD permits may affect individuals, but is not likely to lead to a trend toward federal listing or a loss of viability for these species.

Federally listed and sensitive plant species

There is no modeled habitat for federally-listed species at the project site. Based on the conditions at the project site, there is no potential habitat for any Regional Forester's Sensitive plant species at the project site.

Management indicator species

Due to the small scale of this project, the small area of ground disturbance associated with the project, and the short time frame of the project, authorization of this project is expected to have no effect on species or habitat trends for Management Indicator Species and no effect on migratory birds. Work should be scheduled for the fall/winter months to the extent possible to minimize the effect on nesting birds, especially work related to the removal of the old water tank.

- b. **Floodplains, wetlands or municipal watersheds.** This project will have no impact on these resources.
- c. **Congressionally designated areas, such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas.** This project will have no impact on such areas. The location of the enclosure is outside the San Mateo Canyon Wilderness Area boundary.
- d. **Inventoried roadless areas.** This project is not located within an inventoried roadless area.

- e. **Research natural areas.** This project is not located within a research natural area.
- f. **American Indians and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites.** Ground disturbance will be limited to existing developed areas. No impacts to known religious or cultural sites will occur.
- g. **Archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas.** Ground disturbance will be limited to existing developed areas. No impacts to known archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas, will occur.

4. Mitigation Measures

1. To prevent incidental impacts to the native habitat immediately adjacent to the project area, the installation and maintenance of orange snow fencing will be installed along the proposed construction and demolition perimeters prior to the commencement of construction/demolition activities. These fence materials will be removed upon completion of the project.
2. Any oak tree cut as a result of this project shall be cut into pieces approximately 24" long and shall be transported to the El Cariso Hotshot Camp, located off of Ortega Hwy, at 4 Gifford Pinchot Ln., Lake Elsinore, CA 92530.
3. Minimize dust during construction. Keep dust at or below pre-construction levels. Road watering may be required to keep the level of dust at or below this level.
4. Construction traffic shall operate only on existing National Forest System roads and approved operational and staging areas.
5. The Forest Service approved site restoration plan will be followed for the restoration of the old water tank site and road.
6. All best management practices for soil and water conservation will be followed during project planning and implementation. See:
http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/publications/water_resources/waterquality
7. Equipment must be cleaned prior to entering National Forest System lands. Ensure all mud, dirt, and plant material are removed from project equipment before moving it into a project area.

5. Scoping

Based on scoping and the input of resource specialists, I have determined that the project will have no significant effect on the environment. The proposal was submitted for internal scoping among Forest resource specialists and was published in the Forest quarterly Schedule of Proposed Actions from January 2012 until present.

A Legal Notice identifying the availability of this Decision Memo for a 30-day public comment period was published in *The Press-Enterprise* and *Orange County Register* newspapers on June 27, 2013. The Trabuco Ranger District did not receive any comments on the project.

6. Consistency with Land Management Plan and Laws

This decision is consistent with the Forest Land Management Plan, as required by the National Forest Management Act.

The project is consistent with laws protecting the environment and natural resources, including the Endangered Species, Clean Air, and Clean Water acts.

7. Implementation Date

This project may be implemented immediately upon signature of this Decision Memo, and publication in the newspaper of record.

8. Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities

Since no comments were received during the comment period, this decision is not appealable pursuant to 36 CFR 215.12(e).

9. Contact Person

Contact the following persons for further information regarding this decision:

Ashley Taylor
Lands & Special Uses
Trabuco Ranger District Office
1147 East 6th Street
Corona, CA 92879-1616
(951) 736-1811

Signature and Date



KEITH FLETCHER
District Ranger
Trabuco Ranger District



Date

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