

To: Board of Directors  
Santa Barbara County Water Agency

From: Dianne Black, Director  
Development Services

Staff Contact: Dennis Gibbs, Senior Hydrologist

Date: October 10, 2011

Re: **CEQA Determination for the Santa Barbara County/Twitchell Reservoir Cloud Seeding Program:** Addendum to previous Negative Declaration (00-ND-29).

CEQA Guidelines Section 15164 allows an addendum to be prepared when only minor technical changes are proposed in the project or changes which would not create new significant impacts. Negative Declaration 00-ND-29 was prepared in November 2000 for the 2000-2001 Santa Barbara County and Twitchell Reservoir Cloudseeding Program. This 15164 letter hereby amends 00-ND-29 for the proposed 2011-2012 Santa Barbara County/ Twitchell Reservoir Cloud Seeding Program.

Location: The Santa Barbara County portion of the cloud seeding program is located along the Santa Ynez River watershed, upstream of Lake Cachuma reservoir. The Twitchell Reservoir portion of the cloud seeding program is located along the border of Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo counties in the Twitchell Reservoir watershed.

Physical structures involved in the project are stationary land-based generators used to disperse silver iodide into the atmosphere. These generators are proposed to be located along ridgelines surrounding the Twitchell Reservoir and Santa Ynez River watersheds.

#### **BACKGROUND:**

The Santa Barbara County Water Agency proposes to continue the cloud seeding program that has been conducted in Santa Barbara County since 1981 (excluding 1985-86 and 2007-2008). In 1992, the program was expanded to include the Twitchell Reservoir watershed. Runoff water accumulated in Twitchell Reservoir is periodically released to recharge the Santa Maria Groundwater Basin. Impacts of the cloud seeding program are described in Negative Declaration 00-ND-029 as finalized on November 3, 2000.

**PROJECT DESCRIPTION:**

The project description has been modified to include the specific 2011-2012 “Suspension Criteria” proposed by the County Water Agency to protect the South Coast Burned areas, including the Gap, Tea Fire and Jesusita areas, to protect the Santa Ynez River Watershed, which has not yet recovered from the Zaca Fire and to protect the Santa Ynez River and the Cuyama River from excessive flows due to seeding operations during the upcoming winter season. *Suspension criteria are subject to revision when deemed necessary by the Santa Barbara County Water Agency (Agency) and Santa Barbara County Flood Control District (District).* The proposed suspension criteria are presented below:

**2011-2012 CLOUD SEEDING SUSPENSION CRITERIA**

**A. General Criteria for the Entire Project Area in both Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo Counties**

*Criteria in this category apply to the entire project area including all of Santa Barbara County and the Twitchell Reservoir Drainage of Southern San Luis Obispo County.*

1. Whenever the National Weather Service (NWS) issues a severe storm, precipitation, or flood warning that affects any part of the project area, the project meteorologist shall suspend operations which may affect that part. Operations will be suspended at least for the period that the warning is in effect.
2. The Project Meteorologist or District/Agency personnel shall retain independent authority to suspend cloudseeding operations for any part, or all of the project area in the event that unforeseen conditions develop during storm events which in their best judgment have the potential to cause flooding or other adverse conditions anywhere within the project area.

**B. Specific Criteria for Individual Areas/Watersheds**

**South Coastal Burned Areas Including the Gap, Tea and Jesusita Fire Areas:**

1. No targeting of or seeding operations which affect the South Coast of Santa Barbara County south of the Santa Ynez Mountains Ridgeline will be conducted.

**Santa Ynez River Watershed including the Zaca Fire Area:**

1. The Santa Ynez River Watershed will not be seeded this year thus no special

suspension criteria are needed.

**The La Brea Fire Area:**

1. The La Brea Fire Area is not a targeted area of the cloudseeding program. However, due to ongoing recovery and the fact that this area is *adjacent* to the Twitchell Reservoir target, if the NWS predicts 0.8" per hour or greater rainfall intensity for the La Brea Fire Area, seeding would not be conducted in the adjacent project area (Huasna and Alamo drainages). If 0.8" per hour intensities are observed in the Twitchell target area, seeding activities shall be immediately suspended for the remainder of that storm event.

**Twitchell Reservoir and the Cuyama River Watershed:**

1. Cloud seeding operations shall be suspended in the Twitchell Watershed when 30,000 Acre Feet of storage remain in the conservation pool of Twitchell Reservoir (elevation 608.75') prior to March 1, 2012. The conservation pool is full at elevation 622.30' (108,758 acre-feet of storage). This leaves 119,000 AF of Flood Control capacity. After March 1, 2012 seeding operations shall only be suspended if the entire conservation pool is filled leaving 89,000 AF of flood storage in the Reservoir.
2. Seeding operations shall be suspended if the current or projected flow on the Cuyama River is 15,000 cfs or greater, as determined by the District/Agency.
3. Seeding operations shall be suspended if the NWS or NOAA predicts a storm of 6" or greater over any 24-hour period to occur in any location within the Sisquoc Watershed. The Sisquoc River has no control facilities on it and significant flows emanating from it can affect the Santa Maria River levee.

***Note: All suspension criteria are subject to revision should hydrologic conditions warrant it. All revisions must be documented in writing and be approved by District/Agency representatives with notification provided to the project meteorologist.***

**CHANGES IN PROJECT IMPACTS:**

The proposed modifications in project description are intended to minimize the potential for cloud seeding activities to contribute to potential flood hazards along the Santa Ynez and Cuyama rivers. These modifications would restrict cloud seeding operations to a level of activity equal to or less than has occurred in the past. Potential impacts of the revised cloud

seeding program would be no greater than those disclosed in the previous environmental document, 00-ND-29, based on the added restrictions. Therefore, no new impacts would be anticipated due to the proposed modification of the project.

**FINDINGS:**

It is the finding of the Planning and Development Department that the previous environmental document as herein amended may be used to fulfill the environmental review requirements of the current project. Because the current project meets the conditions for the application of State CEQA Guidelines Section 15164, preparation of a new EIR or ND is not required.

Discretionary action by the Board of Directors of the Santa Barbara County Water Agency on the proposed 2011-2012 Santa Barbara County/Twitchell Reservoir Cloud Seeding Program may now proceed with the understanding that any substantial changes in the proposal may be subject to further environmental review.