NOTICE OF AVAILABILITY OF
DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT/ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT (DRAFT EIS/EIR)

To: All Interested Agencies, Organizations and Persons

From: California Department of Fish and Wildlife

Subject: Notice of Availability of Draft Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report (Draft EIS/EIR) (State Clearinghouse No. 2012071090)

Project Title: Ballona Wetlands Restoration Project

Project Proponents: The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) and the Los Angeles County Department of Public Works-Flood Control District (LACFCD)

Project Location: The project site includes approximately 566 acres within the Ballona Wetlands Ecological Reserve (Ballona Reserve) and approximately 4 acres comprised of seven potential natural gas storage well relocation sites proposed within the Southern California Gas Company (SoCalGas) Property located adjacent to the Ballona Reserve. The Ballona Reserve is located in southern California, south of Marina del Rey and east of Playa del Rey. It extends roughly from the Marina Freeway (State Route 90) to the east, the Westchester bluffs to the south, Playa del Rey to the west, and Fiji Way to the north. It is primarily located in the western portion of the City of Los Angeles and partially within unincorporated Los Angeles County, approximately 1.5 miles west of the San Diego Freeway (Interstate 405) and approximately 0.25 mile southeast of Santa Monica Bay. The Ballona Reserve is bisected by and includes a channelized reach of Ballona Creek, and it is traversed by Culver Boulevard, Jefferson Boulevard, and Lincoln Boulevard. SoCalGas owns in fee, occupies, and operates the Playa del Rey Storage Facility, which is a natural gas storage system located at 8141 Gulana Avenue, Los Angeles. The SoCalGas Property consists of Site 1 through Site 7, which range between 0.19 and 0.99 acre in size and represent potential future locations for SoCalGas wells to be relocated from the Ballona Reserve as part of the project.

Date of Notice: September 25, 2017

Comment Review Period: September 25, 2017 – November 24, 2017

In accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), CDFW, acting in the capacity of Lead Agency, has worked together with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (the Corps) in its capacity as Lead Agency under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to complete a joint Draft EIS/EIR for the Ballona Wetlands Restoration Project. This notice briefly describes the project and its location, identifies the potential significant impacts of the project, describes how the Draft EIS/EIR and the reference material relied upon its drafting may be accessed electronically, and states where printed copies of the Draft EIS/EIR are available for inspection.

PROJECT BACKGROUND AND SUMMARY DESCRIPTION: The California State Legislature provided for the establishment of ecological reserves, like the Ballona Reserve, to further a policy of protecting threatened or endangered native plants, wildlife, or aquatic organisms or specialized habitat types, both terrestrial and non-marine aquatic, or large heterogeneous natural gene pools for the future use of mankind. The wetlands ecosystem in the vicinity of the Ballona Reserve once spanned more than 2,100 acres and supported a great diversity of wetland types that stretched from Playa del Rey to Venice and inland to the Baldwin Hills. As preliminarily delineated in 2011, the 577-acre Ballona Reserve now provides approximately 153 acres of potential wetlands, as well as approximately 83 acres of potential non-wetland waters of the U.S., including the Ballona Creek channel. The United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) has determined that all wetland habitats within the Ballona Reserve are impaired, and a portion of the Ballona Reserve has been identified as among the most degraded wetlands in California using standardized wetland condition protocols.

CDFW proposes a large-scale restoration of the Ballona Reserve that would entail restoring, enhancing, and establishing native coastal wetland and upland habitats within the Ballona Reserve, and incidental work necessitated by the proposed restoration activities. The project is intended to return the daily ebb and flow of tidal waters where practically feasible to achieve predominantly estuarine conditions, enhance freshwater conditions, and enhance physical and biological functions within the Ballona Reserve. Restoring wetland functions and services would reestablish native wetland vegetation and provide important habitat for a variety of wildlife species. A restored, high-functioning wetland also would benefit the adjacent marine environment and enhance the quality of tidal waters. More specifically, the project would:

1. Establish 81.0 acres of new and enhance 105.8 acres of existing native wetland waters of the U.S. (total wetland waters of the U.S established or enhanced: 186.8 acres);

2. Establish 38.7 acres of new and enhance 58.0 acres of existing non-wetland waters of the U.S. (total non-wetland waters of the U.S established or enhanced: 96.7 acres);

3. Subject 31.4 acres of wetland waters of the U.S. to permanent loss, 0.2 acre to permanent loss of function, and 30.2 acres to temporary impacts;

4. Subject 5.2 acres of non-wetland waters of the U.S. to permanent loss, 5.7 acres to permanent loss of function, and 25.0 acres to temporary impact;

5. Work within 58.3 acres of navigable waters of the U.S. (16.2 acres of permanent loss of waters, 5.9 acres of permanent loss of function, and 36.2 acres of temporary impacts);

6. Reposition between 2,290,000 and 2,420,000 cy of dredged or fill material on the project site as perimeter levees, transition zones, and upland restoration areas to allow Ballona Creek to reconnect with its historic floodplain;

7. Export from the site between 10,000 and 110,000 cy of excavated soil via trucks or barge;

8. Remove approximately 9,800 feet of existing Ballona Creek levees and construct new engineered levees set back from the existing Ballona Creek channel;

9. Realign Ballona Creek to a “meander-shaped” channel configuration;

10. Restore, enhance, and establish estuarine aquatic and associated upland habitats connected to the realigned Ballona Creek;

11. Install, operate, and maintain new hydraulic structures (potentially including culverts with self-regulating tide gates or similar structures) to allow for controlled tidal exchange;

12. Improve tidal circulation into the site and implementing other modifications to create dynamic interactions between the Ballona Creek channel, aquatic resources within the Ballona Reserve, and the Santa Monica Bay and thereby support estuarine and associated habitats within the Ballona Reserve;

13. Implement public access-related improvements including trails, a new three-story parking structure and other parking improvements, and encouragement of appropriate and legal public use throughout the Ballona Reserve by enhancing public safety;

14. Modify existing infrastructure and utilities as necessary to implement restoration activities, potentially including the abandonment or relocation of SoCalGas wells and pipelines; and

15. Implement long-term post-restoration activities, as needed, including inspections, repairs, clean-ups, vegetation maintenance, and related activities.

SUMMARY OF IMPACT CONCLUSIONS: Issues addressed in the Draft EIS/EIR include Aesthetics; Agriculture and Forestry Resources; Air Quality; Biological Resources; Cultural and Paleontological Resources; Energy Conservation; Geology, Seismicity, and Soils; Greenhouse Gas Emissions/Climate Change; Hazards and Hazardous Materials; Hydrology and Water Quality; Land Use and Planning; Mineral Resources; Noise; Population and Housing; Public Services; Recreation; Transportation and Traffic; Utilities and Service Systems; and Socioeconomics and Environmental Justice. With implementation of mitigation measures, no significant and unavoidable direct, indirect, or cumulative impacts associated with these considerations would result due to implementation, operation, or management of the project.

DOCUMENT REVIEW AND COMMENT: If you wish to review a copy of the Draft EIS/EIR, you may do so. The Draft EIS/EIR, appendices, and all documents referenced in the Draft EIS/EIR are available for public review during normal working hours at the following locations:

1. California State Coastal Conservancy, 1330 Broadway, 13th Floor, Oakland, CA 94612-2530

2. Los Angeles Public Library, Playa Vista Branch, 6400 Playa Vista Drive, Los Angeles, CA 90094

3. County of Los Angeles Public Library, Lloyd Taber-Marina del Rey, 4533 Admiralty Way Marina del Rey, CA 90292

4. Los Angeles Public Library, Westchester-Loyola Village Branch, 7114 W Manchester Ave, Los Angeles, CA 90045

In addition to printed copies, the Draft EIS/EIR also is available electronically on the project website (https://www.wildlife.ca.gov/Regions/5/Ballona-EIR) and at www.ballonarestoration.org

The public review period for the Draft EIS/EIR begins on September 25, 2017 and ends on November 24, 2017. Written comments on the Draft EIS/EIR will be accepted via regular mail or e-mail at any time before the end of the comment period on November 24, 2017, including in person at the public meeting described below. Written comments may be directed to:

Richard Brody, CDFW
c/o ESA (jas)
550 Kearney Street, Suite 800
San Francisco, California, 94108
E-mail: BWERcomments@wildlife.ca.gov

PUBLIC MEETING DATE AND LOCATION: A public meeting will be held to provide an overview of the findings of the Draft EIS/EIR and to receive comments on the Draft EIS/EIR. No decisions about the project will be made at the public meeting. The date, time, and place of the public meeting is scheduled as follows:

Date: Wednesday, November 8, 2017
Time: 6:00 p.m. – 8:30 p.m.
Place: Burton Chase Park – Community Center
13650 Mindanao Way
Marina del Rey, CA 90292