

**SUPPLEMENT TO THE DECISION DOCUMENT  
FOR NATIONWIDE PERMIT 18**

This document is a supplement to the national decision document for Nationwide Permit (NWP) 18, and addresses the regional modifications and conditions for this NWP. The South Pacific Division Engineer has considered the potential cumulative adverse effects on the aquatic environment that could result from the use of this NWP, including the need for additional modifications of this NWP by the establishment of regional conditions to ensure that those cumulative adverse effects on the aquatic environment are minimal. The Division Engineer has also considered the exclusion of this NWP from certain geographic areas or specific waterbodies. These regional conditions are necessary to address important regional issues relating to the aquatic environment. These regional issues are identified in this document. These regional conditions are being required to ensure that this NWP authorizes activities that result in no more than minimal individual or cumulative adverse effects on the aquatic environment. This document also identifies regionally important high-value waters and other geographic areas in which this NWP should be regionally conditioned or excluded from NWP eligibility, as described below, to further ensure that the NWP does not authorize activities that may exceed the minimal adverse effects threshold.

Text of NWP 18:

*Minor Discharges.* Minor discharges of dredged or fill material into all waters of the United States, provided the activity meets all of the following criteria:

- (a) The quantity of discharged material and the volume of area excavated do not exceed 25 cubic yards below the plane of the ordinary high water mark or the high tide line;
- (b) The discharge will not cause the loss of more than 1/10-acre of waters of the United States; and
- (c) The discharge is not placed for the purpose of a stream diversion.

Notification: The permittee must submit a pre-construction notification to the district engineer prior to commencing the activity if: (1) The discharge or the volume of area excavated exceeds 10 cubic yards below the plane of the ordinary high water mark or the high tide line, or (2) the discharge is in a special aquatic site, including wetlands. (See general condition 31.) (Sections 10 and 404)

Summary of changes to NWP 18 from 2007:

This NWP is reissued without change.

## **1.0 Background**

In the February 16, 2011, issue of the Federal Register (76 FR 9174), the Corps of Engineers (Corps) published its proposal to reissue 48 existing NWP's and issue two new NWP's. To solicit comments on its proposed regional conditions for these NWP's, the Los Angeles District issued a public notice on February 25, 2011. The issuance of the NWP's was announced in the February 21, 2012, Federal Register notice (77 FR 10184). After the publication of the final NWP's, the Los Angeles District considered the need for regional conditions for this NWP. The Los Angeles District's findings are discussed below.

## **2.0 Consideration of Public Comments**

### **2.1 General Comments**

Please see the attached response to comments document (Section III)

### **2.2 Comments on Proposed Regional Conditions**

#### **2.2.1 Proposed Regional Condition 1**

Please see the attached response to comments document.

#### **2.2.2 Proposed Regional Condition 2**

Please see the attached response to comments document.

#### **2.2.3 Proposed Regional Condition 3**

Please see the attached response to comments document.

#### **2.2.4 Proposed Regional Condition 4**

Please see the attached response to comments document.

#### **2.2.5 Proposed Regional Condition 5**

Please see the attached response to comments document.

#### **2.2.6 Proposed Regional Condition 6**

Please see the attached response to comments document.

#### **2.2.7 Proposed Regional Condition 7**

Please see the attached response to comments document.

### **2.2.8 Proposed Regional Condition 8**

Please see the attached response to comments document.

### **2.2.9 Proposed Regional Condition 9**

Please see the attached response to comments document.

### **2.2.10 Proposed Regional Condition 10**

Please see the attached response to comments document.

## **3.0 Waters Excluded from NWP or Subject to Additional Pre-Construction Notification Requirements**

### **3.1 Waters excluded from use of this NWP**

#### **3.1.1 Special Aquatic Sites in Arizona and Mojave and Sonoran Deserts of California (Regional Condition 2)**

Reason for Exclusion: With this regional condition, NWPs 3, 7, 12-15, 17-19, 21, 23, 25, 29, 35, 36, 39-46, and 48-52 may **not** be used to authorize the discharge of dredged or fill material into a jurisdictional special aquatic site in the State of Arizona and the Mojave and Sonoran desert regions in California, including wetlands, mudflats, vegetated shallows, and sanctuaries and refuges as defined in 40 CFR Part 230.40-45. The regional condition would require applicants to submit an application for a Standard Individual Permit subject to authorization under section 10 of the Rivers and Harbors Act, section 103 of the Marine Protection, Resource and Sanctuaries Act, and/or section 404 of the Clean Water Act (CWA). Special aquatic sites in the desert regions of the Los Angeles District support substantial aquatic resources that exhibit relatively high physical and biological functions. Furthermore, these aquatic areas can provide important and unique habitat for endangered species, neotropical migratory birds, and other indigenous wildlife. Past construction activities in and adjacent to these special aquatic sites have degraded portions of these high value systems. Regional Condition 2 would ensure compliance with the 404(b)(1) guidelines and evaluation and mitigation, if warranted, of activities that may have an adverse effect on special aquatic sites in the otherwise arid regions of the Los Angeles District.

In the Los Angeles District, the semi-arid climate limits the extent and number of special aquatic sites. This scarcity of special aquatic sites is especially evident in Arizona and in the desert regions of California. In these areas, annual precipitation is usually below 10 inches, which precludes the development of wetlands in the majority of these desert regions. Furthermore, approximately 90 percent of wetlands in California have been affected by historic conversion to agricultural uses, grading, and filling activities. As a result, wetland areas are rare in the Los Angeles District and warrant more rigorous protection. Regional Condition 2 would serve to better protect special aquatic sites in desert regions of the Los Angeles District by requiring the

additional scrutiny inherent in the Standard Individual Permit (SIP) process for most permanent discharges of dredged or fill material in these areas. The permit applicant would have to perform a 404(b)(1) alternatives analysis that would include careful examination of the purpose and need for the project and alternatives that avoid or reduce impacts to special aquatic sites. Regional Condition 2 would help ensure that discharges of dredged or fill material that would otherwise be authorized by NWP's would have minimal impacts, both individually cumulatively, to special aquatic sites in the Los Angeles District.

This regional condition has been amended from that included with the 2007 NWP's (Regional Condition 4) to clarify the definition of *desert regions of California* to include specific watersheds as defined by USGS Hydrologic Unit Code (HUC) accounting units. These include Lower Colorado (150301), Northern Mojave (180902), Southern Mojave (181001) and Salton Sea (181002). In addition, coral reefs and sanctuaries and refuges were removed from the list of special aquatic sites for which this regional condition would apply. Coral reefs were removed as they do not exist within the subject geographic area. Sanctuaries and refuges were removed as there are circumstances where a predominantly upland sanctuary or refuge may contain aquatic resources that exhibit relatively low physical and biological functions (such as a disturbed ephemeral drainage) yet nevertheless would be considered a special aquatic site. In those cases, mandatory notification (per regional condition 4a) would be sufficient to ensure a given project would have no more than minimal impacts by ensuring Corps review.

For additional information please see the supplemental decision document for Regional Condition 2.

### **3.1.2 Jurisdictional Vernal Pools (Regional Condition 5)**

Reason for Exclusion: This regional condition would require any project proposing to discharge dredged or fill material into a jurisdictional vernal pool to be reviewed under the standard individual permit (SIP) process, which requires a more rigorous alternatives review. This regional condition has been amended from the 2007 version to include an exception for discharges associated with restoration, enhancement, management, or scientific study activities that qualify for NWP's 5, 6, and 27. NWP's 5 and 6 authorize temporary activities and structures that could be used to further the understanding of vernal pool functions and services or for monitoring the effectiveness of enhancement, restoration, and establishment projects. NWP 27 authorizes only activities that result in net increases in aquatic resource functions and services. Per this regional condition, authorization under other NWP's cannot be considered and a PCN must be submitted in accordance with General Condition 31 and Regional Condition 3. In discussions with local land managers, Regional Condition 5 has increased project costs and timelines in order to obtain an SIP for voluntary restoration and enhancement projects. This has also limited their ability to compete for grant and other public funding with restrictions on costs and timelines. Therefore, the Los Angeles District believes that by allowing the use of these three NWP's, the scientific community and open space land managers would benefit from the streamlined process and there may ultimately be a net increase in functions and services in vernal pool ecosystems through the implementation of restoration, enhancement, and management activities.

The Los Angeles District Regulatory Branch previously determined that the 0.5-acre SIP threshold for vernal pool impacts (established by the District in 1997) would not adequately protect remaining vernal pool resources in the region. It is estimated that 95 to more than 97 percent of the vernal pools that historically existed in the region have been lost through urbanization or agricultural practices (USFWS 1998); in some counties the loss is virtually total. Under the new and modified NWP, a single and complete project could impact up to 0.5 acre of vernal pool habitat and be considered for NWP authorization. The District had previously been using a 0.5-acre SIP threshold for vernal pool impacts since 25 November 1997 (previous District Regional Condition 1). Despite the establishment of this earlier regional condition, the District experienced additional losses of vernal pool habitat, requiring the establishment of Regional Condition 5 as part of the 2000, 2002 and 2007 NWP Programs. Within the boundaries of the Los Angeles District, the sizes of jurisdictional vernal pools generally range from approximately 200 to 4,900 square feet (e.g. 0.00459 to 0.11248 acre). Therefore, 0.5 acre of vernal pools could include a large vernal pool complex or individual pools made up of 5 to 100 pools. Compounding this situation, mitigation for vernal pool impacts is not well developed, and often takes the form of preservation and enhancement of remaining pools, resulting in a continued net loss of vernal pool acreage, functions and services. The SIP review process includes an analysis of the propriety of the proposed fill in a special aquatic site pursuant to the 404(b)(1) Guidelines.

Vernal pools in the region comprise a severely diminished class of aquatic habitats and are fragile, easily disturbed ecosystems. Due to the decline of vernal pool habitat in the region, the District determined future impacts to vernal pools in the region would result in more than minimal adverse environmental effects both individually and cumulatively. With the proposed regional condition, any quantity of dredged or fill material discharged into a jurisdictional vernal pool that is not temporary in accordance with NWP 5 or 6 or does not result in a net increase in aquatic resources functions and services in accordance with NWP 27 would be subject to an SIP review. By requiring an SIP, the remaining jurisdictional vernal pools in the region would be afforded the maximum level of protection under the Regulatory Program which includes a 404(b)(1) analysis (i.e., under this more rigorous process, the Corps can only authorize the least environmentally damaging practicable alternative for a given project).

With the modification of Regional Condition 5, the District recognizes certain regulated activities involving restoration, enhancement, management, and scientific study of vernal pools would not contribute to the overall loss of vernal pool habitat and in such cases (with few exceptions) SIP review would not provide any additional protection or benefit to vernal pools. Therefore, this regional condition has been modified since the 2007 NWPs to include language excluding these four categories of activities from this requirement. If the success of a proposed restoration or enhancement activity is uncertain, or the subject vernal pool is of particularly high ecological value, the District would still retain the ability to review any such action as an SIP through our discretionary authority. In addition, the Corps has determined that issuance of Regional Condition 5 would not be contrary to the public interest. Overall, the implementation of Regional Condition 5, which requires an SIP for discharges of dredged or fill material in jurisdictional vernal pools (with the exception of activities associated with the restoration, enhancement, management or scientific study), would provide additional assurances that the

activities permitted under the NWP's would result in minimal impacts on both an individual and cumulative basis in the Los Angeles District.

For additional information please see the supplemental decision document for Regional Condition 5.

### **3.1.4 Bank Stabilization Projects in San Luis Obispo Creek and Santa Rosa Creek in San Luis Obispo County and Bank Stabilization and Grade Control Projects in Gaviota Creek, Mission Creek, and Carpinteria Creek in Santa Barbara County (Regional Condition 7)**

Reason for Exclusion: Regional Condition 7 would exclude bank stabilization from NWP authorization in San Luis Obispo Creek and Santa Rosa Creek in San Luis Obispo County, and bank stabilization and grade control projects in Gaviota Creek, Mission Creek, and Carpinteria Creek in Santa Barbara County. This exclusion would require any project that would stabilize a stream bank and/or grade control in these particular watersheds receive greater review and scrutiny through the SIP process, which includes a 404(b)(1) alternatives analysis. This regional condition has been modified from the version adopted in 2007 (Regional Condition 9) to include Section 404 Letters of Permission (LOP) as an SIP that may be used following a final Environmental Impact Statement (2009) which evaluated cumulative impacts of bank stabilization in San Luis Obispo Creek and Santa Rosa Creek in San Luis Obispo County, California. While NWP 12, 14, 18, 25, 29, 39, 42 and 43 address utility lines, linear transportation crossings, minor discharges, structural discharges, residential development, commercial/institutional development, recreational facilities and stormwater management facilities respectively, these types of projects could include stream bank stabilization or grade control. These watercourses were identified as vulnerable to adverse effects on endangered species and designated critical habitat associated with additional bank stabilization and grade control activities. In San Luis Obispo Creek and Santa Rosa Creek, a substantial number of bank stabilization projects have resulted in cumulative adverse impacts to flow velocity and water surface elevations during storm events. With the augmented flow velocity, channel substrate can be scoured during large storm events causing loss of vegetation and long-term channel incision. Although the existing bank stabilization projects have not resulted in the loss of a large amount of waters of the United States, the cumulative hydrogeomorphic effects of the bank stabilization have reduced the amount suitable of habitat for the threatened southern steelhead that utilizes these streams.

At present, the Los Angeles District has identified more than minimal cumulative impacts directly resulting from the use of NWP 13, and other NWP's in these stream channels. By taking discretionary authority over new bank stabilization projects in these two stream channels, the Los Angeles District will ensure future impacts are appropriately mitigated. In Gaviota Creek, Mission Creek and Carpinteria Creek in Santa Barbara County, bank stabilization and grade control structures have resulted in more than minimal cumulative impacts to flow velocity and water surface elevations during storm events. With the augmented flow velocity, channel substrate can be scoured during large storm events causing loss of vegetation and long-term channel incision. Although the bank stabilization projects have not resulted in large losses of waters of the United States, the cumulative hydrogeomorphic effects of the bank stabilization

have reduced the amount suitable of habitat for the endangered California red-legged frog (*Rana draytonii*) and southern and central coast steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) that utilize these streams and have had adverse affects on designated critical habitat.

At present, there has been a cumulative adverse impact as a result of use of NWP 13, as well as other NWPs that may authorize bank stabilization and grade control structures in these stream channels. By taking discretionary authority over new bank stabilization and grade control structure projects in these three stream channels, the Los Angeles District will ensure future impacts are appropriately evaluated and mitigated. This regional condition will allow the Corps of Engineers to review bank stabilization activities in these waterways on a case-by-case basis, ensuring that only the least environmentally damaging practicable alternative is permitted. If, at a later time, there is clear unequivocal evidence that the above regional conditions do not produce the intended results, the Los Angeles District may further modify them, as warranted.

For additional information please see the supplemental decision document for Regional Condition 7.

### **3.1.5 San Diego Creek and San Juan Creek/Western San Mateo Creek SAMPs (Regional Condition 8).**

Reason for Exclusion: Regional Condition 8 would exclude the use of selected NWP authorizations within all jurisdictional waters of the San Diego Creek, San Juan Creek, and western San Mateo Creek and their tributaries within three watersheds. This decision to revoke selected NWPs was made in accordance with two Special Area Management Plans (SAMPs) the Corps conducted in Orange County, and pursuant to the South Pacific Division (SPD) Commander's authority at 33 C.F.R. § 330.5(c).

Concurrent with establishing watershed-specific permitting frameworks, the following 24 NWPs are being revoked for use in these watersheds covered by the two SAMPs in Orange County: 03, 07, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 21, 25, 27, 29, 31, 33, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 46, 49, and 50. The remaining 26 NWPs would be retained for use in the watersheds covered by the two SAMPs in Orange County: 01, 02, 04, 05, 06, 08, 09, 10, 11, 15, 20, 22, 23, 24, 28, 30, 32, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 45, 48, 51 and 52.

The decision to revoke selected NWPs within these SAMP Watersheds involved establishing alternative permitting procedures determined to be more appropriate for the given aquatic resources in the watersheds, and promoting long-term aquatic resource conservation. This exclusion would require any project that involved a regulated activity within these particular watersheds to receive the level of permit review and evaluation in consideration of the applicable SAMP framework.

Specifically, the San Juan Creek/Western San Mateo Creek Watersheds SAMP incorporated alternative permitting procedures consisting of the establishment of a Regional General Permit (RGP) 74 for maintenance activities for use outside the targeted aquatic resource conservation areas, new LOP procedures, and a long-term Standard Individual Permit (SIP) and LOP

procedures for the SAMP participants. Similarly, the San Diego Creek Watershed SAMP incorporated alternative permitting procedures consisting of new LOP procedures and RGP 74. Regulated activities ineligible for retained NWP or the SAMPs' alternative permitting procedures would be reviewed under the SIP process, which would include a 404(b)(1) alternatives analysis.

The Corps conducted extensive analyses in its environmental impact statement (EIS) for the San Juan Creek/Western San Mateo Creek Watersheds SAMP and its joint EIS/environmental impact report (EIR) with the California Department of Fish and Game Habitat Conservation Branch, South Coast Region for the San Diego Creek Watershed SAMP/Watershed Streambed Alteration Agreement (WSAA) Process. The final decision to revoke selected NWPs was made by the SPD Commander in his record of decision signed July 19, 2010.

For additional information please see the supplemental decision document for Regional Condition 8.

### **3.2 Waters subjected to additional pre-construction notification requirements**

#### **3.2.1 All Perennial Waters and Special Aquatic Sites in Arizona and Desert Regions of California (Regional Condition 4a)**

Reason for Pre-Construction Notification Requirement: It is the position of the Los Angeles District that any discharges of dredged or fill material in a special aquatic site or a perennial water body in a desert area (excluding two reaches in the Colorado River) warrants the review of Regulatory Division. The loss of approximately 90% of wetland resources in southern California and the general scarcity of special aquatic sites in this semi-arid region indicate the need for compensatory mitigation to ensure adverse impacts to special aquatic sites are no more than minimal individually and cumulatively. Special aquatic sites in Los Angeles District support substantial aquatic resources exhibiting relatively high physical and biological functions. Furthermore, these aquatic areas can provide important and unique habitat for endangered species, migratory birds, and other wildlife. In addition, past construction activities in and adjacent to these special aquatic sites have degraded portions of these high value systems.

Two relatively small reaches of the Colorado River have been excluded from this regional condition because these areas exhibit relatively low physical and biological functions; however, due to a large amount of existing infrastructure and ongoing recreational activities, there are a large number of small structures and minor projects that require authorization pursuant to section 10 of the RHA and/or section 404 of the CWA. As a result, requiring notification in the above two reaches of the Colorado River would increase the District's workload substantially while only providing minimal environmental benefits. With this notification requirement, the Los Angeles District can ensure that the use of the NWP for activities proposed within the special aquatic sites would have minimal impacts, both individually and cumulatively. Activities sited within special aquatic sites that are determined to have the potential to exceed the minor impact threshold would be subject to review under the SIP process that requires a rigorous alternatives analysis. As such, further impacts to the special aquatic sites and perennial water bodies in

desert areas would be avoided and minimized to the maximum extent practicable. Through the mandatory pre-construction notification process, the Los Angeles District will review the proposed discharges of dredged or fill material into special aquatic sites and perennial streams in desert areas (excluding the above two reaches in the Colorado River) on a case-by-case basis to ensure that those activities would result in minimal adverse effects on the aquatic environment, individually and cumulatively. This regional condition has been amended from that included with the 2007 NWP (Regional Condition 4) to clarify the definition of *desert regions of California* to include specific watersheds as defined by USGS Hydrologic Unit Code (HUC) accounting units. These include Lower Colorado (150301), Northern Mojave (180902), Southern Mojave (181001), and Salton Sea (181002).

For additional information please see the supplemental decision document for Regional Condition 4a.

### **3.2.2 All areas designated as Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) in the Los Angeles District (Regional Condition 4b)**

Reason for Pre-Construction Notification Requirement: The EFH regional condition has been developed to ensure compliance with the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSFCMA), as amended. The 2007 NWP included Regional Condition 5, which required notification for any project located in EFH. Regional Condition 4b would replace Regional Condition 5 and include the additional requirement to include an EFH assessment as part of the notification package. The EFH mandates of the MSFCMA are to integrate fisheries management and habitat management by stressing the ecological relationships between fishery resources and the environments upon which they depend, and ensure a consultation process by which federal agencies explicitly consider the effects of their actions on important habitats, with the goal of supporting the sustainable management of marine fisheries. The consultation process for any Federal project or action that may adversely affect EFH requires submission of an EFH assessment to the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). The inclusion of the requirement for applications to provide an EFH assessment places the burden of preparing the assessment on the permit applicant rather than the Corps, however, the Corps has generally relied on permit applicants to provide this information to meet the requirements of the consultation process associated with the permit action. Therefore, the Los Angeles District does not believe this will create an unduly burdensome requirement on permit applicants relative to current procedures. Regional Condition 4b also includes a link to sample EFH assessments provided by NMFS.

For additional information please see the supplemental decision document for Regional Condition 4b.

### **3.2.3 Projects located in all watersheds in the Santa Monica Mountains (Regional Condition 4c)**

Reason for Pre-Construction Notification Requirement: The Santa Monica Mountains represent an important cultural and natural resource. The region contains a variety of protected areas, and serves as a recreation destination for Los Angeles area residents. Aquatic resources in the Santa

Monica Mountains are important in the regional context and are also a center of native biodiversity. Despite their ecological importance, aquatic resources in the Santa Monica Mountains have experienced heavy losses. The Corps' ongoing study of cumulative impacts in the Malibu Creek watershed, the region's largest drainage basin, indicates that most of these impacts have occurred without Corps authorization (Lilien 2001<sup>1</sup>). The Santa Monica Mountains have high natural resource values that contain 1066 hectares of aquatic habitat and support a number of federally listed threatened and endangered species. As documented in Lilien 2001, despite their importance, aquatic ecosystems in the Santa Monica Mountains, particularly Malibu Creek, have experienced loss and degradation of riparian habitat and, as a result, this regional condition is required to ensure that the NWP's would have minimal impacts, both individually and cumulatively, to aquatic and riparian habitat in various watersheds in the Santa Monica Mountains.

For additional information please see the supplemental decision document for Regional Condition 4c.

### **3.2.4 Projects located in the Santa Clara River watershed (Regional Condition 4d)**

Reason for Pre-Construction Notification Requirement: The entire Santa Clara River watershed encompasses approximately 1,634 square miles in Los Angeles and Ventura Counties (the upper watershed, which includes 45 miles of the river between its headwaters and the Ventura County line, is 680 square miles, while the lower watershed, between the county line and the ocean is 954 square miles). The river flows approximately 84 miles from its headwaters east of Acton to its delta located between the cities of Ventura and Oxnard. Recent estimates (as of 2005) for the total amount of urbanization, including residential, industrial, and commercial areas, in the entire Santa Clara River watershed vary between 4 and 4.5 percent (approximately 4.5%, with most of the development located in the Santa Clarita area). Between 1988 and 2006, the Corps has issued approximately 228 permits that have resulted in actual impacts to waters of the U.S. (this number excludes permit actions where the same permit was issued multiple times, permits that were never utilized by the applicant, and permits that authorized an activity in the same location multiple times). Of these actions, more were associated with emergency repairs and maintenance than any other type of activity (approximately 25%, more than half of which were for emergency actions). The above 228 permit actions resulted in temporary impacts to approximately 480 acres and permanent impacts to approximately 149 acres of waters of the U.S., including approximately 15 acres of wetlands in the Santa Clara River watershed (temporary impacts are usually addressed with on-site restoration as opposed to compensatory mitigation requirements). As compensatory mitigation for the above permanent impacts to waters of the U.S., the Corps required a total of approximately 518 acres of preservation, creation, enhancement, and restoration of aquatic and riparian habitat in the Santa Clara River watershed.

To assess the current condition of the main stem of the Santa Clara River, an assessment was made to determine the condition for several reaches in the Santa Clara River downstream of the City of Santa Clarita. Based on the results of the fieldwork for the assessment, the main stem of

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<sup>1</sup> Lilien, J.P. Cumulative Impacts to Riparian Habitat in the Malibu Creek Watershed. Dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles.

the Santa Clara River exhibits relatively high physical and biological functions immediately downstream of the developed areas in Santa Clarita. The above assessment was completed in the summer of 2004 (and updated in 2007) and supports the results of past and present environmental assessments for Section 404 permit decisions in the Santa Clarita area that have determined that the Santa Clara River exhibits limited physical evidence of direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts from urbanization, agriculture and other land use changes in the watershed. The purpose of this regional condition is to ensure that the NWP's would continue to have minimal impacts, both individually and cumulatively, to aquatic and riparian habitat that exhibits relatively high physical and biological functions in the Santa Clara River watershed.

For additional information please see the supplemental decision document for Regional Condition 4d.

## **4.0 Alternatives**

### **4.1 No Regional Conditions**

Without specific requirements for road crossings as indicated in Regional Condition 1, there could be more than minimal impacts to certain endangered species, such as southern steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*). Without Regional Condition 2, NWP 18 could have more than minimal impacts to special aquatic sites in the desert regions of southern California and State of Arizona. Without Regional Condition 4 requiring notification for impacts within perennial waterbodies and special aquatic sites within the State of Arizona and within desert regions of Southern California, essential fish habitat, and the Santa Monica Mountains and the Santa Clara River watersheds, there could be more than minimal impacts to waters of the U.S. that exhibit both high physical and biological functions, as well as contributing to substantial cumulative impacts in some portions of these areas. In addition, with no Regional Condition 5, NWP 18 could have more than minimal impacts to jurisdictional vernal pools in the Los Angeles District. Historically, there has been a 95 to more than 99 percent loss of vernal pool habitat in the southern California area. Further losses would have more than minimal impacts both individually and cumulatively. Without Regional Condition 7, NWP 18 could have more than minimal impacts individually and cumulatively within the San Luis Obispo Creek and Santa Rosa Creek in San Luis Obispo County for bank stabilization projects, and in Gaviota Creek, Mission Creek, and Carpinteria Creek in Santa Barbara County for bank stabilization projects and grade control structures. Without Regional Condition 8, NWP 18 may result in more than minimal impacts within the San Diego Creek and San Juan Creek/Western San Mateo Creek watersheds and would conflict with the alternative permitting procedures defined by these watersheds' corresponding SAMPs. Overall, with no regional conditions, NWP 18 could be utilized in sensitive special aquatic sites in some areas with no review by the Corps or other applicable resource agencies and result in more than minimal impacts.

### **4.2 Alternative Regional Limits or Pre-Construction Notification Thresholds**

To further ensure NWP 18 would have minimal impacts to aquatic resources, both individually and cumulatively, the Los Angeles District could augment the proposed notification requirements

for NWP 18 by including all coastal watersheds. Alternatively, the Los Angeles District could eliminate the use of NWP 18 in all special aquatic sites, including wetlands, in the Los Angeles District.

The Los Angeles District could require notification for all projects that require authorization under NWP 18. Requiring notification for all minor discharges, not just those in special aquatic sites and in waters with relatively high physical and biological functions, would substantially increase the workload for the Los Angeles District without any commensurate benefits to aquatic resources. As a result, the Los Angeles District has determined the above alternative notification requirements would not be practicable and would result in only minor additional benefits to aquatic resources. With the proposed modifications to NWP 18, the Los Angeles District has identified the resources and watersheds that warrant additional scrutiny under NWP 18. As a result, the District's proposed modifications would result in a relatively minor increase in overall workload, but would provide potentially substantial benefits to the aquatic environment in the identified areas.

The loss of approximately 90 percent of wetland resources in southern California and the general scarcity of special aquatic sites in this semi-arid regions indicate there could be a need for the review of any project that would discharge dredged or fill material in a special aquatic site under the 404(b)(1) Guidelines and the public interest factors to ensure no adverse impacts to special aquatic sites. However, as discussed above, NWP 18 authorizes the discharge of a maximum of 25 cubic yards into waters of the U.S., including jurisdictional wetlands. When considering the inclusion of the constraints on NWP 18 from the General Conditions, a regional condition that precluded all discharges in special aquatic sites would unnecessarily increase our workload to review small-scale impacts in areas that exhibit lower physical and biological functions. As a result, this proposed modification would not be practicable and would result in relatively minor environmental benefits to the aquatic ecosystem. In conclusion, the majority of the projects that could be authorized under NWP 18 would likely result in minimal impacts to the aquatic ecosystem. With the proposed regional conditions, the Los Angeles District would ensure that NWP 18 has minimal impacts on both sensitive resources and watersheds without a substantial increase in workload.

#### **4.3 Alternative Regional Nationwide Permit Conditions**

The Los Angeles District could develop the following separate Regional Conditions: 1) Agency notification for proposed use of this NWP; and/or 2) Post-project reporting for non-notifying uses of NWP 18. Based upon the limited use of this NWP in the Los Angeles District, existing NWP safeguards (mandatory notification for projects that may affect federally-listed species or historic properties), and the additional resource-specific restrictions written into the revised Regional Conditions, the Los Angeles District has determined that the consideration of alternative or additional regional conditions are unnecessary at this time to ensure minimal impacts and would adversely increase workload without commensurate benefits to the aquatic environment. Further, the implementation of alternative or additional regional conditions would be impracticable given the questionable benefit to the resource(s) and additional staff workload. With the proposed modifications to NWP 18, the Los Angeles District has identified the resources and watersheds

that warrant additional scrutiny under NWP 18. As a result, the District's proposed modifications would result in a relatively minor increase in overall workload, but would provide potentially substantial benefits to the aquatic environment in the identified areas.

## **5.0 Endangered Species Act**

### **5.1 General Considerations**

NWP 18 authorizes the discharge of fill material for minor discharges of dredged or fill material into all waters of the U.S., provided the activity meets all of the following criteria: (a) The quantity of discharged material and the volume of area excavated do not exceed 25 cubic yards below the plane of the ordinary high water mark or the high tide line; (b) The discharge will not cause the loss of more than 1/10 acre of waters of the U.S; and (c) The discharge is not placed for the purpose of a stream diversion. To avoid and minimize impacts to the aquatic environment, the terms and conditions for NWP 18 contain several restrictions including notification requirements that must be submitted prior to commencing the activity if: (1) The discharge or the volume of area excavated exceeds 10 cubic yards below the plane of the ordinary high water mark or the high tide line, or (2) the discharge is in a special aquatic site, including wetlands. In addition, the new General and regional conditions would provide further limitations on the use of NWP 18 in sensitive aquatic ecosystems. With these constraints, NWP 18 would result in minimal adverse impacts to threatened and endangered species, both individually and cumulatively, in the majority of the Los Angeles District. With no regional conditions for NWP 18, there would be more than minimal impacts only in specific geographic areas and certain habitat types that exhibit relatively high physical and biological functions. The regional conditions for NWP 18 either prohibit use or require notification for projects in special aquatic sites. The Regional Condition 4b requires notification for projects located in designated EFH. With the inclusion of these prohibitions and notification requirements for NWP 18, the above long-term minor impacts to endangered and threatened species in the Los Angeles District would be further reduced. In addition, given the large number of listed species in Los Angeles District, continued coordination with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and NMFS is required to ensure minimal impacts to endangered species. With the continuation of the existing informal coordination procedures, the development and implementation of Standard Local Operating Procedures for Endangered Species (SLOPES), and the inclusion of additional notification requirements, the use of NWP 18 would have minimal impacts, both individually and cumulatively, to threatened and endangered species in the Los Angeles District.

In southern California, the large number of listed species has made the public more aware of the need to contact the USFWS and NMFS for many proposed projects. In addition, General Condition 18 requires the applicant to contact the Corps if their proposed project may affect a threatened or endangered species or critical habitat. The District has substantial information, including maps, previous studies and survey data that document areas that support endangered species. The District is also very careful to inform all prospective applicants of the need to comply with the Endangered Species Act. If the District has no available data for a proposed project, the applicant may be referred to the USFWS or NMFS for additional information. When the District receives an application within the range of a listed species and/or the project area

otherwise supports suitable habitat, the USFWS or NMFS is contacted early in the review process. To facilitate compliance with the ESA, the District has coordinated with the USFWS to complete programmatic consultations for several threatened and endangered species in Ventura, Santa Barbara, and San Luis Obispo counties.

As proposed, the NWP general and regional conditions ensure that other federal statutory requirements are met. For example, in instances where a project may impact a federally listed species or its critical habitat, the applicant would be required to submit to the Corps appropriate biological investigations and supporting documentation for an “effects determination” with respect to the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Per General Condition 18, if the Federal Action were determined to have a potential effect on a federally listed species, or its designated critical habitat, consultation would be required pursuant to section 7 of the ESA. (It should be noted that the Los Angeles District would ensure all federal project activities authorized under the NWPs comply with the ESA and use of the NWPs shall be determined to have minimal impacts on threatened and endangered species in the Los Angeles District, pursuant to the ESA).

## **5.2 Local Operating Procedures for Endangered Species**

The Los Angeles District has various procedures for ensuring compliance with the ESA. SLOPES formalize additional procedures between agencies to enable the agencies to ensure better compliance with the ESA. With the implementation of SLOPES, these procedures could be formally documented, facilitating the compliance the NWPs with the ESA. It is anticipated there will be many situations that will not be addressed by SLOPES and a case-by-case determination will be made regarding consultation with the USFWS or NMFS pursuant to section 7 of the ESA. In January 2003, the Corps, Los Angeles District, Regulatory Branch and the USFWS, Ventura Office finalized SLOPES for informal and formal ESA consultations. In addition, some the activities authorized by the NWPs that may adversely affect EFH have been addressed by the General Concurrence dated August 5, 2003 and a Programmatic Consultation that was completed by the Corps, Los Angeles District, Regulatory Branch and NMFS. The District has completed conducted several preliminary meetings with USFWS and NMFS staff to determine the direction of further SLOPES discussions, and additional meetings will be conducted in the future.

As proposed, the NWP general and regional conditions ensure that other federal statutory requirements are met. For example, in instances where a project may impact a federally listed species or its critical habitat, the applicant would be required to submit to the Corps appropriate biological investigations and supporting documentation for an “effects determination” with respect to the ESA. Per General Condition 18, if the Federal Action were determined to have a potential effect on a federally listed species, or its designated critical habitat, consultation would be required pursuant to section 7 of the ESA. (It should be noted that the Los Angeles District would ensure all federal project activities authorized under the NWPs comply with the ESA and use of the NWPs shall be determined to have minimal impacts on threatened and endangered species in the Los Angeles District, pursuant to the ESA),

## **6.0 National Historic Preservation Act**

### **6.1 General Considerations**

The Los Angeles District would ensure that activities authorized by NWP 14 would comply with the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA). The District would review the latest version of the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) to make an effect determination that activities verified under NWP 14 would have on Historic Properties. Once an effects determination has been made the District will coordinate with the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO), Tribal Historic Preservation Officer (THPO), recognized Tribes, and, if necessary, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP) as appropriate. The District has considered the requirement of pre-construction notification for NWP activities in geographic areas of high site potential, or known locations of cultural resources including prehistoric sites, historic sites, tribal lands, traditional cultural properties, state landmarks or National Historic Landmarks. In areas where there is a high likelihood of cultural resources within the Corps' area of potential effect (APE), the district engineer may: (1) consult with SHPO, THPO, or Tribes during the NWP review process or (2) the district engineer may assert its discretionary authority to require an individual permit for the proposed activity and initiate consultation through the individual permit process. Option 2 would only be used if there is value added that compensates for the increase in workload due to processing more SIPs. If the consultation would be conducted under the NWP process without the district asserting discretionary authority to require an SIP, then the applicant would be notified that the activity could not be verified under the NWP until all Section 106 requirements have been satisfied.

### **6.2 Local Operating Procedures for National Historic Preservation Act**

The district engineer would ensure that NWP 14 complies with section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, and its implementing regulation 36 C.F.R. Part 800: Protection of Historic Properties (amended August 5, 2004), and Appendix C (33 U.S.C. 325): Procedures of Historic Properties. Under section 106, federal agencies are prohibited from approving any federal "undertaking" (e.g., the issuance of any license, permit, or approval) without taking into account the effects of the undertaking on the historic properties, and affording the ACHP a reasonable opportunity to comment on the undertaking. In order to comply with section 106, the Corps, if evaluating an undertaking, must go through the process outlined in the ACHP's regulations at 36 C.F.R. Part 800 and Appendix C. Pursuant to 36 C.F.R. § 800.4, 800.5, and 800.6, the Los Angeles District is required to consult with the SHPO, or tribal equivalent, THPO, if the undertaking would result in a "No Effect", "No Adverse Effect", or "Adverse Effect" to Historic Properties. The district engineer must (a) determine the permit area/APE; (b) identify historic properties within the permit area/APE; and (c) determine whether those properties are listed or eligible for listing in the NRHP. If the district engineer determines that NWP 14 would have no potential to cause effects to Historic Properties a memorandum for the record would be prepared and no further consultation with the SHPO/THPO or recognized tribes would need to occur.

## **7.0 Government-to-Government Consultation with Indian Tribes**

### **7.1 Summary of the Consultation Process**

Prior to the issuance of the Los Angeles District's public notice announcing the proposed rule for the 2012 NWP's and our proposed regional conditions, all federally recognized tribes within Los Angeles District were contacted via letter dated December 13, 2010 to provide advance notification of the Corps' intent to issue the 2012 NWP's and upcoming opportunity to engage in government-to-government consultation. Follow-up letters were sent to the same set of federally recognized tribes February 11, 2011 announcing the issuance of the proposed rule and formally requesting government-to-government consultation. An advance copy of the proposed rule was also included. One tribe provided a response, indicating they did not foresee a need to utilize the NWP's. No requests for government-to-government consultation were received.

### **7.2 Local Operating Procedures for Protecting Tribal Resources**

The Los Angeles District will avoid or minimize adverse effects to tribal lands, historic properties, sacred sites, or trust resources. This may involve identifying categories of activities that require pre-construction notification and/or conducting consultation with Tribes for specific activities in a particular geographic area. If coordination with recognized tribes is required the District Engineer will obtain a list of recognized tribes from the Native American Heritage Commission. From that list provided the District Engineer will initiate a 30-day coordination period to obtain comments on the project. The District Engineer will review comments and address as appropriate.

## **8.0 Essential Fish Habitat**

Pursuant to the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Management and Conservation Act, Federal agencies are required to consult with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) for actions that may adversely affect essential fish habitat (EFH). The marine and estuarine waters within the Los Angeles District contain designated EFH, which are administered by four fishery management plans (FMP): the Pacific Groundfish FMP, the Highly Migratory Species FMP, the Pacific Coast Salmon FMP, and the Coastal Pelagic Species FMP. The Los Angeles District's Regional Condition 4b requires submission of a PCN for any NWP authorization in EFH. A similar PCN requirement has been in place since the issuance of the 2002 NWP's. The current proposed regional condition includes the additional requirement that applicants include an EFH assessment with the PCN. By requiring a PCN with an EFH assessment for all activities within designated EFH, the Los Angeles District ensures the appropriate level of consultation with NMFS is conducted and effects to EFH are adequately addressed prior to verification.

To facilitate the consultation process, the Los Angeles District has developed an EFH general concurrence with Southwest Region of the NMFS. The general concurrence establishes a coordination procedure between NMFS and the Los Angeles District and covers a variety of Corps-regulated activities with minimal and/or temporary adverse effects to EFH. In addition, the Los Angeles District has developed a programmatic consultation with the Southwest Region

of the NMFS that covers a broader range of activities that do not fit within the scope of the general concurrence. In summary, the inclusion of Regional Condition 4b, in conjunction with Los Angeles District's well-established set of procedures for addressing the effects of regulated activities within EFH (including conducting coordination with the NMFS as appropriate) will ensure the effects to EFH from the implementation of the 2012 NWP will be minimal.

## **9.0 Supplement to National Impact Analysis**

### **9.1 Public interest review factors (33 CFR 320.4(a)(1))**

In addition to the discussion in the national decision document for this NWP, the Los Angeles District has considered the local impacts expected to result from the activities authorized by this NWP, including the reasonably foreseeable cumulative effects of those activities.

(a) Conservation: NWP 18 would only authorize a maximum of 25 cubic yards of discharge of dredged or fill material into waters of the U.S., including jurisdictional wetlands. The notification threshold for NWP18 is 10 cubic yards of discharge into waters of the U.S. The new General Conditions would provide further limitations on the use of NWP 18 in waters of the U.S. Due to the above constraints, NWP 18 would result in minimal impacts to conservation, both individually and cumulatively, in the majority of the Los Angeles District. Regional conditions for NWP 18 would preclude discharges of dredged or fill material in jurisdictional vernal pools and in special aquatic sites in Arizona and the desert regions of California. With the inclusion of notification requirements for NWP 18 in special aquatic sites and sensitive watersheds or other aquatic resources, the above long-term minor impacts to conservation in the Los Angeles District would be further reduced.

(b) Economics: Same as discussed in the national decision document.

(c) Aesthetics: Same as discussed in the national decision document.

(d) General environmental concerns: In the Los Angeles District, numerous threatened or endangered species require extensive coordination with USFWS and NMFS. The semi-arid environment limits the extent of aquatic resources in the southern California/Arizona area. NWP 18 would only authorize a maximum of 25 cubic yards of discharge of dredged or fill material into waters of the U.S., including jurisdictional wetlands. The notification threshold for NWP is 10 cubic yards of discharge into waters of the U.S. The new General Conditions would provide further limitations on the use of NWP 18 in waters of the U.S. Regional conditions for NWP 18 would preclude discharges of dredged or fill material in jurisdictional vernal pools in specific regions and in special aquatic sites in Arizona and the desert regions of California. With the inclusion of the augmented notification requirements for NWP 18 in special aquatic sites and sensitive watersheds and other aquatic resources, minor impacts to general environmental concerns in the Los Angeles District would be further reduced, resulting in minor cumulative impacts.

(e) Wetlands: In the Los Angeles District, the semi-arid climate limits the extent and number of wetland resources. This scarcity of wetlands is especially evident in Arizona and in the desert regions of California. In these areas, annual precipitation is usually below 10 inches, which often precludes the development of wetlands. As a result, special aquatic sites, such as wetlands, are relatively rare in the Los Angeles District and warrant more substantial protection. NWP 18 would only authorize a maximum of 25 cubic yards of discharge of dredged or fill material into waters of the U.S., including jurisdictional wetlands. The notification threshold for NWP 18 is 10 cubic yards of discharge into waters of the U.S. The new General Conditions would provide further limitations on the use of NWP 18 in waters of the U.S. To ensure minimal impacts to wetland resources, the Los Angeles District would require notification for any activity discharging dredged or fill material in any special aquatic site, including wetlands. In addition, the Los Angeles District would preclude the use of several NWPs, including NWP 18, in special aquatic sites within desert regions in southern California and all of Arizona. With the inclusion of the above regional conditions, NWP 18 would have long-term minor impacts, both individually and cumulatively, to wetland resources in the Los Angeles District.

(f) Historic properties: Many known and unknown historic properties and cultural resources occur in many areas of the Los Angeles District. Many of them are adjacent to watercourses or other aquatic resources, and as such, may be affected by projects proposed for authorization under NWP 18. Section 106 of the NHPA requires any federal action agency to determine the eligibility of any known or discovered cultural resources that may be affected by the agency's action, and coordinate with the SHPO/THPO as appropriate. Because projects that may potentially be authorized under NWP 18 are brought to the attention of the Corps only when there is a specific project proposed, and because the project's relationship to the cultural resource may not be known until appropriate surveys are conducted, greater specificity cannot be determined at this time; however, through coordination with the SHPO and the implementation of mitigation measures, the Corps would ensure that NWP 18 would result in minimal impacts to historic properties.

(g) Fish and wildlife values: NWP 18 would only authorize a maximum of 25 cubic yards of discharges of dredged or fill material into waters of the U.S., including jurisdictional wetlands. The notification threshold for NWP18 is 10 cubic yards of discharge into waters of the U.S. In addition, the new General Conditions would provide further limitations on the use of NWP 18 in waters of the U.S. Due to the above constraints, NWP 18 would result in minimal impacts to fish and wildlife values, both individually and cumulatively, in the majority of the Los Angeles District. Regional conditions for NWP 18 would preclude discharges of dredged or fill material in jurisdictional vernal pools and in special aquatic sites in Arizona and the desert regions of California. With the inclusion of the proposed notification requirements and regional conditions for NWP 18 in special aquatic sites and sensitive watersheds and other aquatic resources, the above long-term minor impacts to fish and wildlife values in the Los Angeles District would be further reduced.

(h) Flood hazards: With the dynamic storm season typical of southern California and parts of Arizona, large floods are a normal part of the hydrologic regime. Due to a general lack of soil development and vegetation coverage in semi-arid areas, peak discharges for very high

magnitude storm events are potentially larger for dry land basins than similar-sized humid region basins. General Condition 9 will serve to reduce the flood hazard potential. This condition requires the applicant to maintain, to the maximum extent possible, the preconstruction course, condition, capacity and location of open waters. This condition also requires that activities constructed under the NWP be capable of withstanding expected high flows. Given the relatively small amount of material authorized under this NWP, combined with the additional restrictions and prohibitions of the regional conditions, the use of NWP 18 is expected to contribute only minor individual and cumulative effects in regard to flood hazards.

(i) Floodplain values: Same as discussed in the national decision document.

(j) Land use: Same as discussed in the national decision document.

(k) Navigation: Same as discussed in the national decision document.

(l) Shore erosion and accretion: Same as discussed in the national decision document.

(m) Recreation: Same as discussed in the national decision document.

(n) Water supply and conservation: Same as discussed in the national decision document.

(o) Water quality: In the heavily populated areas of southern California and Arizona, existing water quality in most rivers is impaired by runoff from upland agricultural, residential and industrial sources. NWP 18 would only authorize a maximum of 25 cubic yards of discharges of dredged or fill material into waters of the U.S., including jurisdictional wetlands. The notification threshold for NWP 18 is 10 cubic yards of discharge into waters of the U.S. Furthermore, the new General Conditions would provide further limitations on the use of NWP 18 in waters of the U.S. Due to the above constraints, NWP 18 would result in minimal adverse impacts to water quality, both individually and cumulatively, in the majority of the Los Angeles District. Regional conditions for NWP 18 would preclude discharges of dredged or fill material in jurisdictional vernal pools and in special aquatic sites in Arizona and the desert regions of California. With the inclusion of notification requirements for NWP 18 in special aquatic sites and sensitive watersheds and other aquatic resources, the above long-term minor impacts to water quality in the Los Angeles District would be further reduced, resulting in minor cumulative impacts.

(p) Energy needs: Same as discussed in the national decision document.

(q) Safety: Same as discussed in the national decision document.

(r) Food and fiber production: Same as discussed in the national decision document.

(s) Mineral needs: Same as discussed in the national decision document.

(t) Considerations of property ownership: Same as discussed in the national decision document.

## **9.2 National Environmental Policy Act Cumulative Effects Analysis (40 CFR 1508.7)**

Please see the attached supplemental analysis (Section I), and the 404(b)(1) guidelines cumulative effects analysis (Section 9.4), below.

### **9.3 Section 404(b)(1) Guidelines Impact Analysis (Subparts C-F)**

(a) Substrate: With NWP 18, there would short-term adverse impacts to channel substrate in the immediate vicinity of the discharge area. NWP 18 would only authorize a maximum of 25 cubic yards of discharges of dredged or fill material into waters of the U.S., including jurisdictional wetlands. The notification threshold for NWP 18 is 10 cubic yards of discharge into waters of the U.S. Furthermore, the new General Conditions and the proposed regional conditions have additional limitations on the use of NWP 18 in waters of the U.S. Due to the above constraints, NWP 18 would result in minimal adverse impacts to substrate, both individually and cumulatively, in the majority of the Los Angeles District.

With no regional conditions for NWP 18, there could be more than minimal impacts only in specific geographic areas and certain habitat types that exhibit relatively high physical and biological functions. The regional conditions for NWP 18 would preclude discharges of dredged or fill material in jurisdictional vernal pools, in special aquatic sites in Arizona and the desert regions of California, and in the San Diego, San Juan/Western San Mateo Creek SAMP areas. With the inclusion of the proposed notification requirements for NWP 18 in special aquatic sites and sensitive watersheds and resources, the above long-term minor impacts to channel substrate in the Los Angeles District would be further reduced and would result in long-term minor impacts to channel substrate.

(b) Suspended particulates/turbidity: In heavily populated areas of southern California and Arizona, existing turbidity levels in most rivers has been exacerbated by runoff from upland agricultural, residential and industrial sources. Short-term construction activities often augment turbidity levels in waters of the U.S. However, these activities would generally only result in short-term minor changes in turbidity levels. NWP 18 would only authorize a maximum of 25 cubic yards of discharges of dredged or fill material into waters of the U.S., including jurisdictional wetlands. The notification threshold for NWP 18 is 10 cubic yards of discharge into waters of the U.S., including jurisdictional wetlands. Furthermore, the new General Conditions have additional limitations on the use of NWP 18 in waters of the U.S. Due to the above constraints, NWP 18 would result in minimal adverse impacts to turbidity levels, both individually and cumulatively, in the majority of the Los Angeles District.

With no regional conditions for NWP 18, there would be more than minimal impacts only in specific geographic areas and certain habitat types that exhibit relatively high physical and biological functions. The regional conditions for NWP 18 would preclude discharges of dredged or fill material in jurisdictional vernal pools, special aquatic sites in Arizona and the desert regions of California, and in the San Diego, San Juan/Western San Mateo Creek SAMP areas.. With the inclusion of the proposed notification requirements for NWP 18 in special aquatic sites and sensitive watersheds and other aquatic resources, the above long-term minor impacts to

suspended sediment levels in the Los Angeles District would be further reduced. In addition, the required 401 certification would also address short-term and long-term minimal impacts to turbidity and suspended sediment in the rivers and streams in the Los Angeles District. With the implementation of the above regional conditions, NWP 18 would have long-term minor impacts to turbidity levels in waters of the U.S. within the Los Angeles District.

(c) Water: Same as discussed in the national decision document.

(d) Current patterns and water circulation: NWP 18 would only authorize a maximum of 25 cubic yards of discharges of dredged or fill material into waters of the U.S., including jurisdictional wetlands. The notification threshold for NWP 18 is 10 cubic yards of discharge into waters of the U.S., including jurisdictional wetlands. In the coastal watersheds of the Los Angeles District, impacts to currents and water circulation could affect spawning of southern steelhead. Any maintenance activities associated with projects authorized by NWP 18 should not reduce the cross-sectional area of the channel or modify the existing gradient of the stream channel. Furthermore, the Los Angeles District would require notification for any activities in sensitive watersheds or resource areas. With the inclusion of the above provisions, NWP 18 would have minimal impacts to current patterns and circulation in waters of the United States.

(e) Normal water level fluctuations: Same as discussed in the national decision document.

(f) Salinity gradients: Same as discussed in the national decision document.

(g) Threatened and endangered species: NWP 18 would only authorize a maximum of 25 cubic yards of discharges of dredged or fill material into waters of the U.S., including jurisdictional wetlands. The notification threshold for NWP 18 is 10 cubic yards of discharge into waters of the U.S., including jurisdictional wetlands. Furthermore, the new General Conditions have additional limitations on the use of NWP 18 in waters of the U.S. Furthermore, The Corps collected data for consultations with USFWS and NMFS for the period of Fiscal Year 2009 through 2011 to provide a reasonable basis to examine the cumulative effects of each NWP as well as the NWP Program as a whole within the Los Angeles District on threatened and endangered species. Based on the data, only 2 consultations (1 with the USFWS and 1 with NMFS) associated with NWP 18 occurred during this time period. Due to the above constraints and given past consultation data, the future use of NWP 18 would result in minimal adverse impacts to threatened and endangered species, both individually and cumulatively, in the majority of the Los Angeles District.

With no regional conditions for NWP 18, there could be more than minimal impacts only in specific geographic areas and certain habitat types that exhibit relatively high physical and biological functions. The regional conditions for NWP 18 would preclude discharges of dredged or fill material in jurisdictional vernal pools in Los Angeles District, in special aquatic sites in Arizona and the desert regions of California, and in the San Diego, San Juan/Western San Mateo Creek SAMP areas.. With the inclusion of the proposed notification requirements for NWP 18 in special aquatic sites and sensitive watersheds and resources, the above long-term minor impacts to endangered and threatened species in the Los Angeles District would be further reduced. In

addition, given the large number of listed species in Los Angeles District, continued coordination with USFWS and NMFS is required to ensure minimal impacts to endangered species. With the continuation of the existing informal coordination procedures, the development and implementation of SLOPES, and the inclusion of additional notification requirements, the use of NWP 18 would have minimal impacts, both individually and cumulatively, to threatened and endangered species in the Los Angeles District.

(h) Fish, crustaceans, molluscs, and other aquatic organisms in the food web: Same as discussed in the national decision document.

(i) Other wildlife: In the semi-arid southern California climate, rivers and streams and their associated riparian habitat represent an important resource for wildlife. NWP 18 would only authorize discharges of dredged or fill material into a maximum of 0.1 acre of waters of the U.S. The notification threshold for NWP 18 is 10 cubic yards of discharge into waters of the U.S., including jurisdictional wetlands. In addition, the new General Conditions have additional limitations on the use of NWP 18 in waters of the U.S. Due to the above constraints, NWP 18 would result in minimal adverse impacts to wildlife, both individually and cumulatively, in the majority of the Los Angeles District. With no regional conditions for NWP 18, there would be a potential for more than minimal impacts in specific geographic areas and certain habitat types that exhibit relatively high physical and biological functions. The regional conditions for NWP 18 preclude discharges of dredged or fill material in jurisdictional vernal pools and in special aquatic sites in Arizona and the desert regions of California. With the inclusion of additional notification requirements for NWP 18 in special aquatic sites and sensitive watersheds and other aquatic resources, the above long-term minor impacts to wildlife in the Los Angeles District would be further reduced.

(j) Special aquatic sites: The potential impacts to specific special aquatic sites are discussed below:

(1) Sanctuaries and refuges: Same as discussed in the national decision document.

(2) Wetlands: In the Los Angeles District, the semi-arid climate limits the extent and number of wetland resources. This scarcity of wetlands is especially evident in Arizona and in the desert regions of California. In these areas, annual precipitation is usually below 10 inches, which precludes the development of wetlands in the majority of these desert regions. Furthermore, approximately 90 percent of wetlands in California have been affected by historic conversion to agricultural uses, grading and filling activities. As a result, wetland areas are rare in the Los Angeles District and warrant more rigorous protection. To ensure minimal impacts to wetland resources, the Los Angeles District would require notification for any activity discharging dredged or fill material in any special aquatic site, including wetlands. The regional conditions for NWP 18 would preclude discharges of dredged or fill material in jurisdictional vernal pools in specific regions and in wetlands in Arizona and the desert regions of southern California. With the inclusion of the above additional requirements for NWP 18 in special aquatic sites and sensitive watersheds and other aquatic resources, there would be only long-term

minor impacts to wetlands in the Los Angeles District.

(3) Mud flats: In the Los Angeles District, historic coastal development activities have greatly reduced the extent and number of mudflat resources. Approximately 90 percent of wetlands, including coastal wetlands and mudflats, in California have been affected by historic conversion to agricultural uses, grading and filling activities. As a result, mudflats are especially rare in the Los Angeles District and warrant more rigorous protection. To ensure minimal impacts to mudflats, the Los Angeles District would prohibit discharging dredged or fill material under NWP 18 in any mudflat in the State of Arizona and desert regions of California. In addition, the Los Angeles District would require notification for any discharge of dredged or fill material in essential fish habitat, such as within coastal estuaries. With the inclusion of these regional conditions, NWP 18 would have long-term minor impacts to mudflats in the Los Angeles District.

(4) Vegetated shallows: In the Los Angeles District, historic agricultural and construction activities have reduced the extent and number of vegetated shallows. Approximately 90 percent of wetlands in California, including some vegetated shallows, have been affected by historic conversion to agricultural uses, grading, and filling activities, such as marina construction. As a result, vegetated shallows are especially rare in the Los Angeles District and warrant more rigorous protection. To ensure minimal impacts to vegetated shallows, the Los Angeles District would require notification for any activity discharging dredged or fill material in any special aquatic site, including vegetated shallows. The regional conditions for NWP 18 would also preclude discharges of dredged or fill material in jurisdictional vernal pools and in special aquatic sites in Arizona and the desert regions of California. With the inclusion of these regional conditions, NWP 18 would have minimal impacts on vegetated shallows in the Los Angeles District.

(5) Coral reefs: Same as discussed in the national document.

(6) Riffle and pool complexes: In the semi-arid southern California and Arizona areas, limited water resources and the need for flood control have led to the construction of numerous dams in the mountains of southern California and Arizona, and on the Colorado River. With the construction of these large dams, many riffle-and-pool complexes have been eliminated by the large reservoirs. Furthermore, construction of the dams also modifies the hydrologic regime of the river, which can also degrade downstream riffle-and-pool complexes. As a result, riffle-and-pool complexes in the Los Angeles District are essentially confined to montane and foothill regions. They warrant more rigorous protection due to their relatively high production of invertebrate fauna and other contributions to riparian aquatic resources such as aeration of the water, provision of substrate for decomposers, and other factors. To ensure minimal impacts to riffle-and-pool complexes, the Los Angeles District would require notification for any activity discharging dredged or fill material in any special aquatic site, including riffle-and-pool complexes. In addition, another regional condition for NWP 18 would also preclude discharges of dredged or fill material in special aquatic sites in Arizona and the desert regions of California, including riffle and pool complexes. With the inclusion of the

above regional conditions, NWP 18 would have minimal impacts to riffle-and-pool complexes in the Los Angeles District.

Based on data collected by the Corps, NWP 18 did not impact special aquatic sites between Fiscal Year 2009 and Fiscal Year 2011. Overall, NWP 18 would not result in greater than minimal impacts to special aquatic sites.

(k) Municipal and private water supplies: Same as discussed in the national decision document.

(l) Recreational and commercial fisheries: Same as discussed in the national decision document.]

(m) Water-related recreation: Same as discussed in the national decision document.

(n) Aesthetics: Same as discussed in the national decision document.

(o) Parks, national and historical monuments, national seashores, wilderness areas, research sites, and similar areas: Same as discussed in the national decision document.

#### **9.4 Section 404(b)(1) Guidelines Cumulative Effects Analysis (40 CFR 230.7(b)(3))**

The cumulative effects of this NWP on the aquatic environment are dependent upon the number of times the NWP is used and the quantity and quality of waters of the United States lost due to the activities authorized by this NWP. Impacts to aquatic resources authorized by the Los Angeles District's permit actions are tracked using the ORM (OMBIL Regulatory Module) database. This includes both temporary and permanent impacts, as well as any compensatory mitigation required. Impact and mitigation data was collected for the period of Fiscal Year 2009 through 2011 to provide a reasonable basis to examine the cumulative effects of each NWP as well as the NWP Program as a whole within the Los Angeles District. The Los Angeles District authorized approximately 0.29 acre of permanent impacts and 0.04 acre of temporary impacts to waters of the U.S. with NWP 18 during Fiscal Year 2009 through 2011. During this period, no individual project authorized under NWP 18 exceeded 0.03 acre of permanent impact.

Based on an analysis of the types of activities authorized by the Los Angeles District during this period, the Los Angeles District estimates that this NWP will be used approximately 7 times per year, resulting the loss of approximately 0.10 acre of waters of the U.S. on an annual basis. To ensure that these activities result in minimal adverse effects on the aquatic environment, individually and cumulatively, the Los Angeles District estimates that approximately 0.01 acre of compensatory mitigation will be required on an annual basis to offset the authorized losses of waters of the U.S. and ensure that the NWP authorizes only activities with minimal individual and cumulative adverse effects on the aquatic environment. The majority of projects authorized under NWP 18 result in very small impacts (0.02 acre or less) and are considered minimal even without compensatory mitigation. As a result, the continued use of NWP 18, with the inclusion of regional conditions listed in Section 10, below, would have no more than minimal impacts on the aquatic environment on an individual and cumulative basis, within the Los Angeles District.

## **10.0 List of Final Corps regional conditions for NWP 18**

### **10.1 Regional Condition 1**

For all activities in waters of the U.S. that are suitable habitat for federally listed fish species, the permittee shall design all road crossings to ensure that the passage and/or spawning of fish is not hindered. In these areas, the permittee shall employ bridge designs that span the stream or river, including pier- or pile-supported spans, or designs that use a bottomless arch culvert with a natural stream bed, unless determined to be impracticable by the Corps.

### **10.2 Regional Condition 2**

Nationwide Permits (NWP) 3, 7, 12-15, 17-19, 21, 23, 25, 29, 35, 36, or 39-46, 48-52 cannot be used to authorize structures, work, and/or the discharge of dredged or fill material that would result in the "loss" of wetlands, mudflats, vegetated shallows or riffle and pool complexes as defined at 40 CFR Part 230.40-45. The definition of "loss" for this regional condition is the same as the definition of "loss of waters of the United States" used for the Nationwide Permit Program. Furthermore, this regional condition applies only within the State of Arizona and within the Mojave and Sonoran (Colorado) desert regions of California. The desert regions in California are limited to four USGS Hydrologic Unit Code (HUC) accounting units (Lower Colorado -150301, Northern Mojave-180902, Southern Mojave-181001, and Salton Sea-181002).

### **10.3 Regional Condition 3**

When a pre-construction notification (PCN) is required, the appropriate U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) District shall be notified in accordance with General Condition 31 using either the South Pacific Division PCN Checklist or a signed application form (ENG Form 4345) with an attachment providing information on compliance with all of the General and Regional Conditions. The PCN Checklist and application form are available at: <http://www.spl.usace.army.mil/regulatory>. In addition, the PCN shall include:

- a. A written statement describing how the activity has been designed to avoid and minimize adverse effects, both temporary and permanent, to waters of the United States;
- b. Drawings, including plan and cross-section views, clearly depicting the location, size and dimensions of the proposed activity as well as the location of delineated waters of the U.S. on the site. The drawings shall contain a title block, legend and scale, amount (in cubic yards) and area (in acres) of fill in Corps jurisdiction, including both permanent and temporary fills/structures. The ordinary high water mark or, if tidal waters, the mean high water mark and high tide line, should be shown (in feet), based on National Geodetic Vertical Datum (NGVD) or other appropriate referenced elevation. All drawings for projects located within the boundaries of the Los Angeles District shall comply with the most current version of the *Map and Drawing Standards for the Los Angeles District*

*Regulatory Division* (available on the Los Angeles District Regulatory Division website at: [www.spl.usace.army.mil/regulatory/](http://www.spl.usace.army.mil/regulatory/)); and

- c. Numbered and dated pre-project color photographs showing a representative sample of waters proposed to be impacted on the project site, and all waters proposed to be avoided on and immediately adjacent to the project site. The compass angle and position of each photograph shall be documented on the plan-view drawing required in subpart b of this regional condition.

#### **10.4 Regional Condition 4**

Submission of a PCN pursuant to General Condition 31 and Regional Condition 3 shall be required for all regulated activities in the following locations:

- a. All perennial waterbodies and special aquatic sites within the State of Arizona and within the Mojave and Sonoran (Colorado) desert regions of California, excluding the Colorado River in Arizona from Davis Dam to River Mile 261 (northern boundary of the Fort Mojave Indian Tribe Reservation). The desert region in California is limited to four USGS HUC accounting units (Lower Colorado -150301, Northern Mojave-180902, Southern Mojave-181001, and Salton Sea-181002).
- b. All areas designated as Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) by the Pacific Fishery Management Council (i.e., all tidally influenced areas - Federal Register dated March 12, 2007 (72 FR 11092)), in which case the PCN shall include an EFH assessment and extent of proposed impacts to EFH. Examples of EFH habitat assessments can be found at: <http://www.swr.noaa.gov/efh.htm>.
- c. All watersheds in the Santa Monica Mountains in Los Angeles and Ventura counties bounded by Calleguas Creek on the west, by Highway 101 on the north and east, and by Sunset Boulevard and Pacific Ocean on the south.
- d. The Santa Clara River watershed in Los Angeles and Ventura counties, including but not limited to Aliso Canyon, Agua Dulce Canyon, Sand Canyon, Bouquet Canyon, Mint Canyon, South Fork of the Santa Clara River, San Francisquito Canyon, Castaic Creek, Piru Creek, Sespe Creek and the main-stem of the Santa Clara River.

#### **10.5 Regional Condition 5**

Individual Permits shall be required for all discharges of fill material in jurisdictional vernal pools, with the exception that discharges for the purpose of restoration, enhancement, management or scientific study of vernal pools may be authorized under NWP 5, 6, and 27 with the submission of a PCN in accordance with General Condition 31 and Regional Condition 3.

## **10.6 Regional Condition 7**

Individual Permits (Standard Individual Permit or 404 Letter of Permission) shall be required in San Luis Obispo Creek and Santa Rosa Creek in San Luis Obispo County for bank stabilization projects, and in Gaviota Creek, Mission Creek and Carpinteria Creek in Santa Barbara County for bank stabilization projects and grade control structures.

## **10.7 Regional Condition 8**

In conjunction with the Los Angeles District's Special Area Management Plans (SAMPs) for the San Diego Creek Watershed and San Juan Creek/Western San Mateo Creek Watersheds in Orange County, California, the Corps' Division Engineer, through his discretionary authority has revoked the use of the following 24 selected NWP within these SAMP watersheds: 03, 07, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 21, 25, 27, 29, 31, 33, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 46, 49 and 50. Consequently, these NWPs are no longer available in those watersheds to authorize impacts to waters of the United States from discharges of dredged or fill material under the Corps' Clean Water Act section 404 authority.

## **10.8 Regional Condition 10**

The permittee shall complete the construction of any compensatory mitigation required by special condition(s) of the NWP verification before or concurrent with commencement of construction of the authorized activity, except when specifically determined to be impracticable by the Corps. When mitigation involves use of a mitigation bank or in-lieu fee program, the permittee shall submit proof of payment to the Corps prior to commencement of construction of the authorized activity.

## **11.0 Water Quality Certification and Coastal Zone Management Act consistency determinations**

Pursuant to Section 401 of the Clean Water Act (CWA), tribal or state Water Quality Certification, or waiver thereof, is required for activities authorized by NWPs that may result in a discharge of fill material into waters the U.S. In addition, any state with a federally-approved Coastal Zone Management (CZM) plan must concur with the Corps determination that activities authorized by NWPs that are either within the state's coastal zone, or will affect any land or water uses, or natural resources within the state's coastal zone, are consistent with the CZM plan. In accordance with Corps regulations at 33 CFR 330.5 (c) and (d), any state 401/CZM conditions for a particular NWP become regional conditions for that NWP. The Corps recognizes that in some tribes or states there will be a need to add regional conditions, or for individual tribal or state review for some activities to ensure compliance with water quality standards or consistency with CZM plans.

The Los Angeles District announced the proposal to reissue the Nationwide Permits and our proposed regional conditions in a Special Public Notice dated February 25, 2011. The Los Angeles District also send letters dated March 9, 2011 to the seven federally recognized tribes

within the Los Angeles District (Big Pine Tribe, Bishop Paiute Tribe, Hopi Tribe, Hualapai Tribe, Navajo Nation, White Mountain Apache Tribe, and Twenty-nine Palms Band of Mission Indians) and the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality announcing the proposed rule and our proposed regional conditions, and requesting the State of Arizona and each tribe review the information for purposes of providing water quality certification pursuant to section 401 of the Clean Water Act. Similarly, acting on behalf of the three Corps Districts in California the Sacramento District provided the same letter on February 23, 2011 to the California State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) and EPA requesting 401 certification in the State of California and tribal lands within EPA Region 9, respectively (excluding those tribes with delegated 401 authority). The San Francisco District provided a letter to the California Coastal Commission (CCC) on behalf of both coastal districts in California on March 3, 2011, requesting Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA) consistency certification. Additional discussions were held among the three Corps Districts in California and the SWRCB in an effort to strategize options for certifying a broader range of NWP or NWP-eligible activities than under the 2007 NWPs.

Upon publication of the final rule in the February 21, 2012, issue of the Federal Register (77 FR 10184), the Los Angeles District again provided letters to each of the seven tribes with 401 authority, and the State of Arizona requesting final 401 certification of the 2012 NWPs within their respective geographic areas of responsibility. Copies of the final regional conditions for the Los Angeles District were also provided. Similarly, the Los Angeles District provided a letter to the CCC on behalf of both coastal districts in California requesting final CZMA consistency certification of the 2012 NWPs and the respective regional conditions (copies of the letters are provided in Section IV). Each tribe and the State of Arizona have 60 days to issue, waive or deny certification for any or all of the 2012 NWPs. The CCC has 90 days to make their final determination. Due to the fact that the final rule was published on February 21, 2012, there is not sufficient time to allow the full 60- or 90-day review period before the 2012 NWPs are scheduled to go into effect on March 19, 2012. Therefore, the final outcome of 401 and CZMA certification within in the Los Angeles District is uncertain. Individual certifications will be required for any action authorized under the 2012 NWPs where applicable (i.e. projects within or affecting the Coastal Zone and/or projects that may affect water quality) until final determinations are provided by the respective state/tribal authorities.

The Los Angeles District believes, in general, that these NWPs and our regional conditions comply with State Water Quality Certification standards and are consistent with the Coastal Zone Management Plans.

## **12.0 Measures to Ensure Minimal Adverse Environmental Effects**

The terms and conditions of the NWP, including the pre-construction notification requirements and the regional conditions listed in Section 10.0 of this document, will ensure that this NWP authorizes only activities with minimal individual and cumulative adverse effects on the aquatic environment. High value waters will be protected by the restrictions in General Condition 22, the regional conditions discussed in this document, and the pre-construction notification requirements of the NWP. Through the pre-construction notification process, the Los Angeles

District will review certain activities on a case-by-case basis to ensure that those activities result in minimal adverse effects on the aquatic environment, individually and cumulatively. As a result of this review, the district engineer can add special conditions to an NWP authorization to ensure that the activity results in minimal adverse effects on the aquatic environment, individually and cumulatively. During the pre-construction notification process, the district engineer will exercise discretionary authority and require an individual permit for those activities that result in more than minimal individual and cumulative adverse effects on the aquatic environment.

Discharges of dredged or fill material authorized under NWP 18 are limited to 25 cubic yards within waters of the U.S., including jurisdictional wetlands. The notification threshold for NWP 18 is the discharge of 10 cubic yards into waters of the U.S. or the discharge is in a special aquatic site. The new General Conditions have further limitations on the use of NWP 18. Due to the above constraints, NWP 18 would generally result in minimal impacts, both individually and cumulatively, in the majority of the Los Angeles District.

In the Los Angeles District, the semi-arid climate limits special aquatic sites throughout the region. In dry land areas, lack of vegetation and developed soils result in high peak discharges for large storm events. With a predominance of deep alluvial soils, dry land systems are dominated by overland flow with groundwater recharge and through flow only contributing a relatively small quantity to stream discharge. Over the past fifty years, agricultural and construction activities have resulted in a loss of approximately 90 percent of wetlands and 95 to more than 99 percent of the vernal pools in southern California. Further loss of special aquatic sites in southern California and Arizona could result in more than minimal cumulative impacts. To ensure any impact to special aquatic sites is offset by compensatory mitigation, the Los Angeles District would require notification for any project that impacts a special aquatic site. The Los Angeles District would eliminate the use of NWP 18 in jurisdictional vernal pools and to authorize losses in most types of special aquatic sites in Arizona and the desert regions of California. With the inclusion of the above modifications to NWP 18, the Los Angeles District would ensure minimal impacts to jurisdictional vernal pools and special aquatic sites through additional review without substantially increasing our workload. Lastly, certain watersheds and resources in the Los Angeles District support high physical and biological functions that are threatened by cumulative impacts at the watershed level. To ensure that NWP 18 would have minimal impacts to these resources, the Los Angeles District would require notification for all projects in the Santa Monica Mountains, Santa Clara watershed, special aquatic sites, perennial watercourses, and areas designated as EFH. With the inclusion of the above modifications, the Los Angeles District would ensure minimal impacts, both individually and cumulatively, for projects authorized under NWP 18 in the Los Angeles District.

If, at a later time, there is clear, unequivocal evidence that use of the NWP would result in more than minimal adverse effects on the aquatic environment, individually or cumulatively, the modification, suspension, or revocation procedures at 33 CFR 330.4(e) or 33 CFR 330.5 will be used.

### **13.0 Final Determination**

Based on the considerations discussed above, and in accordance with 33 CFR 330.4(e)(1) and 330.5(c), I have determined that this NWP, including its terms and conditions, all regional conditions, and limitations, will authorize only those activities with minimal adverse effects on the aquatic environment, individually or cumulatively.