January 30, 2009

Mr. Mark Hutchinson
Environmental Programs Management
San Luis Obispo County Department of Public Works
County Government Center, Room 207
San luis Obispo, CA 93408

Subject: Comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) for the Los Osos Wastewater Project (LOWWP)

Dear Mr. Hutchinson:

The Los Osos Sustainability Group is submitting a relatively long list of recommendations, included with our project recommendations from January 6, which we are requesting to have reviewed in a subsequent EIR.

In general, we are disappointed with the Draft—as we have been with the LOWWP alternatives review and selection process so far. The selection/planning process does not seem to be leading the community of Los Osos nor the County of San Luis Obispo toward a sustainable future; even though it could provide a tremendous opportunity to create a model of 21st Century sustainable development.

In the attached list of specific DEIR comments, we note numerous serious omissions, inconsistencies, and inaccuracies, which, if not adequately addressed, will not only lead to an unsustainable project long term, but may lead to an unsustainable project in the relatively near future.

The following is a summary of the most serious problems.

1. The DEIR finds "no significant impacts" to the Los Osos Valley Water Basin and sensitive aquatic ecosystems, including the Morro Bay Estuary, from the removal of 400-700 AFY of water from the basin to be "disposed of" on spray fields (i.e., Project 2b, the recommended "reuse/disposal" options). Studies of the basin, including the Cleath and Associates Seawater Intrusion Assessment (2005) and the Yates and Williams study, (2003) have found that the Los Osos Valley Water Basin is a relatively self-contained system, with little water flowing in from its boundaries, except for the seawater currently replacing the freshwater now overdrafted. Removing 400-700 AFY from a basin already seriously out of balance, without adequate mitigations, will undoubtedly cause significant impacts. Failing to acknowledge and address these impacts is sure to undermine efforts to sustain the freshwater supply and preserve vital ecosystems for future generations.

2. The DEIR fails to review a reasonable range of collection options, or to recognize the benefits of sealed, small-pipe systems over gravity systems for the particular conditions in Los Osos. Many communities with hilly terrains, high groundwater, and proximity to

surface waters are choosing sealed, small-pipe collection systems to lower collection system costs and reduce the environmental harm resulting from leaks inherent in gravity systems. The DEIR omits any substantive discussion of the gravity alternative's increased potential 1) to harm sensitive ecosystems due to serious overflows, 2) permanently damage community infrastructure (due to deep trenching down the middle of streets), 3) exceed project cost estimates (e.g., due to problems encountered during installation, e.g., extensive high groundwater), 4) result in wastewater flows exceeding system capacity or treatment levels (due to excessive I/I or future sea level rises), and 5) incur prohibitive costs in the event of an earthquake. It also fails to review the vacuum collection alternative despite the NWRI's recommendation to consider vacuum collection near the bay, and it eliminates the low-pressure collection alternative on limited and inaccurate information. These last two alternatives could not only emerge as environmentally superior options but allow the project to meet state and federal affordability levels—key to project sustainability.

3. Finally, the DEIR fails to include a triple bottom line analysis of project options to ensure the highest value project long-term for the community, or a substantive analysis of numerous sustainable strategies and processes, including decentralized wastewater collection, constructed wetlands, clean and renewable energy use (wind and solar), co-generation, graywater and rainwater reuse, carbon sequestering, and beneficial recycling of all system byproducts (see our Sustainability Scoping Recommendations from May 6, 2008).

We believe a subsequent EIR is necessary to address these deficiencies and we hope you agree. In our opinion, the "environmentally preferred" alternative identified by the DEIR—95% conventional gravity collection, oxidation ditch treatment, spray fields with limited beneficial reuse and conservation, and a treatment site several miles out of town—is one of the least sustainable alternatives available.

Per our phone conversation today, please attach the appendices and attachments for the "EIR Recommendations for a Sustainable LOWWP" (submitted on May 6, 2008 to the Board) and the "Sustainable Los Osos Wastewater Project Criteria and Recommendations," and "Achieving a Sustainable Los Osos Valley Water Basin," (submitted to the Board on January 6, 2009.) Please be sure that the title page and table of contents page are attached to the last document. Thank you.

Yours truly,

Keith Wimer
Los Osos Sustainability Group (LOSG)

Subject: Clarifications/corrections to the Comments on the LOWWP Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) submitted by the Los Osos Sustainability Group on January 30, 2009

Dear Mr. Hutchinson:

I noticed a few errors in the documents I sent on Friday. If it is not too late to add corrections please attach this letter to the comments.

My cover letter states that spray fields will remove "400-700 AFY from a basin already seriously out of balance…," but DEIR (Table 5.2-4, p. 5.2-19, Appendix D) indicates spray fields will remove between 549 and 842 AFY. In Comment #1, we state that 160 AFY of conservation will be "…in effect (at) project start up", but the DEIR indicates it will not be in full effect until 2020 (Page 3-42). Comment # 7 on Page 8 states that the flows of the new Lathrop gravity system "double" in wet weather, but they more than quadruple. Comment # 9 a. could be interpreted to mean the LOSG is requesting analysis of only one of the options mentioned (a dedicated vacuum or a hybrid vacuum low- pressure system), but we believe both deserve more thorough analysis for a complete EIR. Item #10 is requesting a "more thorough" analysis of alternatives that offset or reduce GHG production (e.g., co-generation). Item #12 (second sentence) should read "The estimated project costs ($250 per moth per household) exceed the affordability level for most of the homeowners in the community" (rather than "..for 90% of the homeowners…"), and the last comment item, now numbered "11," should be renumbered "14.

Also, although our comments may not specifically state it, we are requesting that our scoping recommendations of May 6, 2007, are substantively reviewed (e.g., 25% indoor conservation), along with the three systems we recommended on January 6, 2009. Please overlook typos, but let me know if any points need to be clarified to facilitate substantive responses.

Thank you.

Keith Wimer
Los Osos Sustainability Group (LOSG)