



Cooperative Extension, University of California

## **Ag Water & Land Resource Manager**

TEHAMA, GLENN, COLUSA, AND SHASTA COUNTIES

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*A newsletter from the University of California Cooperative Extension seeking to support wise and judicious use of limited water and land resources in the Northern Sacramento Valley.*

### **In This Issue**

#### **New Water Quality Regulations Facing Irrigated Agriculture**

#### ***Sacramento Valley Water Quality Coalition Forms***

*This issue discusses the status of new surface water quality regulations referred to as the "Irrigation and Storm Water Runoff Conditional Waiver". This newsletter will provide background leading up to the adoption of this new conditional waiver, describe important aspects of this conditional waiver, and outline an effort among the irrigated agricultural community in the Sacramento Valley to respond responsibly and effectively to the new regulation. Please take a few moments to assure that you are informed. Thank you!*

*Allan E. Fulton*

Allan Fulton

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## **Background**

The California Water Code requires persons discharging waste to waterways to submit a Report of Waste Discharge. Waste is broadly defined in the Water Code to include nearly all water management and agricultural activities that add materials to a watercourse. The Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board (“Regional Board”) is the state regulatory agency responsible to enforce the Water Code and to protect the beneficial uses of receiving waters. The Regional Board uses a permitting process where waste discharge reporting is required to formulate Waste Discharge Requirements as a means of regulating and protecting waterways.

In 1982, the Regional Board adopted a resolution waiving Waste Discharge Requirements for 23 categories of discharges, including irrigation return flows and storm water runoff from irrigated lands. As a result, most entities or landowners discharging from irrigated lands have not been required to obtain a waste discharge requirement permit from the Regional Board for the past 20 years.

In 1999, state legislation was signed into law requiring that the 1982 waiver expire on December 31, 2002 unless renewed by the Regional Board. After much public input and debate, on December 5, 2002 the Regional Board did not renew the 1982 waiver. Instead the Regional Board adopted a new “Conditional Waiver for Irrigation Return Flows and Storm Water Runoff from Irrigated Lands”.

## **About the new “Conditional Waiver”**

The right of an entity or irrigated landowner to discharge from irrigated lands was terminated December 31, 2002. However, under the new “Conditional Waiver” the Regional Board will allow irrigation discharge for a two-year period under the following conditions:

- 1) The dischargers will actively participate in a watershed effort that assists in achieving water quality objectives to comply with the waiver;

**or**

- 2) The dischargers will apply for and obtain an individual Waste Discharge Requirement Permit to comply with the waiver.

## **Sacramento Valley Water Quality Coalition (SVWQC) Formed**

A broad group of Sacramento Valley water districts, farm organizations, and waterfowl organizations has formed the Sacramento Valley Water Quality Coalition (“Coalition”). Leading Coalition members include the Northern California Water Association (NCWA), Coalition for Urban/Rural Environmental Stewardship (CURES), county Farm Bureaus, Ducks Unlimited, Western Growers Association, and valley Agricultural Commissioners. Various agricultural commodity groups, cooperative extension, resource conservation

districts, and watershed groups at work on tributaries to the Sacramento River are supporting the Coalition.

The Coalition is pursuing a Sacramento Valley watershed approach to better understand and manage water quality and to comply with the new Conditional Waiver for irrigation return flows and storm water runoff from irrigated farmland. The watershed approach is viewed by the Coalition as a sensible and effective way to preserve and enhance the high quality water resources in the Sacramento Valley. The alternative of individuals or small groups applying for Waste Discharge Requirement Permits to comply with the new Conditional Waiver looms as an enormous regulatory task given there are about 7 million acres of irrigated farmlands and about 25,000 entities or individuals that discharge throughout the Regional Board's jurisdiction. If this watershed approach is not successful over the course of the next two years, every individual landowner or entity that discharges water in the Sacramento Valley may be required to obtain an annual waste discharge permit which may include annual fees ranging from \$500 to \$2000 plus other potential costs related to monitoring and reporting.

## **Coalition Objectives**

- 1) Most importantly the Coalition would like to provide initial coverage for every discharger within the Sacramento River watershed so that individual dischargers will not need to submit a waste discharge report or obtain a Waste Discharge Requirement Permit. To accomplish this objective the Coalition will be presenting a report on behalf of all irrigated land within the Sacramento River Watershed to the Regional Board in advance of the June 30, 2003 deadline set by the Regional Board. This report will include a map that will show all of the irrigated land in the Sacramento River Watershed that is under jurisdiction of the Regional Board. The report will also begin to describe the activities that will be necessary to meet the Conditional Waiver requirements over the next several years. The Coalition's draft report will be available soon for review and input. To inquire how to obtain a copy of the draft report please contact one of the individuals identified at the end of this newsletter.
- 2) The Coalition is committed to demonstrating a sincere and pragmatic effort to preserve and enhance the high quality of water in the watershed. As part of this regional watershed approach, the Coalition will work closely with the Regional Board by maintaining dialogue, meeting report deadlines, and coordinating efforts that will be necessary to meet Regional Board requirements. This will include seeking funding sources, establishing essential monitoring, and prioritizing specific water quality issues that need to be addressed by implementing appropriate management practices.
- 3) As part of this regional watershed approach, this broad Coalition is sensitive to complying with the Conditional Waiver in a way that will compliment local efforts of existing sub-watershed groups, resource conservation districts, cooperative extension, and other local programs. Ultimately, this will be necessary to implement appropriate management practices in specific areas of the watershed and to meet the Conditional Waiver and other regulatory requirements.

## **Working Cooperatively with Coalition**

All of the participants in this Coalition recognize that the Regional Board will at times revisit the status of the Conditional Waiver (for example on April 24, 2003) and changes may occur over the next several months. The coalition is prepared to adjust accordingly.

If a local entity or individual is interested in working cooperatively in this Coalition, there are several pathways to interact. Entities may consider contacting the Coalition to become a signatory member and validate their interest. Individuals may seek out opportunities to participate in local management of water quality in the watershed areas where they live. If you would like specific suggestions of how to become involved begin by contacting one of the individuals listed at the end of this newsletter.

The new Conditional Waiver clearly allows individual dischargers to proceed independently of this Coalition. If any discharger or a particular area in the Sacramento River watershed wants to proceed, independent of this Coalition, they can contact one of the individuals listed below and they will be clearly delineated from this process in the Coalition's reporting and presentations to the Regional Board. In fact, for some entities it may be more sensible to delineate their activities. Examples may be entities representing confined feeding operations or specific commodity organizations that already have an established working relationship with the Regional Board concerning water quality. Unless indicated otherwise, the Coalition will assume that dischargers and areas within the Sacramento Valley desire to be covered by this watershed approach.

### **Suggested Initial Contacts**

David Guy or Aaron Ferguson, Northern California Water Association  
(916) – 442 - 8333.

Parry Klassen, Coalition for Rural/Urban Environmental Stewardship  
(559) – 325 – 9855.

### **Opportunity to Hear More about this Watershed Approach**

David Guy, Executive Director of the Northern California Water Association will present an overview of the Sacramento Valley Water Quality Coalition's watershed approach in response to the new Conditional Waiver. The presentation will be made before the Board of Directors of the Tehama County Flood Control and Water Conservation District.

Tuesday, May 13, 2003  
8:30 a.m.

Tehama County Board of Supervisor Chambers  
624 Washington Street  
Red Bluff, CA 96080

