

# Watershed Coalition

# News

INFORMATION FOR CENTRAL VALLEY AGRICULTURE

SUMMER 2004

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## Water Monitoring Begins In Central Valley

**W**ater sampling in more than 70 streams and sloughs carrying farm drainage began this July throughout the Central Valley. The monitoring is part of the new Irrigated Lands Waiver put into effect on July 11, 2003.

The sampling is being funded by seven new watershed coalitions and a program operated by Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board (Regional Board), called "Phase II". The Regional Board's "Phase II" program monitors 31 sites from Butte County in the north to Fresno County in the south.

An additional 40 sites are being monitored by the watershed coalitions in the Central Valley. The coalitions will add 20-plus sites to that list this winter when storm event monitoring begins.

The conditional waiver requires a "phased" approach to water sampling. The first two years include testing for toxicity and stream parameters such as flow, tem-

perature, pH and coliform bacteria. Toxicity testing is a standard analysis that exposes three test species to the water sample. When organism toxicity occurs, further analysis determines the cause.

In years three and four, coalitions will also be required to monitor for nutrients and specific pesticides used by farmers in a watershed.

Watershed coalitions are taking various approaches to funding the monitoring programs. Most assess per acre membership fees (ranging from \$1 to \$5 per acre) while some absorb the costs in operating budgets of local water agencies.

The Regional Water Board reported in September that toxicity to test organisms was found in 4 out of 84 samples analyzed in the Phase II monitoring conducted in July and August. The cause of toxicity was not reported. Results from the coalition sampling programs are not yet available.

## Water Board Hears Coalition Update

**C**entral Valley watershed coalition organizers pay attention when the irrigated lands waiver shows up on the monthly agenda for the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board. The September 10, 2004 meeting was no exception. A staff report released two weeks before the meeting panned coalition efforts to date and threatened to withdraw coalition approvals if certain timelines weren't met.

At the September 10 meeting, Bill Croyle, manager of the irrigated lands unit, told Regional Board members that all coalitions had made significant progress toward fulfilling requirement since the staff report was written. Two coalitions, the Westside San Joaquin River Watershed Coalition and the Southern San Joaquin Valley Water Quality Coalition, were to receive monitoring plan approvals by late September. The remaining coalitions were expected to receive approvals in October.

Croyle described the staff priorities in coming months as: 1) finalizing remaining coalition plans; 2) beginning work on

individual filer applications; and 3) organizing the Technical Issues Committee (TIC) for the Irrigated Lands Waiver program.

The TIC is being formed to help define technical issues related to designing and implementing the water monitoring programs. The TIC, which is scheduled to meet October 7, will be made up of two Regional Water Board members (one will chair the TIC) plus experts from irrigated agriculture, water districts, government agencies and the environmental community.

The TIC will identify technical issues and refine them into questions that, if necessary, will be referred to an External Scientific Review Panel. This "peer review panel" will be made up of persons with no vested stake or interest in the conditional waiver. The panel will make recommendations to the Regional Board which will then decide to what extent the findings would be incorporated in the Board's determinations.

The Regional Board is next scheduled to include irrigated lands waiver issues in its December 2004 meeting.



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## East San Joaquin Starts From Scratch

**T**en local farm groups and county agencies formed the East San Joaquin Water Quality Coalition in November 2003. The coalition represents irrigated lands east of the San Joaquin River within Madera, Merced, Stanislaus, Tuolumne and Mariposa Counties and portions of Calaveras County. As of September, 1500 landowners and operators with 520,000 acres were signed up for the coalition in the region.

When local agricultural interests decided to form the coalition, a volunteer Board of Directors was named and Mike Johnson, a UC Davis water specialist, was contracted to prepare the reports required by the Conditional Waiver. In July, Pacific EcoRisk was contracted to begin sampling and water analysis. The coalition board is also pursuing non-profit, tax exempt status for the organization.

Coalition water monitoring began on four sites in July and continued monthly through September. Sampling will begin again during the winter storm season when orchards are being dormant sprayed. Results of water sampling will be available in a report to the Regional Board in March 2005. Coalition activities are funded by membership dues paid by landowner and operator members.

The coalition schedules periodic technical committee meetings to review monitoring plans and develop implementation strate-

gies for local rivers and drains. (Sign up for meeting notices at [www.esjcoalition.org](http://www.esjcoalition.org).) The coalition is also pursuing state water bond grants to address water quality issues in the region.

Information on the coalition is available from Wayne Zipser, Stanislaus County Farm Bureau at 209-522-7278 or [waynez@stanfarmbureau.org](mailto:waynez@stanfarmbureau.org); or Parry Klassen, Coalition for Urban/Rural Environmental Stewardship at 559-325-9855 or [parryk@comcast.net](mailto:parryk@comcast.net); or at [www.esjcoalition.org](http://www.esjcoalition.org).

Cooperating entities include: Calaveras County Agricultural Commissioner; Coalition for Urban/Rural Environmental Stewardship; Ducks Unlimited; East Merced Resource Conservation District; East Stanislaus Resource Conservation District; Madera County Agricultural Commissioner; Madera County Farm Bureau; Mariposa County Agricultural Commissioner; Mariposa County Farm Bureau; Merced County Agricultural Commissioner; Merced County Farm Bureau; Natural Resources Conservation Service, Madera, Merced, & Stanislaus; Stanislaus County Agricultural Commissioner; Stanislaus County Department of Environmental Resources; Stanislaus County Farm Bureau; Tuolumne County Agricultural Commissioner; Tuolumne County Farm Bureau; and more than 1500 area growers.

## South San Joaquin Valley Organizes Coalitions

**W**ater agencies in the southern San Joaquin Valley have taken the lead to form a coalition to address water quality-related issues of common concern to members. The Southern San Joaquin Valley Water Quality Coalition was formed in early 2002 as the umbrella organization to coordinate activities to preserve and protect water supplies and water quality in the Tulare Lake Basin watershed. The watershed boundaries extend from the San Joaquin River south to the Tehachapi Mountains.

Coalition organizers decided early on to divide the region into four subwatershed groups based on the unique hydrology of the southern valley. Those regions include drainages of the Kings River, Tule River, Kaweah River and Kern River area. Each group has adopted a similar name, i.e. Kings River Subwatershed Water Quality Coalition, Tule River Subwatershed Water Quality Coalition, etc.

Since last winter, coalition organizers have held grower outreach meetings to explain the regulations and inform growers that sign-ups are underway. Grower workshops are being scheduled throughout the upcoming months.

Water monitoring was started in July on all rivers in the watershed, including the

Kings River. In that subwatershed, monitoring costs are being shared by the Kings River Conservation District and Kings River Water Association. Irrigation season monitoring was expected to end in September but will resume after winter storms begin in December or January. Two winter storm events are scheduled to be monitored.

Members of the Coalition include: Kings River Conservation District; Kings River Water Association; Friant Water Users Authority; Kaweah-Delta Water Conservation District; Kaweah and St. Johns Rivers Association; Tule River Association; Kern County Water Agency; Kern Delta Water District; North Kern Water Storage District; Buena Vista Water Storage District; and Navalencia Resource Conservation District.

Each subwatershed is handling membership requirements slightly different, so those individuals interested in joining a water quality coalition need to contact their appropriate subwatershed manager: Kings River, Mike Mendes 559-237-5567; Kaweah River, Mark Larson 559-747-5601; Tule River, Dick Schafer 559-734-1348; Kern River, Lloyd Fryor 661-634-1446.

## Westside Covered by Coalition

**T**he Westside San Joaquin River Watershed Coalition represents landowners on the west side of the San Joaquin River from the Stanislaus River on the north to 10 miles south of Mendota. Irrigated lands total 550,000 acres with approximately 4,000 landowners and 1,500 operators.

The Grassland Drainage Area is included in the coalition region and coordinates a separate monitoring and reporting program. Other federal, state and private managed wetlands in the region are also included in the coalition.

The Westside coalition started its water monitoring program in July at 19 local streams and drains and was to continue with monthly sampling through September. Sampling resumes when winter storm runoff begins. Four wetland area sites will be monitored monthly during the winter. The coalition contracted Pacific EcoRisk to perform the field sampling and water analysis. Final results of the monitoring will be published in a report due to the Regional Board in March 2005.

The Westside coalition outreach activities are coordinated by the San Joaquin Valley Drainage Authority and its member water agencies. Landowners and operators can contact the following entities for coalition sign up information: Del Puerto Water District; Patterson Irrigation District; the San Joaquin River Exchange Contractors Water Authority; Tranquility Irrigation District/Fresno Slough Water District; Twin Oaks Irrigation District; West Stanislaus Irrigation District; Oak Flat Water District; El Solyo Water District; Stevinson Water District; White Lake Mutual Water Company; Lone Tree Mutual Water Company; and Turner Island Water District. Landowners not in a water agency can contact the San Joaquin Valley Drainage Authority for membership information.

## Westlands Water District Coalition

**T**he Westlands Water District Coalition encompasses the Panoche-Silver Creek and the Arroyo Pasajero Creek watersheds of western Fresno County. The coalition, managed by the Westlands Water District, plans to set up monitoring sites where the Panoche-Silver Creek and the Arroyo Pasajero Creek enter and exit coalition boundaries.

Coalition signup efforts have been underway since early summer, with 431,435 acres representing 77% of the total irrigable acres already signed for the group. Coalition representatives are working out the last details with Regional Board staff on the monitoring plans with approval of the plans expected in September or October. The Coalition is also in the process of selecting a laboratory to sample and analyze water collected during upcoming winter storms.

Information on the coalition is available by contacting Thad Bettner at 559-241-6215 or [tbettner@westlandswater.org](mailto:tbettner@westlandswater.org)

# Regional Coalition News

## Sacramento Valley Coalition Formed

More than 200 agricultural and wetlands interests joined forces with local governments in the northern Central Valley to form the Sacramento Valley Water Quality Coalition. Founded in 2002, the coalition is made up of 10 subwatershed groups, each representing a unique geographic region delineated by hydrologic features as well as county boundaries.

The coalition is managed and coordinated by Northern California Water Association, Ducks Unlimited and Coalition for Urban Rural Environmental Stewardship. Working with the 10 subwatershed groups that make up the coalition, the coordinating entities prepared the required Watershed Evaluation Report (WER) and a Monitoring and Reporting Program Plan (MRP).

The WER is a comprehensive watershed assessment of the 21-county coalition region. Using the WER information, the MRP outlines a regional water quality monitoring and reporting program that addresses agricultural runoff and recognizes all beneficial uses in the Sacramento River watershed.

Over the last 12 months, the Coalition's technical experts have worked with the subwatershed groups to ensure that the monitoring plan accurately reflects local conditions and hydrology.

Each of the 10 subwatershed groups has structured its management based on the varying level of involvement by individuals from production agriculture, managed wetlands or local/state agencies. Participants include County Agricultural Commissioners, County Farm Bureaus, water districts and companies, University of California Cooperative Extension Specialists and Farm Advisors, Resource Conservation Districts, the Natural Resource Conservation Service, wetlands managers, local watershed groups, industry organizations, farmers and landowners.

To register with the Coalition and its member subwatersheds, contact the appropriate subwatershed (see list below) based upon your property location. Online registration is available at [cjvp.ducks.org/sacvalleycoalition](http://cjvp.ducks.org/sacvalleycoalition).

## Colusa Basin Landowners Start Program

The Colusa Basin Subwatershed Program (CBSP) was formed in summer 2004 to represent landowners in Glenn and Colusa counties. The CBSP covers irrigated land in the hydrologic region known as the Colusa Basin and is a member of the Sacramento Valley Water Quality Coalition.

In late August, the newly formed group mailed membership information to landowners in the region. Members of the CBSP pay a \$25 membership fee plus 50 cents an acre, due annually. The funding will cover the costs of compliance monitoring in local waterways plus the program's cost share with the Sacramento Valley Water Quality Coalition for scientific analysis, reporting and administrative costs. The program anticipates similar membership costs for 2005 although plans are subject to change based on modifications that could be required by the Water Board.

CBSP plans to monitor five sites in the Colusa Basin sub-watershed beginning this winter with two sites receiving partial funding through the Glenn County Agriculture Department's Surface Water Stewardship Program.

CBSP has retained an accountant to manage the program's data base and membership activities. A technical steering committee made up of local growers plus staff from Glenn and Colusa Agricultural Departments and UC Cooperative Extension was formed to manage program activities.

## Shasta/Tehama Organizes Education Group

Landowners in Shasta and Tehama Counties combined efforts in summer 2004 to form the Shasta-Tehama Water Education Coalition (STWEC). The coalition region covers irrigated farmland in 28 subwatersheds of the northern Sacramento River.

An interim board of directors for STWEC, made up of local growers and supported by water districts and other agricultural leaders, organized the entity to represent the subwatershed region in the Sacramento Valley Water Quality Coalition.

The STWEC board set an initial assessment of \$2 per irrigated acre (minimum \$25)

for landowners to participate in the group and receive STWEC coverage under the conditional waiver. Landowner assessments are intended to cover organizational start-up costs and water monitoring requirements of the Regional Board. Water quality monitoring is scheduled to begin this winter at two sites in the Shasta/Tehama region, Burch and Cow Creek agricultural areas.

In September, STWEC initiated efforts to form a non-profit 501(c) 3 organization. Landowner outreach meetings are being scheduled for the upcoming fall and winter months.

## Yolo Group Covers Three Watersheds

The Yolo County Farm Bureau Subwatershed Program (YCFBSP) was created to represent farmers with irrigated farmland in Yolo County. Three watersheds are included in the coalition region: the lower Colusa Basin Drain, Cache Creek and Putah Creeks.

Yolo County Farm Bureau members took the lead in forming the group in late 2003. In September, program organizers sent out sign-up information to farmers in the region. Member dues for the YCFBSP are set at \$2.00 per acre, with \$1 due October 31, 2004 and the balance on March 1, 2005. Program

managers may need to adjust the second installment based on revisions to costs for monitoring the 2005 irrigation season.

Water monitoring in the watersheds began in June 2003 at three sites and continued through August. Toxicity to test organisms was not reported at any of the sites. Two storm events will also be monitored in winter 2004. The three monitoring sites in the Yolo County Bypass include the Z Drain, Tule Canal at Highway 80 and the Toe Drain. The coalition sampling effort is coordinated with a City of Woodland monitoring program operating at those same sites.

Contact information for other Sacramento Valley subwatershed groups formed to comply with the Irrigated Lands Waiver:

- Sacramento-Amador Subwatershed, Dan Port, 209-274-4351, [dport@volcano.net](mailto:dport@volcano.net);
- Colusa Basin, Anjanette Martin, 530-934-3911;
- Butte-Yuba-Sutter Subwatershed, Steve Danna, 530-742-6722, [sdanna@dannaanddanna.com](mailto:sdanna@dannaanddanna.com);
- El Dorado Subwatershed, Steve Burton, 530-621-5520, [Steveb@atasteofeldorado.com](mailto:Steveb@atasteofeldorado.com);
- Lake-Napa Subwatershed, Chuck March, 808-263-0911, [lcfb@pacific.net](mailto:lcfb@pacific.net);
- Placer North Sacramento Subwatershed, Kirk Scilacci, 916-645-8791, [scilacci10@msn.com](mailto:scilacci10@msn.com);
- Pit River Subwatershed, Craig Macarthur, 530-941-9357, [mcarthur@citolink.net](mailto:mcarthur@citolink.net);
- Upper Feather Subwatershed, Cindy Noble, 530-836-1014, [nobull@psln.com](mailto:nobull@psln.com);
- Shasta-Tehama Subwatershed, Vieve Swearingen, 530-347-6637, [ccwg@shasta.com](mailto:ccwg@shasta.com);
- Solano-Yolo Subwatershed, John Currey, 707-678-1655 Ext. 105, [john.currey@ca.usda.gov](mailto:john.currey@ca.usda.gov).





## Watershed Coalition News Launched

Welcome to the first edition of *Watershed Coalition News*. This newsletter is dedicated to bringing information to Central Valley agriculture about the newly formed watershed coalitions, locally based organizations whose primary goal is to comply with the Irrigated Lands Waiver. WCN is available via email, postal or online at [www.curesworks.org](http://www.curesworks.org). Send editorial submissions or questions to [parryk@comcast.net](mailto:parryk@comcast.net).

## Committees Review Waiver Issues

As with any new program, there are no shortage of questions and issues being raised about the new Irrigated Lands Conditional Waiver. Two new committees have been formed this summer by the Regional Water Board in an attempt to get feedback and answers to those questions.

The Program Advisory Committee (PAC) held its first two meetings in June and July in Sacramento and Modesto. Both meetings were facilitated by Regional Water Board members along with staff from the State Water Resources Control Board. In attendance were representatives from the watershed coalitions, agricultural and irrigation interests, and environmental groups.

The meetings provide a forum to discuss progress of the watershed coalitions, raise concerns over difficulties with the program and suggest ways to improve the program. While the meetings are open to the public, the Regional Board is encouraging watershed coalitions to assign spokespersons to represent each group.

The next Program Advisory Committee meeting is scheduled for September 27 at the Stanislaus Agricultural Center in Modesto.

The Technical Issues Committee (TIC) identifies technical issues and refines these issues into questions that, if necessary, will be referred to an External Scientific Review Panel. The panel then makes recommendations to the Regional Board. The first meeting of the TIC is scheduled for October 7.

## Board Survey to Gauge Compliance

Are you covered or not? That is question on the minds of the Regional Water Board as they prepare to mail hundreds of questionnaires to farmers throughout the Central Valley.

The "Program Query" will be sent to selected farmers asking if their farm's discharges are covered by membership in a coalition, individual waiver or other means. Scheduled to be mailed in Fall 2004, the survey is seen as a "critical first step in the non-filer enforcement strategy," says the Regional Water Board in a staff report for its September 2004 meeting.

Farmers in the survey will be selected based on a priority list of counties and coalitions. Shortly after the initial mailing, follow-up contact will be made with those who do not respond to the survey.

## Brochure on Irrigated Lands Reg

The Regional Water Board has released a brochure detailing requirements for the new regulations on farm runoff. *Irrigated Lands Waiver* explains that farmers have three options in complying with the law: join a coalition group; file for an individual discharger conditional waiver; or file a report of waste discharge. According to the brochure, the coalition group waiver and the individual discharger waiver require owners or operators of irrigated lands to manage their operations so they do not cause or contribute to surface water pollution. Conditions in the waiver require water quality monitoring, implementation of management practices to address water quality problems and reporting to the Regional Board. The Irrigated Lands Waiver brochure is available at most County Agricultural Commissioner's offices, from the watershed coalitions or by contacting the Regional Board at 916-464-3291.

### Central Valley GIS Watershed Map

Order your wall-poster size map of the Central Valley showing color GIS mapping of crops and water monitoring sites funded by the Central Valley Coalitions and the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board. The 35" x 45" maps are available for \$30 each at [www.curesworks.org](http://www.curesworks.org) or by mailing a check or money order to CURES Maps, 1508 Tollhouse Rd, Suite D, Clovis, CA 93611.



In each issue of *Watershed Coalition News*, we ask experts to provide insight on Frequently Asked Questions related to agricultural water quality. In this issue, we've excerpted from the irrigated lands section of the Regional Water Board website [www.swrcb.ca.gov/~rwqcb5/](http://www.swrcb.ca.gov/~rwqcb5/).

### Who is a discharger?

A discharger is any person who releases waste that could affect the quality of waters of the state. "Persons" may include individuals, corporations, cities and special districts. A discharger can be the owner of property or a tenant farmer.

### What is a "discharge"?

A discharge occurs whenever water that contains waste leaves your property, if it could ultimately enter surface waters. A discharge occurs whether the wastewater directly enters surface waters from your property, flows over other lands first, or enters a drain. There is no minimum amount or frequency of discharge – if any waste is in water that leaves the property and can enter and affect water quality, coverage under the waiver or a permit is required.

### What is "waste"?

Waste is defined in the California Water Code to include any and all waste substances. Waste includes, but is not limited to, soil, salts, trace elements (e.g. selenium), pesticides or fertilizers.

### Who must apply for waiver or permit coverage?

The California Water code requires that "any person discharging waste" must obtain coverage under a waiver or permit if the discharge "could affect the quality of waters of the state." If you own or operate irrigated lands and water drains from your property, you are a discharger and must be covered by the waiver or by a waste discharge permit. This water may be released as irrigation return flows, drain water, tail water or storm water.

# Watershed Coalition

## **Central Valley Watershed Coalitions Contact Information**

### **Sacramento Valley**

*Sacramento Valley Water Quality Coalition*  
(also Sacramento Valley subwatershed contacts)

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916- 442-8333  
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Mark Biddelcomb  
Ducks Unlimited  
916-852-2000  
[www.ducksunlimited.org](http://www.ducksunlimited.org)

### *California Rice Commission*

Tim Johnson  
916-442-8333  
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### **San Joaquin Valley & Delta**

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### *Root Creek Water District*

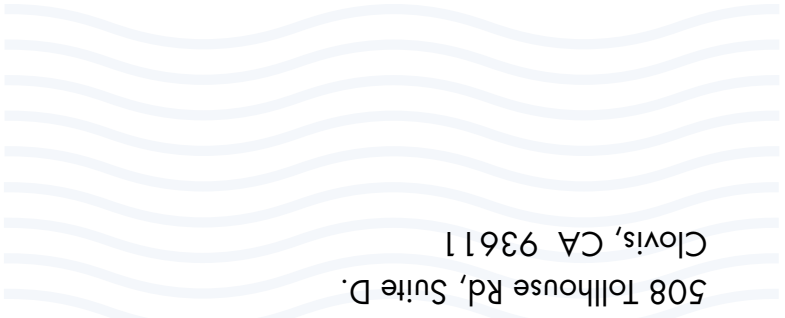
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