

# Watershed Coalition

## News

INFORMATION FOR CENTRAL VALLEY AGRICULTURE

WINTER 2004



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## State Fees Announced for 2005

The State Water Resources Control Board told watershed coalition managers in late November that landowner fees to fund “staff resources” to implement the Irrigated Lands Waiver would likely be assessed by late 2005.

State law authorizes the State Water Board to collect fees to cover staff needed to implement the Conditional Waiver program in the state. In the 2004-05 State budget, \$3.1 million is being requested for 22.3 new positions to manage the Irrigated Lands Waiver programs statewide. Thirteen of those positions are for the Central Valley waiver program. The new fees on irrigated lands would cover program costs in 2005-06 and subsequent years.

State Water Board officials are proposing fees for all irrigated lands in the state at \$100

per landowner plus 15 or 25 cents per acre. The lower per-acre fee would be for landowners who belong to watershed groups (if the coalition collects the fee for the state), and the 25 cents per acre is for landowners who are not in a coalition. The State Board estimates that collecting fees from an estimated 7 million irrigated acres in California would raise \$1.9 million the first year.

State Water Board officials emphasize that the fee schedule and collection scheme are draft proposals only and any plan must first be reviewed at Water Board public hearings and then be approved by the Board (likely at its May 2005 meeting). Authority for the fees comes from SB 390, passed in October 1999, which requires the State Water Board to cover waiver program costs with fees collected from program users.

## Preliminary Monitoring Results In

Watershed coalition managers are optimistic that preliminary results from Summer 2004 water monitoring have not revealed widespread problems in Central Valley agricultural drains.

Watershed coalitions formed in response to the Irrigated Lands Waiver were required to begin sampling streams, sloughs and canals on July 1, 2004. Each coalition is charged by the regulations to “characterize agricultural drainage” then develop plans using best management practices (BMPs) to solve problems found during monitoring.

More than 40 Central Valley sites were monitored by coalitions between July and September, analyzing for toxicity to test organisms and exceedances of water quality standards. A total of 400 individual samples were taken from waterways with irrigation runoff. An informal survey of watershed managers who had received preliminary laboratory results by late November showed fewer than 10 samples with toxicity to test organisms or exceedances of water standards.

In each case where tests revealed toxicity, coalition managers sent “Communications

Reports” to Water Board staff — as required by the waiver — describing the testing site location and constituents found in the sample. Coalitions are required to provide final test results and supporting data to the Regional Water Board by April 1, 2005.

In water monitoring performed in Summer 2004 by the Regional Water Board in its Phase II program, a September staff report said toxicity was found in four out of 84 samples taken in July and August. Preliminary results are due to be released in late December.

Final results from Regional Board monitoring performed in Summer 2003 were released in early November. Of 203 samples taken at 25 sites between Modesto and Woodland, toxicity to test organisms was found in 10 samples (4.9%).

The next round of coalition monitoring begins in January. Coalitions are required to sample two “storm events” after orchard dormant sprays begin in their regions. Irrigation season monitoring resumes again in April or May 2005 with most coalitions expecting to add more monitoring sites.

## Coalition Formed to Cover Butte-Yuba-Sutter Counties

Eastern Sacramento Valley growers have joined forces to form the Butte-Yuba-Sutter Water Quality Coalition, one of 10 subwatershed groups organized in Sacramento Valley to assist landowners and operators with meeting monitoring and reporting requirements of the Irrigated Lands Waiver.

Managed by a nine-member board of trustees - three from each county - the coalition initially set membership dues at \$50 annually plus 50 cents per acre. Those dues doubled after the November 30 sign-up deadline passed. As of early November, coalition leaders reported only about half the region's 429,000 acres had been

enrolled. The coalition has identified up to 2,500 farmers and wildlife land managers for potential membership in Butte, Yuba and Sutter counties.

Membership dues will be used to fund water quality monitoring and reporting requirements of the new regulations. All growers who join the coalition will be considered in compliance with the Regional Water Board's waiver requirements. Those who do not join a coalition can either apply for an individual discharge waiver or submit an application for a Report of Waste Discharge, which are more restrictive and expensive than joining a coalition.

## Glenn County Grant Helps Promote BMPs

A program to showcase orchard Best Management Practices (BMPs) in Glenn County has received state funding for the next three years. The Glenn County Department of Agriculture and its Surface Water Stewardship Program received a grant from the CALFED Watershed Program to set up demonstration orchards, host field days and farm tours and publish technical information on BMPs. The BMPs used on demonstration farms are designed to reduce orchard runoff of pesticides, nutrients and sediment.

The Glenn County Surface Water Stewardship program was developed to implement a water quality and pesticide management education program for the numerous sub-watersheds within Glenn County. Past monitoring of local waterways by local and state agencies has shown that

storm water runoff attributed to orchards can result in elevated concentrations of pesticides in surface waters. Organophosphate pesticides such as diazinon, chlorpyrifos, methidathion, and malathion are of particular concern because of their applications to dormant orchards.

This latest project will demonstrate practical means for farmers to control or mitigate orchard runoff. Data collected from the demonstration orchards will also aid in answering questions on BMPs and the efficacy of those practices. Monitoring water quality at project sites and at locations downstream of the sites will provide a baseline assessment of current conditions of agricultural discharge. For information on the program, contact Deputy Agricultural Commissioner Rey Lopez at 530-934-6501 or [agcommr@countyofglenn.net](mailto:agcommr@countyofglenn.net).

## Grant Funds Grass Filter Strip Installation

Corn and soybean growers in the Midwest have known for years the benefits of maintaining vegetation on field edges - either planted or native - to prevent storm runoff from eroding farmland and carrying fertilizers and herbicides into waterways. Called vegetative filter strips, these grassy areas slow storm runoff and act as natural sediment traps.

An effort is underway in eastern Sacramento Valley to see if vegetation planted between orchards and waterways can reduce movement of sediment and insecticides into canals and streams. Organized by the Coalition for Urban/Rural Environmental Stewardship (CURES) and funded through a State Water Board grant, the project's goal is to assist growers in planting filter strips around hundreds of acres of orchards in the region.

The project, started in November 2004, is actively seeking orchard growers of almonds, peaches and prunes who are interested in installing grass filter strips on the edges of orchards where storm runoff can potentially reach streams, sloughs or canals.

CURES will make available at no cost a no-till drill and perennial grass seed mix. Growers need only provide a tractor (35 hp minimum), driver and place to plant the grasses (orchard border areas at least 8 feet wide).

The project's geographic area includes the orchard region bounded by Biggs (north), Yuba City (south), the Sierra Nevadas (east) and the Sutter Buttes (west). To schedule use of the seed drill, contact Doug West at 530-677-6886 or [madsdoug@aol.com](mailto:madsdoug@aol.com).

## Membership Grows in Shasta/Tehama Group

Shasta and Tehama County landowners have formed the Shasta Tehama Water Education Coalition (STWEC) to provide local farmers and ranchers a low-cost approach to complying with the Irrigated Land Waiver. The coalition, which has membership dues of \$2 an acre, has nearly 1,500 landowners who have joined to date.

STWEC was organized by local landowners, agricultural scientists and farm advisors in conjunction with members of the Sacramento Valley Water Quality Coalition. As part of the reporting requirements for the waiver, 29 drainages with irrigated acreage have been identified in Shasta and Tehama counties.

Four water monitoring sites in the two-county region have been selected based on land use mapping, the types of agricultural production systems and their potential risk to surface water quality. STWEC is also developing a plan to assist landowners in responding if agricultural practices are determined to affect surface water quality.

## Dried Plum Board Funds BMP Research

The California Dried Plum Board research on aphid control shows that alternate year dormant sprays can be an effective pest control strategy. Key to success of the practice is field scouting during the summer for aphid and secondary pests such as scale to determine if populations are present in economic numbers.

This strategy for dormant pest management is part of Integrated Prune Farming Practices (IPFP), an umbrella for a state-wide dried plum project aimed at environmentally sensitive cultural programs. IPFP relies on reduced risk practices for pest control, irrigation and tree nutrition that incorporate alternatives to dormant sprays for control of aphids, scale, peach twig borer and mite eggs.

Research supported by the Dried Plum Board and IPFP shows that overwintering pests can often be controlled with alternative year dormant sprays or reduced rates of dormant season insecticides. Both practices help reduce the potential for pesticide runoff into waterways.

The new approaches are highlighted in Integrated Prune Farming Practices Decision Guide, an illustrated booklet showing key pests of dried plums. Limited supplies are available through UC Cooperative Extension offices for \$30.

## Delta Coalition Forms

**W**ater agencies and farm groups have joined forces to form the San Joaquin and Delta Water Quality Coalition. The coalition's goal is to help farmers and landowners with irrigated land in San Joaquin County and eastern Contra Costa and Alameda counties comply with requirements of the Irrigated Lands Waiver.

Coalition activities are coordinated by the San Joaquin County Resource Conservation District in cooperation with the Contra Costa Resource Conservation District; San Joaquin and Contra Costa county water and irrigation districts; Delta water agencies; county farm bureaus; county agricultural commissioners, University of California Cooperative Extension Service; Ducks Unlimited; and the Natural Resource Conservation Service.

More than 16,000 landowners with 545,000 acres operate in the coalition area,

including 520,000 acres in San Joaquin County and 25,000 acres in Contra Costa County. To date, more than 77 percent of the acres have been enrolled in the Delta coalition. Water monitoring was performed in Summer 2004 on six sites, although additional sites will be added before monitoring resumes in Summer 2005.

Members are assessed membership dues based on total acreage of each parcel within the coalition boundaries at a rate of \$1 per acre to cover the cost of monitoring and reporting requirements. Landowners with parcels less than 20 acres are charged \$20 to become members. The coalition has also applied for an \$800,000 grant to help support its monitoring efforts. Information on the Delta Coalition is available by contacting John Meek at 209-333-8146 or [jmeek@jmeek.com](mailto:jmeek@jmeek.com).

## Westside Coalition Initiates Monitoring

**T**he Westside San Joaquin River Watershed Coalition was the first group in the Central Valley to receive Regional Board approval for its monitoring plan in Summer 2004. The Westside 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 4,000 landowners and 1,500 operators.

The Westside Coalition conducted its first official water sampling in early July on 19 locations throughout the watershed area. John Relvas with Central California Irrigation District (CCID) is charged with managing sample collection at nine sites located in the southern end of the Coalition's area stretching from Newman to Dos Palos. In the northern region of the coalition, John Hansen with Del Puerto Water District oversees sample collection at an additional 10 sites between Newman and Westley.

Through October 2004 the Westside coalition had performed 545 field measurements; 1496 different pesticide constituents; 298 general physical and drinking water parameters; 217 water toxicity analyses; and 14 sediment toxicity analyses.

During the summer, the coalition also performed four follow-up water toxicity

dilution analyses and one water toxicity TIE (Toxicity Identification Evaluation). All toxic events affected the water flea (*Ceriodaphnia dubia*). In most cases, the toxic event could be attributed to a detected pesticide(s), though in some cases, no cause was apparent.

Out of the 1496 pesticide analyses performed, only 88 (about 6%) indicated a measurable result. Of these, only 17 (about 1%) could be attributed to a toxic event. Of the 14 sediment toxicity analyses performed, 4 indicated some toxic effect – 2 affecting the growth parameter, and 2 affecting the survival parameter. One of these samples is currently undergoing a TIE by the CVRWQCB.

Significant progress is also being made with landowner signups in the coalition region. CCID officials report that landowners and operator signup has been steady in its area since the coalition was formed. As of October, nearly 90 percent of landowners within CCID, representing a total of 134,580 acres, had joined the Westside Coalition. Likewise, 94 percent of farm operators representing 140,000 acres had joined. The Westside Coalition is developing BMP's and working with local water agencies and cities, growers and county ag commissioners to deal with any water quality issues.

## Grant Supports Westside BMP Compilation

**A** project to develop economic information on farming practices to protect local waterways in the Orestimba Creek watershed has been funded by a two-year, \$269,000 grant from the CALFED Drinking Water Program. The grant will pay for studies and grower outreach on Best Management Practices (BMPs) for irrigated agriculture in the watershed.

The project is being managed by the Coalition for Urban/Rural Environmental Stewardship (CURES), in cooperation with the California Water Institute at California State University, Fresno, Ducks Unlimited and the West Stanislaus Resource Conservation District.

The goal of the project is to develop detailed economic information on BMPs and to assist in promoting commercial farming operations' voluntary use of these BMPs to reduce or eliminate pesticide, nutrient and other contaminant loads carried by irrigation return flows and storm water into the Orestimba Creek and subsequently the San Joaquin River.

Project collaborators will work closely on these activities with the Westside San Joaquin River Watershed Coalition and its local members, the Central California Irrigation District and Del Puerto Water District.

Central to the project is compiling information on BMPs used in the Orestimba Creek watershed for reducing sediment, pesticide and nutrient runoff. Installation and maintenance costs will also be compiled and made available to farmers in the region.

## TID Receives Grant For Runoff Controls

**T**he Turlock Irrigation District has received grant funding from the State Water Board to reimburse growers for up to 50 percent of the cost to install control structures on field drains connected to district canals. Control measures eligible for cost share funding include installing stop gates or other structures to keep water in fields.

Funding is limited to lands within the Turlock Irrigation District boundaries and is available on a first-come, first-served basis. All modifications funded through the program must be completed by February 2006. Program information is available from Justin Small (209-883-8250) or Felipe Juarez (209-883-8215).

## Technical Committee Takes On Waiver Issues

The Regional Water Board's newly formed Technical Issues Committee (TIC) for the Irrigated Lands Waiver held its first meeting October 7 and watershed coalition organizers say the dialogue was civil and constructive.

The TIC was formed to help define technical issues for designing and implementing water monitoring programs required under the conditional waiver. The committee is made up of two Regional Board members along with experts from irrigated agriculture, water districts, government agencies and the environmental community.

At its October meeting, the TIC identified key issues to be addressed by the committee:

- 1) What questions are being answered with the water monitoring data and how will data be interpreted;
- 2) How will Constituent of Concern thresholds (water quality standards) that have not been developed be addressed;
- 3) What are the triggers for moving to the next phase of the process (including toxicity testing and chemical measurements);
- 4) What sampling containers can ensure accurate analysis for various organic or metal constituents;
- 5) How will mass balance issues, such as contribution of pesticides resulting from rainfall, be addressed;
- 6) How will sediment related issues be addressed;
- 7) How can bioassessments be incorporated into future monitoring efforts to provide a benchmark for determining the status of instream biological communities.

TIC members agreed to form four focus groups to more narrowly address issues. The four focus groups will cover bioassessments, triggers, mass balance issues and sediment. Each focus group will be coordinated by a Regional Board staff member. A committee meeting has been set for January to address bioassessments and triggers.

### Map of Central Valley Monitoring Sites

Order a 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 Regional Water Board. The 25" x 45" map is available for \$30 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.

## Pyrethroid Makers Initiate Stewardship Campaign

Concerns over detections of pyrethroids in Central Valley farm runoff have lead two makers of the widely used insecticides to expand a grower and crop advisor stewardship campaign for the products. The program is jointly sponsored by Bayer CropScience and Syngenta Crop Protection through a grant to the Coalition for Urban/Rural Environmental Stewardship (CURES).

The campaign will focus on promoting and developing Best Management Practices (BMPs) for pyrethroids and protection of surface water. Outreach to growers will include two BMP publications, one for orchard crops, a second for field and row crops, presentations at continuing education courses, and a pyrethroid information website.

Funding will also support adding pyrethroids to BMP runoff studies for diazinon and chlorpyrifos in the Sacramento and San Joaquin Valleys. The studies, funded through State Water Board grants and managed by CURES, focus on the impact of using select BMPs for dormant orchard sprays and irrigation runoff management.

## Coastal Landowners Under New Waiver

Irrigated farm landowners on the California Central Coast face a conditional waiver program more strict than the Central Valley version. Passed in July 2004, the Region 3 Irrigated Lands Waiver requires all landowners with irrigated crops to sign up by January 1, 2005 and prepare individual farm management plans to be in compliance. Region 3 encompasses irrigated lands from Santa Cruz south to Santa Barbara.

Landowners or operators are also required to implement Best Management Practices as outlined in their farm plan and participate in a water monitoring program. Landowners have two options: sign up for individual monitoring, following Water Board requirements, or participate with coalitions who implement region-wide monitoring. Monitoring of Central Coast waterways is scheduled to begin in 2005. For information contact the central coast regional office at 805-549-3147 or <http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/centralcoast/index.htm>

In *Watershed Coalition News*, we ask experts to answer Frequently Asked Questions related to agricultural water quality. Retired farmer Al Brizard, a board member of the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board, offers his opinion on enforcement options

### What enforcement actions can the Regional Water Board take against those not complying with the Irrigated Lands Waiver?

The Clean Water Act and the Porter-Cologne Act requires anyone who is causing, or threatens to cause, a discharge of waste to the "Waters of the State" to report this to the Regional Board. The irrigated lands conditional waiver puts aside this requirement to report discharges if a discharger either a) joins a coalition group, which files a group waiver, or b) files an individual waiver. A discharger may also file a report of waste discharge and apply for a permit to discharge.

The Regional Board staff has several enforcement actions, both informal and formal, that could be taken if someone ignores the laws on discharges and does not file for a waiver or a permit.

#### Informal Actions:

- Have verbal, informal consultation with discharger;
- Issue an informal letter to the discharger;
- Issue a Notice of Violation (highest level of informal enforcement action).

#### Formal Legal Actions:

- Issue a "California Water Code 13267" letter, requesting more information;
- Issue a Cleanup and Abatement Order;
- Issue a Cease and Desist Order;
- Issue an Administrative Civil Liability or monetary penalty of up to \$1,000 for each day of violation (there is no maximum penalty).

Which action the Regional Board staff takes depends on how extensive and/or serious is the violation of the Report of Waste Discharge. If a grower is covered by a waiver, they are not required to file this report.

Currently, the Regional Board staff is requesting pesticide permit holder lists from counties. Letters of inquiry will be sent to permit holders to determine who has a group waiver membership. Pesticide permit holders who irrigate and do not have a waiver or a permit may be subject to one of the informal or formal enforcement actions.

As resources allow, Regional Board staff may also compare lists of parcel holders in agricultural zones to existing Regional Board data to see who may be irrigating without a waiver or a discharge permit. These people may also be subject to enforcement actions.

# Watershed Coalition

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

### **Sacramento Valley**

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

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### *Root Creek Water District*

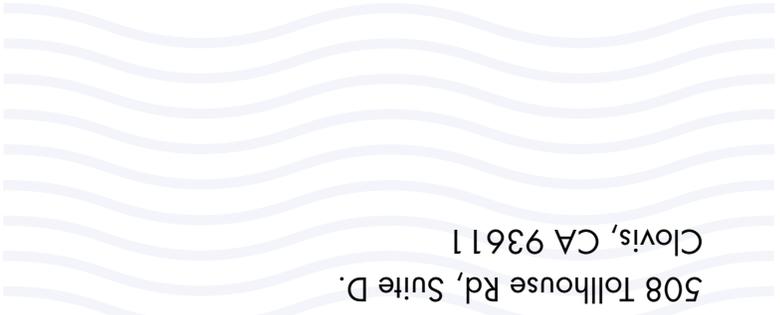
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