

# Watershed Coalition

## News

INFORMATION FOR CENTRAL VALLEY AGRICULTURE

SPECIAL BMP ISSUE

*This special issue of Watershed Coalition News highlights the steps coalitions groups and individual growers are taking to implement components of the Irrigated Lands Program. The focus is on how Best Management Practices (BMPs) can be used to address farm runoff into streams and rivers.*

## Watershed Coalitions Begin BMP Outreach Efforts

**E**ight out of nine Central Valley Watershed Coalitions (coalition groups) met the April 1 deadline to turn in reports on their water monitoring activities to the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board (Water Board). Some reports measured over six inches thick: page after page of laboratory test results, paid for by thousands of watershed coalition members in the Central Valley.

The April 1 reports were the first significant documents delivered by the coalition groups to the agency responsible for enforcing California Water Code and the Irrigated Lands Waiver. Coalition groups got a first glimpse of how those reports are being perceived by Water Board officials in a report to a joint meeting of the State and Regional Water Boards on June 23, 2005.

Water board staff used the following statement in all but one of their individual coalition assessments: "Initial review of the data indicates there are impacts to water quality in the (coalition) area and follow-up monitoring to identify sources and/or improvements in management practices will need to be considered."

Most coalition groups have already begun efforts to respond to monitoring results that were generally positive but did indicate problems in certain areas. Where specific pesticides, sediment or pH problems are detected, coalition groups are organizing outreach efforts for this fall and winter 2005-2006 to review results and discuss possible actions.

The Sacramento Valley Water Quality Coalition (SVWQC) shares a similar approach with other coalitions in how it will address these "problems." Like the South San Joaquin Water Quality Coalition, the SVWQC formed subwatershed groups, 10 in all, to provide a field-level connection to growers across their region.

The subwatershed groups have created individual entities or partnered with existing organizations to collect membership dues from participants and pay for local water monitoring. The SVWQC started a Management Practices Outreach Committee, a group that will help

guide implementation of management practices in the region, relying on the expertise of growers, county agricultural commissioners, commodity group representatives, pest control advisors, cooperative extension specialists and farm advisors, resource conservation districts, county farm bureaus and other Coalition members throughout the region.

Once monitoring data is reported at the sub-watershed level, outreach programs will target the identified problem on a broad scale through BMP advisories for specific pesticides or focused workshops in the off-season. Moving attention to upstream areas, which could eventually lead to specific fields or growers, would only be needed should monitoring indicate a problematic trend.

The East San Joaquin Water Quality Coalition (ESJWQC) has a response plan in the event monitoring shows toxicity or exceedances of water quality objectives. The ESJWQC will look for potential sources by examining Pesticide Use Reports and cropping patterns in the upstream subwatershed that drains into the affected site. When a sub area is identified, the ESJWQC will collect cropping information and survey growers about BMPs used by landowners within the coalition region.

If exceedances are detected, upstream landowners will be contacted and informed of the water quality problem, with BMPs recommended for those crops that have the best potential to mitigate the problem.

In a series of informational meetings held in Spring 2005, growers in the ESJWQC region heard about BMPs useful for both irrigation and dormant orchard spray runoff. While coalition monitoring did not show significant problems from these sources, Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs) are currently being adopted in the region to address insecticides carried from fields by these routes. Growers heard about pesticide label changes in the works and BMPs with the potential to address the TMDLs.



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**EDITOR:**  
Parry Klassen [parryk@comcast.net](mailto:parryk@comcast.net)



# Coalition Approach To Water Quality

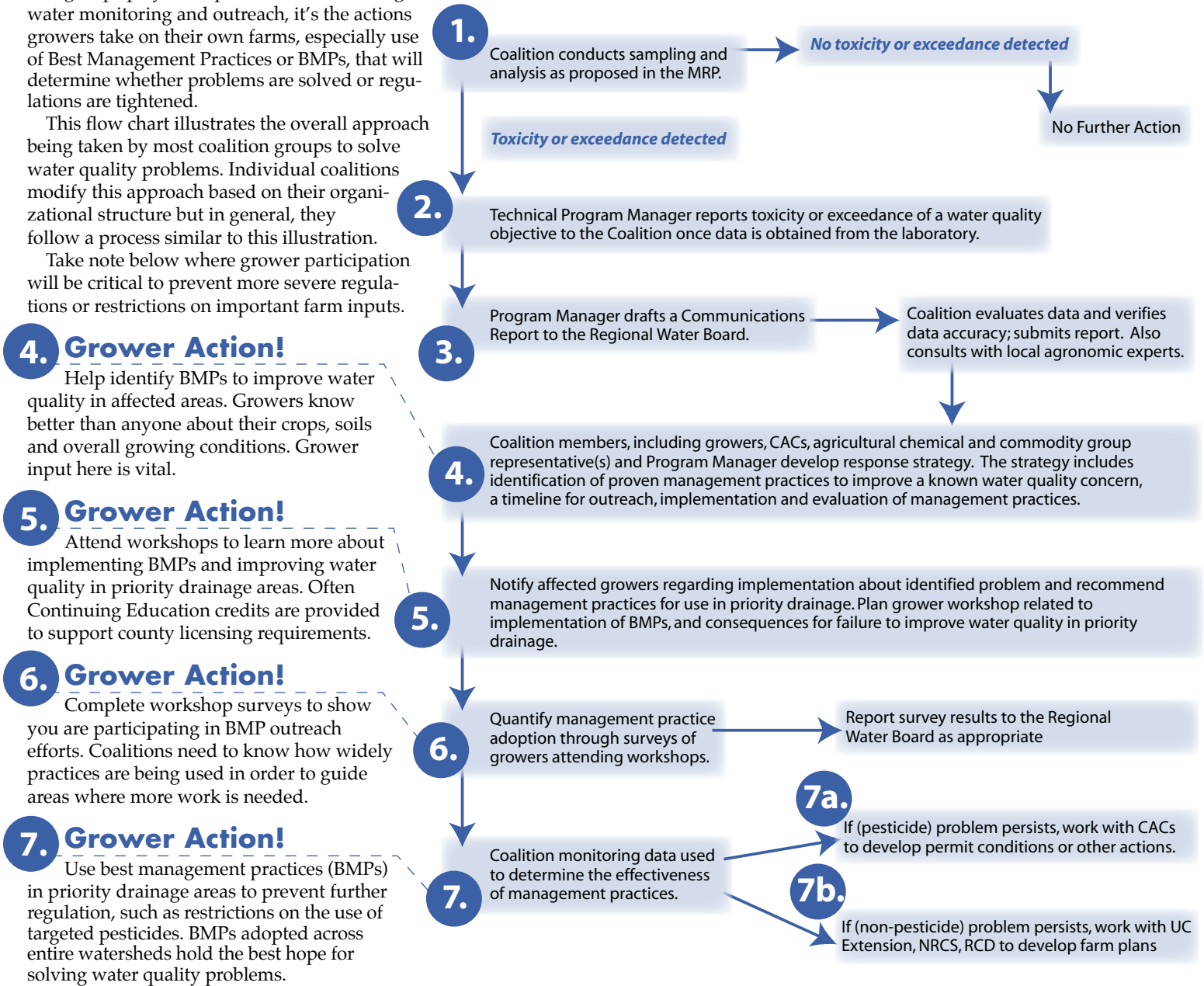
## Growers Play Key Role in Problem Solving

Grower action is key in solving water quality problems caused by runoff of farm inputs and sediment. While coalition groups play an important role facilitating water monitoring and outreach, it's the actions growers take on their own farms, especially use of Best Management Practices or BMPs, that will determine whether problems are solved or regulations are tightened.

This flow chart illustrates the overall approach being taken by most coalition groups to solve water quality problems. Individual coalitions modify this approach based on their organizational structure but in general, they follow a process similar to this illustration.

Take note below where grower participation will be critical to prevent more severe regulations or restrictions on important farm inputs.

### Coalition Response Strategy



### 4. Grower Action!

Help identify BMPs to improve water quality in affected areas. Growers know better than anyone about their crops, soils and overall growing conditions. Grower input here is vital.

### 5. Grower Action!

Attend workshops to learn more about implementing BMPs and improving water quality in priority drainage areas. Often Continuing Education credits are provided to support county licensing requirements.

### 6. Grower Action!

Complete workshop surveys to show you are participating in BMP outreach efforts. Coalitions need to know how widely practices are being used in order to guide areas where more work is needed.

### 7. Grower Action!

Use best management practices (BMPs) in priority drainage areas to prevent further regulation, such as restrictions on the use of targeted pesticides. BMPs adopted across entire watersheds hold the best hope for solving water quality problems.

## Coalitions Report Increased Grower Participation

The Regional Board reports that grower participation in Coalition Groups varies, but has increased in most areas. Here is a breakdown of participation levels according to the Regional Boards' June Information Report:

• The Westside San Joaquin River Watershed Coalition has 87 percent participation in its 334,000 acres;

- The 4.4 million acre Southern San Joaquin Valley Water Quality Coalition has 70 percent participation;
- The San Joaquin County and Delta Coalition has 85 percent participation of its 545,000 acres;
- Westlands Water District has 75 percent of its 570,000 acres enrolled;
- The Sacramento Valley Water Quality Coalition has 60 percent of its 2.1 million acres participating; and

- Root Creek Water District has 70 percent participation in its 26,000 acres.
- The California Rice Commission has automatically enrolled 100 percent of its 500,000 acres. Participation in Goose Lake Coalition Group and East San Joaquin Water Quality Coalition is still to be determined although recent estimates place the latter group's participation level at 60% in its 1 million acre region.

### **Groundwater May Be Added to Waiver**

Discharges to groundwater may soon be included in the definition of “discharger” for the conditional waiver. At the August 5 meeting of the Regional Water Board, Chairman Bob Schneider instructed staff to begin investigating how groundwater discharges might be added to the conditional waiver program.

In a letter to staff, Schneider said not having groundwater included has created confusion over who is a discharger, particularly in the San Joaquin Valley where sandy loam soils are common. Some farmers have asserted that they have no surface runoff from either their irrigation water or from surface water and that all water percolates into the soil. Thus, they are not dischargers under the current Irrigated Lands Conditional Waiver Program, he wrote.

Schneider said that under Porter-Cologne, the state law governing water quality, they are dischargers to groundwater and it is a responsibility of this Board to address this issue.

Schneider asked for a plan on the advantages and disadvantages of various options, together with a recommendation on how best to proceed. The first report is expected at the Board’s September meeting.

### **“Low Threat” Conditional Waiver Considered**

The Regional Board has begun efforts to develop a “Low Threat” or diminimus conditional waiver to more effectively address impacts from small growers or regions where water quality impacts are minimal.

Board staff held several meetings in summer 2005 with small and rural growers to discuss ideas and issues that should be considered in defining a Low Threat conditional waiver. A draft may be circulated for public comment by Fall 2005 and could go to public hearing by the end of 2005.

### **Conditional Waiver Extension Likely**

The Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board is proposing extension of the Irrigated Lands Waiver to July 1, 2007. The current program is set to expire on December 31, 2005.

Regional Board staff met with coalition groups and others in separate meetings in June and July to discuss the extension. Several coalition groups are proposing the waiver be extended by five years. Public comment is also being sought on the extension in time for a Water Board discussion at its September 15-16 meeting. During the public comment period, Regional Board staff plan to conduct public outreach throughout the Central Valley to explain the proposed changes and get feedback on a revised Irrigated Lands Waiver program.

The Board hopes the extension will provide coalition groups more time to address long-term funding for coalition activities, increase grower participation, refine water quality monitoring activities, identify management practices to protect water quality and implement Phase II monitoring.

Changes to the Irrigated Lands Program being proposed in the extension include clarification on how water quality exceedances will be handled; methods and frequency for monitoring; and revised language on reporting requirements for watershed evaluations.

### **DPR Proposes Dormant Spray Regulations**

The Department of Pesticide Regulation is proposing new regulations on dormant spray applications intended to limit or eliminate drift of dormant spray insecticides into surface water in the San Joaquin and Sacramento River watersheds where beneficial uses, such as aquatic life, may be affected. The new regulations, which could be in place by this winter, require use of specific Best Management Practices (BMPs) when conventional insecticides are used.

The proposed regulations would, among other things, restrict how, when and what dormant sprays are applied to orchards to control in-season pests. Proposed restrictions include: a) limit sprays to dormant oil, spinosad or Bts; b) apply insecticides only to hydrologically isolated sites that will not produce runoff capable of entering surface waters; or c) apply only where runoff is diverted or con-

tained and held for 72 hours before being released into a sensitive aquatic site.

If those conditions cannot be met by an orchard grower, the new regulations establish further restrictions on how traditional dormant sprays (using insecticides other than listed in “a” above) are applied, including a required written recommendation by a PCA; a 100-foot buffer zone between aquatic sites and the orchard; and restrictions on the timing of applications based on weather, climate and field conditions.

Written comments on the proposed regulations were due August 1 and no public hearing has yet been scheduled.

### **Dormant Oil Promising in Prunes**

Oil at bloom provides dormant spray alternative for plum aphids. Recent research has shown that two oil sprays during bloom provide good, season-long control of leaf curl plum aphid and mealy plum aphid.

According to Franz Niederholzer, UC farm advisor in Sutter and Yuba counties, retired UC Farm Advisor Bill Olson in 2004 sprayed four gallons of oil in 100 gallons of water per acre at green bud and again 10 days later at full bloom and got adequate control of leaf curl plum aphid. In 2005, Niederholzer applied the same sprays (4 gallons of oil in 100 gallons of water at green bud and 10 days later) and got excellent control of mealy plum aphid and adequate control of leaf curl plum aphid.

Using a bee-safe, in-season insecticide (Bt, Intrepid®, or Dimilin®; consult your PCA) can provide added control of peach twig borer and oblique banded leaf roller. Oil sprays at bloom could be a cost saving replacement to traditional dormant sprays for aphid and scale control, Niederholzer says, by piggybacking aphid control onto fungicide or PTB and OLR sprays. The oil also works as a spreader for bloom fungicide sprays.

Applications should be made at tractor speeds of no more than 1.5 mph to guarantee good coverage. Niederholzer reports seeing the program fail when tractor speed averaged 3.3 mph.

According to Niederholzer, the oil bloom sprays could save dried plum growers \$11 to \$16 per acre in application costs compared to standard dormant sprays.

# Watershed Coalition

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

### **Sacramento Valley**

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

David Guy  
Aaron Ferguson  
[aferguson@norcalwater.org](mailto:aferguson@norcalwater.org)

Northern California Water Association  
916- 442-8333  
[www.norcalwater.org](http://www.norcalwater.org)

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

### *California Rice Commission*

Tim Johnson  
916-442-8333  
[www.calrice.org](http://www.calrice.org)

### **San Joaquin Valley & Delta**

*San Joaquin County &  
Delta Water Quality Coalition*

John B. Meek  
209-472-7127, ext. 125  
[jmeek@jmeek.com](mailto:jmeek@jmeek.com)

### *Westside San Joaquin River Watershed Coalition*

Joseph C. McGahan  
559-582-9237  
[jmcgahan@summerseng.com](mailto:jmcgahan@summerseng.com)

### *East San Joaquin Water Quality Coalition*

Parry Klassen  
Coalition for Urban/Rural  
Environmental Stewardship  
559-325-9855  
[parryk@comcast.net](mailto:parryk@comcast.net)

Wayne Zipser  
Stanislaus County Farm Bureau  
209-522-7278  
[WayneZ@stanfarmbureau.org](mailto:WayneZ@stanfarmbureau.org)  
[www.esjcoalition.org](http://www.esjcoalition.org)

### *Root Creek Water District*

James Provost  
559-449-2700

### *Southern San Joaquin Valley Water Quality Coalition*

Dawn Carlton  
Kings River Conservation District  
559-237-5567  
[dcarlton@krcd.org](mailto:dcarlton@krcd.org)  
[www.krcd.org](http://www.krcd.org)

### *Westlands Water District*

Thaddeus Bettner  
559-241-6215  
[tbettner@westlandswater.org](mailto:tbettner@westlandswater.org)  
[www.westlandswater.org](http://www.westlandswater.org)



Coalition for Urban/Rural Environmental Stewardship  
1629 Pollasky Ave., #1111  
Clovis, CA 93612