



Fact Sheet

Central Valley Salinity Alternatives for Long-Term Sustainability (CV-SALTS)

About Salinity in the Central Valley

Following population growth and increased agricultural activity in California's Central Valley since the 1850s, there has been dramatic increases in salinity to both surface water and groundwater in this region. These increases are attributed to many causes. As surface and groundwater supplies become scarcer, and as wastewater streams become more concentrated, the impact of too much salt is occurring with greater frequency and magnitude. Salt additions include salt added in the form of fertilizer nitrates and soil amendment in agriculture, food processing and other industrial activities and through municipal use.

While salinity is of the focus of this program, the issue of nitrates needs to be addressed related to salinity, because nitrates are tied to salts that can impair drinking water when it percolates from soils to groundwater. High concentration of nitrates in drinking water is a threat to human health and the environment. Agricultural, municipal and industrial wastes are the three classes of salt-containing discharges that are regulated by major regulatory programs of the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board.

Central Valley Salinity Alternatives for Long-Term Sustainability (CV-SALTS)

In 2006, the Central Valley Water Board, the State Water Board, and stakeholders began a joint effort to address salinity and nitrate problems in California's Central Valley and adopt long-term solutions that will lead to enhanced water quality and economic sustainability.

The Central Valley Salinity Alternatives for Long-Term Sustainability (CV-SALTS) is a collaborative basin planning effort aimed at developing and implementing a comprehensive salinity and nitrate management program. In July 2008, the Central Valley Salinity Coalition was formed. The Coalition represents stakeholder groups working with the Board in the CV-SALTS effort. Its purpose is to organize, facilitate and fund efforts needed to fulfill the goals of CV-SALTS.

The overarching goals of CV-SALTS include:

- Sustain the Valley's lifestyle;
- Support regional economic growth;
- Retain a world-class agricultural economy;
- Maintain a reliable, high-quality urban water supply; and
- Protect and enhance the environment.

Central Valley Salt and Nitrate Management Plan

CV-SALTS developed a Salt and Nitrate Management Plan for the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board's jurisdictional area. Although broader in overall scope, the Salt and Nitrate Management Plan was also developed to meet requirements set forth in the State Recycled Water Policy, and to address legacy and ongoing salt and nitrate accumulation issues.

The Salt and Nitrate Management Plan establishes the minimum or default expectations for the management of salt and nitrate in discharges to surface and groundwater in the Central Valley Region. The Salt and Nitrate Management Plan provides the over-arching framework, including default identification of current ambient water quality and available assimilative capacity in the Central Valley's groundwater basins.

The Salt and Nitrate Management Plan provides a framework with milestones and timelines for undertaking such restoration efforts. It includes the required elements from the Recycled Water Policy and recommends new policies to be considered for adoption by the Central Valley Water Board.

The Salt and Nitrate Management Plan is built on the following management goals:

- 1) *Ensure a Safe Drinking Water Supply,*
- 2) *Achieve Balanced Salt and Nitrate Loadings, and*
- 3) *Implement Managed Aquifer Restoration Program*

In general, these goals recognize the need to focus limited resources first on health risks, and then focus on balancing salt and nitrate loading followed by restoring impacted water. Notably, activities (both regulated and unregulated) leading to salt and nitrate balance are ongoing now (e.g., preparation and implementation of nutrient management plans, improved irrigation practices, real-time management of discharges, pilot studies, etc.) and are anticipated to continue and improve moving forward. With respect to the ultimate goal of restoring the region's groundwater basins, the Salt and Nitrate Management Plan recognizes that it will be a time and resource intensive effort.

Due to the diversity of the region, the Salt and Nitrate Management Plan provides for local flexibility and encourages local-scale management plans to be developed and implemented by local and/or regional entities as local stakeholders deem appropriate.

Basin Plan Amendment Policy Recommendation

The Salt and Nitrate Management Plan identifies a number of proposed policy changes and recommends that the Central Valley Water Board take action to adopt these policy recommendations:

- [Draft Nitrate Permitting Strategy \(13 June 2016\)](#)
- [Draft Secondary Maximum Contaminant Level Policy \(3 June 2016\)](#)
- [Draft AGR Salinity Policy \(14 June 2016\)](#)
- [Draft Offsets Policy \(3 June 2016\)](#)
- [Draft Exceptions Policy \(8 June 2016\)](#)
- [Draft Management Zone Policy \(10 June 2016\)](#)
- [Draft Drought Policy \(3 June 2016\)](#)

CV-Salts is working to establish a solid scientific basis for Central Valley salinity management through research and analysis of sources, movement, treatment, and removal of salts and nitrates. To better explain some of the proposed policy changes and how they might work in reality, the Salt and Nitrate Management Plan is supported by archetype/prototype studies ("proofs of concept") that provide examples and/or guidelines for consideration when implementing various elements of the Salt and Nitrate Management Plan. Further, findings from technical studies provide the basis for Salt and Nitrate Management Plan recommendations for the short and long term management of salt and nitrate throughout the Central Valley.

Archetype/prototype studies staff plans to propose as Basin Plan Amendments are:

- Incorporating a process into the Basin Plans for determining appropriate designation and level of protection of Municipal and Domestic Supply (MUN) in agriculturally dominated water bodies;
- Setting salt/boron water quality objectives and adding/modifying an implementation program for the Lower San Joaquin River;
- Evaluating the designation/Dedesignation of the MUN and agricultural supply (AGR) beneficial uses in a portion of the Tulare Lake Bed Groundwater Basin.

After the relevant recommendations are adopted into Basin Plans, the Salt and Nitrate Management Plan recommends that management measures identified in the Salt and Nitrate Management Plan be implemented through the Central Valley Water Board's issuance of Waste Discharge Requirements (WDRs) (individual or General Order) or Conditional Waivers (Waivers). The Basin Plan Amendment is expected to be considered for adoption by the Central Valley Water Board in 2018.

How Can Interested Persons Stay Updated and Informed

For more information visit the Central Valley Regional Water Board's page

http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/centralvalley/water_issues/salinity/index.shtml

Information and materials from on-going committee meetings and other Central Valley Salinity Coalition activities are posted on an independent web site containing information on current CV-SALTS activities www.cvsalinity.org. [Contact](#) the Central Valley Salinity Coalition Executive Director to be added to the notification list for committee meetings.

Subscribe on-line to the [Central Valley Salinity \(CV-SALTS\)](#), electronic mailing list.

Press Contacts

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