

For Immediate Release

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State Water Resource Control Board Hosts Public Workshop

Regarding Regulatory Changes for Managing Salts and Nitrates on July 2, 2019

[DATE] Sacramento, CA...The State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board) is holding a Public Workshop at 9:30 am on Tuesday, July 2, 2019, to receive information and solicit public input regarding the Central Valley-wide Salt and Nitrate Control Program (Salt and Nitrate Control Program). The workshop will be at the CalEPA Headquarters Building Coastal Hearing Room 1001, I Street, Second Floor, Sacramento, CA 95814. At the workshop the State Water Board will receive information from the Regional Water Board staff and oral comments from interested persons related to the Salt and Nitrate Control Program. There will be no action taken at the workshop.

The State Water Board is considering approving the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board (Regional Water Board) Amendments to the Sacramento and San Joaquin Basin Plan and the Tulare Lake Basin Plan to incorporate the Salt and Nitrate Control Program. The Regional Water Board approved the Salt and Nitrate Control Program in May 2018.

The Salt and Nitrate Control Program provides a framework for the Regional Water Board to regulate salt and nitrate while also ensuring that groundwater users have safe drinking water. The amendments represent the most significant changes in decades to the regulation of salts and nitrates in the surface and ground waters of Central Valley.

Daniel Cozad, Executive Director, Central Valley Salinity Coalition (CVSC), noted, "With these amendments, the Regional Water Board will be able to ensure safe drinking water in affected areas and offer greater flexibility for discharger compliance. The approval is a monumental milestone for water quality in the Central Valley, bringing much needed progress toward improved surface and ground water quality.

Procedure for Adoption of Salt and Nitrate Control Program

The State Water Board may schedule a subsequent State Water Board Meeting to consider approval of the Salt and Nitrate Control Program. State Water Board approval is required to implement the Salt and Nitrate Program. The Office of Administrative Law and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) must also approve the Salt and Nitrate Control Program.

Why is a New Salt and Nitrate Control Program Needed?

The buildup of salts and nitrate pose a threat to drinking water, agriculture, and the environment. Levels have increased in the waters of the Central Valley due to the long-term effects of population growth, application of farm fertilizers and soil amendments, food processing, and other industrial activities and municipal water use. The new Salt and Nitrate Control Program is designed to address both the past accumulation of salt and nitrate in surface and groundwater and the ongoing issue of nitrate and salt accumulation. The primary focus for the first ten years of the program is to provide safe drinking water for users currently affected and reduce the level of nitrates affecting groundwater supplies used for drinking water.

The goals of the Salt and Nitrate Control Program are to sustain the Valley's agricultural lifestyle; support regional economic growth; retain a world-class agricultural economy; maintain a reliable, high-quality water supply; and protect and enhance the environment. To support the goals, the Salt and Nitrate Control Program includes recommendations for new policies and regulatory strategies including:

1. Short- and long-term solutions for salt and nitrate discharges from municipal, agricultural, and industrial activities while first focusing on providing safe drinking water supplies in identified high priority areas of the Central Valley.
2. A new regulatory framework that moves away from the current "one-size fits all" regulations and provides more locally focused nitrate regulations to better address the Central Valley's natural diversities (e.g., climatic, hydrologic, geologic) while protecting water quality and maintaining a strong economy.
3. Long-term restoration of groundwater quality where reasonable, feasible, and practicable.

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In the Central Valley, salt and nitrate discharges by agricultural, municipal, and industrial activities are subject to the regulations of the Regional Board and the U.S. EPA. New and improved management practices have already been implemented to reduce salt and nitrate discharges into surface and ground waters, but compliance with current regulations is difficult and, in some areas of the Central Valley, even impossible.

Key Regulatory Changes Included in New Salt and Nitrate Control Program

- For the first time, the Regional Board will be able to require municipal, agricultural, and industrial dischargers to provide safe drinking water supplies in identified high priority areas of the Central Valley that include the Kaweah, Turlock, Chowchilla, Tule, Modesto, and King basins or subbasins.
- For the first time, dischargers will have a choice in how they comply for nitrate discharges: Path A – Individual Permitting Approach and Path B – Management Zone Approach.
- For the first time, dischargers will have the flexibility to work together and form **Management Zones** where dischargers can collaborate to develop more cost-effective discharge controls and groundwater management approaches for nitrates while first providing safe drinking water. Members of a management zone work together to assure zone residents have safe drinking water.

In exchange, the zone participants are allowed more time and flexibility to achieve nitrate compliance. The Regional Water Board provides guidance, oversight, and necessary approvals for management zone creation, planning, and implementation.

Additional Background

Over the last decade, the Central Valley Salinity Coalition (CVSC) has worked side-by-side with the Regional Water Board to prepare the January 2017 *Salt and Nitrate Management Plan* (SNMP) – the basis for the new Regional Water Board **Salt and Nitrate Control Program**.

For a quick overview of the SNMP and Basin Plan amendment process: <https://www.cvsalinity.org/docs/committee-document/pubic-education-and-outreach-docs/3756-cv-salts-outreach-brochure/file.html>

The Central Valley is the epicenter of California's economy—encompassing 40% of the state and providing water for people and businesses from San Francisco to San Diego, as well as food for California, the nation, and the world. Over the last 150 years, increased agricultural, industrial, and municipal activities, coupled with population growth, have resulted in dramatic increases in salts and nitrates in groundwater, soils, and surface waters. In some communities, the nitrate concentrations have caused unsafe drinking water. Salt accumulations have resulted in the loss of 250,000 productive acres, and 1.5 million acres have been declared salinity impaired. If not addressed, the economic impacts of salts and nitrates on the Valley are estimated to exceed \$3-billion per year.¹

The Regional Water Board oversees the regulation of agricultural, municipal, and industrial waste discharges of nitrates and salts within the Central Valley. The Regional Water Board uses Basin Plans as the basis for regulating water quality. <http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/centralvalley>.

In 2006, a coalition of stakeholders, including federal, state and local agencies, permitted dischargers (e.g., growers, ranchers, municipalities, food processors), and environmental justice groups, started discussing how to maintain a strong economy while ensuring safe drinking water. This collaborative initiative is called the **Central Valley Salinity Alternatives for Long-Term Sustainability** (CV-SALTS). www.cvsalinity.org

In 2008, the Central Valley Salinity Coalition (CVSC) was formed to help fund the technical and scientific studies necessary to support the development of alternative regulatory approaches. The Central Valley Salinity Coalition (CVSC) is a non-profit coalition of public agencies, business, associations and other members working together to better manage salt and nitrates in the Central Valley of California. The CVSC formed to organize, facilitate, and fund efforts needed for the efficient management of salinity and nitrates in the Central Valley.

Current Members of CVSC include:

San Joaquin Valley Drainage Authority, California Association of Sanitation Agencies, California League of Food Producers, The Wine Institute, Dairy Cares, City of Fresno, City of Davis, City of Manteca, City of Modesto, City of Tracy, City of Stockton, City of Vacaville, Central Valley Clean Water Agencies, South San Joaquin Water Quality Coalition, Northern California Water Association, Tulare Lake Drainage and Water Districts, Stockton East Water District, California Cotton Growers and Ginners Association, California Rice Commission, San Joaquin Tributary Authority, Western Plant Health Association, East San Joaquin Water Quality Coalition, San Joaquin County & Delta Water Quality Coalition, Pacific Water Quality Association, Sacramento Regional County Sanitation District, California Resources Corporation, Westlands Water District, Valley Water Management Company, and California Independent Producers Association

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https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/centralvalley/water_issues/salinity/centralvalley_salinity_alternative_s_archives/committees_of_cvsalts_leadership_grp/social_economic_impact_committee/sec_12may08_howitt_pres.pdf

