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For Immediate Release

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State Water Resources Control Board Sets Public Meeting October 16, 2019

to Consider a Resolution Approving the Proposed Amendments to Water Quality Control Plans for Sacramento River and San Joaquin River Basins and Tulare Lake Basin to Incorporate a Central Valley-Wide Salt and Nitrate Control Program

The State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board) will hold a public meeting at which it will consider adopting a proposed draft resolution approving the proposed Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board's (Central Valley Water Board's) amendments to the Sacramento and San Joaquin Basin Plan and the Tulare Lake Basin Plan to incorporate a Central Valley-wide Salt and Nitrate Control Program (Salt and Nitrate Control Program) and also directing the Central Valley Water Board to make targeted revisions to the Basin Plan amendments within one year from the approval of the Basin Plan amendments by the Office of Administrative Law.

The Basin Plan amendments were adopted by the Central Valley Water Board on May 31, 2018 ([Resolution No. R5-2018-0034](#)). The Basin Plan amendments are available for review at the Central Valley Water Board's Salt and Nitrate Control Program Basin Plan Amendment [webpage](#) and here are direct links to the [October 16, 2018, Public Meeting agenda item 3](#), [proposed draft resolution](#), [Response to Comments](#).

The State Water Board will hold the public meeting as follows:

Wednesday, October 16, 2019 – 9:30 a.m.

Joe Serna Jr. – CalEPA Headquarters Building Coastal Hearing Room
1001 I Street, Second Floor, Sacramento, CA 95814

Interested persons will have an opportunity to comment orally on the proposed action as the written comment period has closed. There will be no sworn testimony or cross-examination of interested persons, but the State Water Board and its staff may ask clarifying questions. The State Water Board may consider and adopt changes to the Proposed Final Basin Plan Amendments consistent with the general purpose of the amendments. Webcast of the Hearing will be available here: [State Water Board's Public Meeting Live Webcasts webpage](#).

In addition to the State Water Resources Control Board's approval, the Office of Administrative Law (OAL) must also approve the Salt and Nitrate Control Program, and portions of the Salt Control Program are subject to U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) approval.

New Salt and Nitrate Control Program Need

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 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 nitrate affecting groundwater supplies used for drinking water.

The goals of the Salt and Nitrate Control Program are to provide safe drinking water to the Valley's residents; 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.

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

Key Regulatory Changes Included in New Salt and Nitrate Control Program

- 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.
- Dischargers will have alternative compliance pathways for meeting the Regional Board's regulations for nitrate discharges: Path A – Individual Permitting Approach and Path B – Management Zone Approach.
- 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 nitrate while first providing safe drinking water. Members of a management zone will 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 year.¹

¹ https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/centralvalley/water_issues/salinity/centralvalley_salinity_alternatives_archive/s/committees_of_cvsalts_leadership_grp/social_economic_impact_committee/sec_12may08_howitt_pres.pdf

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) and this is the website: 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. 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.