

## CV-SALTS LETTERHEAD

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# SOLUTIONS IDENTIFIED TO RETURN CLEAN DRINKING TO THE CENTRAL VALLEY

## *MANAGEMENT PLAN RELEASED TO REDUCE SALT AND NITRATE POLLUTION AND RESTORE WATER QUALITY*

After a decade of technical studies and consensus building, a coalition of agriculture, cities, industry, environmental and regulatory agencies working together, under the Central Valley Salinity Alternatives for Long-Term Sustainability (CV-SALTS), released a new comprehensive *Salt and Nitrate Management Plan* (SNMP) for public review. On March 9, 2017, the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board (Central Valley Water Board) will hold a public hearing to consider adoption of a resolution to accept the SNMP and direct Central Water Board staff to initiate Basin Plan amendments to incorporate recommendations from the SNMP into the Basin Plans. The hearing will be held at 9 am, Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board, 11020 Sun Center Drive, Suite 200, Rancho Cordova, CA 95670. The SNMP is available for review at [www.cvsalinity.org](http://www.cvsalinity.org). Public comments may be made at the March 9 hearing, online at [www.cvsalinity.org](http://www.cvsalinity.org), or in writing to XXXX. Public Comments will be accepted through February 21, 2017.

Increased population growth and agricultural activity have led to a dramatic increase in salts and nitrates in surface water, groundwater, and soils in the Central Valley (Valley). Salt and nitrates are entering the ecosystem from a wide variety of agricultural, industrial, and municipal sources ranging from fertilizers to failed septic systems to municipal treatment ponds.

“Creating a more flexible regulatory framework,” said **NAME, TITLE**, “that provides both short- and long-term solutions, along with options for local control, for salt and nitrate management in surface and groundwater, is crucial for the economic sustainability of the Valley.”

The Central Valley SNMP defines three goals: (1) first, ensure a safe drinking water supply by addressing the nitrate impacts, and (2) then work to achieve balanced salt and nitrate loadings through improved management actions, and (3) finally, over a longer time period, restore the

water quality in groundwater basins. Additionally, the SNMP recognizes that management plans for nitrates and for salts are different, yet both are complex and will take time to implement.

The Valley's nitrate accumulations are more directly related to potential public health risk, and as such, the need to provide safe drinking water is the top priority of the SNMP. As the Valley encompasses 60,000 square miles, with a variety of terrains, hydrologic conditions and soils, there is no single, uniform solution for reducing the levels of nitrates in drinking water. To restore the regions water quality, the SNMP offers several different solutions that can be tailored to specific local conditions and needs.

Existing State regulations limit the Central Valley Water Board's ability to consider new, innovative nitrate or salt management strategies, particularly as they relate to providing safe drinking water. Therefore, the SNMP recommends policy changes be made to existing Basin Plans, by amendment, that govern water quality in the Valley. These changes will offer a more flexible regulatory framework as today many dischargers are not able to comply with the current regulatory structure.

The recommend SNMP policies allow for the regulated community (farmers, food processors, dairy operations, and others) to provide safe drinking water now as an initial action, allowing implementation of a nitrate controls and cleanup measures to follow, either individually or through the establishment of local management areas. Local decision-making, with State oversight, allow the development effective solutions by considering local conditions and appropriate management strategies. The proposed SNMP policies also allow dischargers to develop independent data for their discharge area. Then, using this data, a discharger or group of dischargers could propose revised permit requirements if default requirements were not applicable to local conditions and discharges.

To rebalance nitrate and salt loadings over time, and ultimately restore water quality in the regions aquifers, a more complex set of long-term solutions in the areas of source control, water management, and treatment to reduce or reuse the nitrate are needed. The SNMP represents a crucial starting point and roadmap toward preserving the economic fabric of the Central Valley.

#### **CHALLENGES IN THE CENTRAL VALLEY FOR LONG-TERM MANAGEMENT OF SALT & NITRATE**

- More salts enter the Lower San Joaquin and Tulare Lake Basins than leave or are removed.
- Dams and imported water supplies, so important for the Valley economy, have reduced the natural flushing of salt and increased the amount brought into the Valley.
- Groundwater use has increased to meet water demands.

- Broad expanses of groundwater aquifers have been affected by legacy nitrate concentrations.
- Salt concentrations in the groundwater are naturally high in some areas and increasing in most areas.
- There are few economically feasible options for removing salt from the Valley.

#### **EXAMPLE OF REGULATORY OPTIONS FOR NITRATE MANAGEMENT**

If the Central Valley Water Board and the State Water Board adopt the proposed policies related to nitrate management, nitrate dischargers such as farms, dairies, wastewater treatment plants, and certain industries would have the following three compliance options. Currently, “traditional permitting” is the only option available.

**Traditional Permitting.** The traditional, or current, permitting approach uses existing regulatory Waste Discharge Requirements (WDRs) and Conditional Waivers issued by the Central Valley Water Board. Each individual discharger must meet specified water quality standards at the discharge point to receiving waters, the base of the root zone, or the top of the groundwater aquifer, depending on the discharger. This approach may be more straightforward for a single discharger, however, in some areas it may not be possible to meet discharge requirements or address nearby nitrate contamination of drinking water.

**Management Zones.** *This is a new regulatory option.* In local or regional areas with high priority nitrate problems, nitrate dischargers would work collectively with water providers, local government, and others to establish a plan to provide safe drinking water for users with nitrate-contaminated water and identify the reasonable and feasible best management practices and treatment strategies that will establish a nitrate balance, within the defined management area. The management zone plan would also develop a long-term plan for restoring groundwater to meet applicable water quality objectives. The SNMP recommends the inclusion of a Groundwater Management Zone Policy within the Basin Plans to define a proper management zone and the criteria for approval by the Central Valley Water Board. The Central Valley Water Board would review, approve, and oversee the management zones and the local management plans. The new management zone option provides an opportunity for dischargers and others to identify cooperative actions that may be more cost-effective and efficient than individual actions.

**Alternative Nitrate Permitting.** *This is a new regulatory option.* In some areas of the Central Valley, and for some types of dischargers, both the traditional permitting and management zone designation may not be feasible, reasonable, or practicable. Accordingly, the SNMP Nitrate Permitting Strategy proposes an alternative permitting approach. This approach would allow an individual discharger to propose an alternate plan and timeline to achieve water quality goals and objectives in the Basin Plan. For example, depending on local conditions, such a plan could address high priority drinking water needs immediately while implementing a longer-term plan to meet nitrate discharge requirements.

## **NEXT STEPS**

**February 2017:** SNMP released for Public Review.

**March 2017:** SNMP presented to the Central Valley Water Board for discussion at an informational workshop.

**October 2017:** Draft Basin Plan Policy Amendments that reflect the recommended SNMP policy changes (for Tulare Lake Basin and for Sacramento River/San Joaquin River Basin Plan).

**February 2018:** Basin Plan Amendments Considered by the Central Valley Water Board.

**April 2018:** Basin Plan Amendments Approved by the Central Valley Water Board.

**June 2018:** SNMP approved by the State Water Resource Control Board.

**August 2018:** SNMP implementation begins after approval by the California Office of Administrative Law (OAL) and approval of surface water portions by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

## **WHY ARE SALTS AND NITRATES ARE ACCUMULATING IN THE CENTRAL VALLEY?**

Since the 1850s, the Central Valley has seen significant population growth and increased agricultural activity. There have been dramatic increases in salts and nitrates in surface water, groundwater, and soils. In parts of the Central Valley, there are inadequate natural outlets for salt, such as a river running to the ocean. In many places, there is no way out and the salt accumulates in the soil and water.

Salt and nitrates are entering the ecosystem from a variety of sources that include agricultural fertilizer nitrates and soil amendment, industrial waste from food processing, municipal waste from water treatment plants, animal feeding operations including dairies, and more. Agricultural groundwater pollution comes from fertilizers, pesticides, animal waste and irrigation leaching. In urban areas, groundwater pollution can come from leaking underground fuel tanks, industrial waste discharges, commercial facilities, failed septic systems, municipal treatment ponds and landfills.

As surface and groundwater supplies become more scarce and as wastewater streams become more salt concentrated, the impact of too much salt is occurring with greater frequency and magnitude. Studies undertaken for the development of the SNMP are showing significant concentrations of nitrates in surface water and water wells, particularly in the San Joaquin Valley. The Central Valley has the highest number of dairies and agricultural lands, as well as more than 50 percent of all the septic systems in California. The Central Valley also has a high number of wastewater treatment plants.

## **CV-SALTS EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP**

The CV-SALTS Executive committee is made up of CVSC Members plus State and Federal, and Environmental Justice interests entities who are not members of CVSC. CVSC members pay the costs for the development efforts.

The Executive Committee comprises 30 members: 6 committee chairs, 6 representing Non-Governmental Organizations, Federal and State agencies, and 18 members of the Central Valley Salinity Coalition (all 29 CVSC members are listed below).

The following state and federal agencies are represented on the Executive Committee:

*State Water Resources Control Board*

*Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board*

*CA Department of Water Resources*

*US Bureau of Reclamation*

## **CENTRAL VALLEY SALINITY COALITION (CVSC) MEMBERS as of 1/117)**

1. California Association of Sanitation Districts
2. California Cotton Growers and Ginners Association
3. California League of Food Processors
4. California Resources Corporation
5. California Rice Commission
6. Central Valley Clean Water Association
7. City of Davis
8. City of Fresno
9. City of Manteca
10. City of Modesto
11. City of Stockton
12. City of Tracy
13. City of Vacaville
14. Dairy CARES/Western United Dairymen
15. East San Joaquin Water Quality Coalition
16. Northern California Water Association
17. Pacific Water Quality Association
18. Sacramento Regional County Sanitation District
19. San Joaquin County and Delta Water Quality Coalition
20. San Joaquin Tributaries Authority
21. San Joaquin Valley Drainage Authority
22. South San Joaquin Water Quality Coalition
23. Stockton East Water District
24. Tulare Lake Basin Water Storage District
25. Tulare Lake Drainage District
26. Valley Water Management Company
27. Western Plant Health Association
28. Westlands Water District
29. The Wine Institute

## **CONNECT, STAY INFORMED, GET INVOLVED**

CV-SALTS: [www.cvsalinity.org](http://www.cvsalinity.org)

Central Valley Water Board: [www.waterboards.ca.gov/centralvalley/water\\_issues/salinity/index.shtml](http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/centralvalley/water_issues/salinity/index.shtml)

## **CONTACT FOR MORE INFORMATION/INTERVIEW/BRIEFING/PRESENTATION**

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