



## New Water Quality Regulations Provide Options for Flexibility Sacramento Valley Agriculture

### Protecting Water Quality is Critical

Ensuring a safe, reliable drinking water supply is the highest priority for managing nitrates and salts throughout the Central Valley. Depending on local conditions, discharges from irrigated lands potentially contain salts, nitrates, sediments, pesticides, heavy metals, and pathogens. These pollutants impact water quality via irrigation drainage or storm season runoff or by leaching into groundwater. At high enough concentrations, these pollutants can harm aquatic life in surface water or make groundwater unusable for drinking water or agricultural uses.

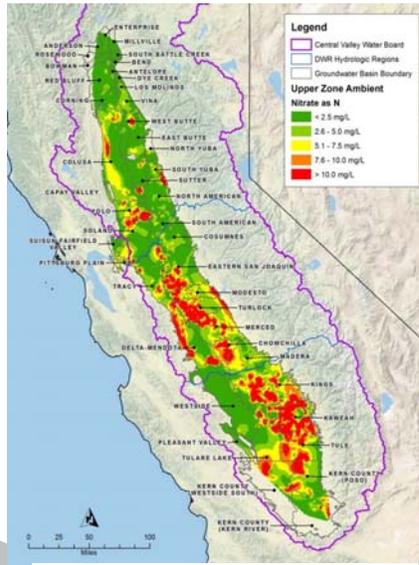
### Nitrate Concentrations

In the Sacramento River Basin or Sacramento Valley, there are localized high-concentrations of nitrates in groundwater (red areas on map). These areas have nitrate concentrations at levels that make groundwater unsafe to drink unless treated. In the Central Valley, areas with high-concentrations of nitrates are more widespread.

### Regulation: How it Works Now

Since 2003, the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board (Water Board) has regulated discharges from irrigated agricultural through the **Irrigated Lands Regulatory Program (ILRP)**. The ILRP was developed to control and prevent waste discharges from irrigated lands from polluting surface waters and, beginning in 2012, groundwater. The ILRP seeks to protect surface and groundwater resources and drinking water supplies, while maintaining a healthy, sustainable irrigated agricultural economy.

Farmers may join an ILRP coalition that assists the members in complying with Waste Discharge Requirements (WDRs), or they may choose to comply under an individual WDRs.



Nitrate Concentrations in Upper Groundwater Zone

### New Regulations Provide Flexibility for Localized Solutions

The importance of protecting surface and groundwater quality, whether for aquatic life, drinking water, or agricultural supply, has become a significant public policy issue.

Because the Water Board currently has few options to best regulate this issue, additional tools are needed.

The new “toolbox” of regulatory options recommended in the *Salt and Nitrate Management Plan (SNMP)* will offer greater local flexibility for compliance by all dischargers, including agricultural interests, while ensuring safe drinking water.

The new regulations that address drinking water will first be implemented in areas identified as **high-priority** in the Kaweah, Turlock, Chowchilla, Tule, Modesto, and Kings sub-basins and basins.

Commented [MC2]: This is from Pamela.

Commented [MC1]: I added this from the central and southern irrigated lands insert per Pamela’s request. **Pamela wanted these two sentences removed:** “Groundwater monitoring shows there are no widespread water quality issues in the Sacramento River Basin. In some localized area, nitrate impacts on groundwater quality and naturally occurring sources of groundwater salinity may require additional management actions.”



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### Local Collaboration is Key

Under the new CV-SALTS SNMP regulatory options, all dischargers, including agriculture, will be asked to collaborate **locally** to implement necessary solutions to meet water quality standards. Similarly, the 2014 Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) provides a framework for sustainable, **local** groundwater management. While SGMA focuses on **water quantity** and the SNMP is focused on **water quality**, there will be close coordination between the two.

### Benefits of New Regulatory Process for Nitrates

Under the new regulations, **all dischargers** will have two choices for nitrate compliance:

Pathway A: Maintain traditional permitting or  
Pathway B: Follow the new management zone permitting option.

In the northern portion of the Central Valley, most agricultural dischargers will select Pathway A and maintain traditional permitting. Under this option, a discharger may opt to comply under the traditional permit requirements established either as an individual (e.g., a food processing plant) or as a third party (e.g., growers and farmers represented by a third party such as an irrigated lands coalition).

### Long-Term Solutions Needed to Address Salt Accumulations

In the Central Valley, the next step in the long-term solutions for salinity will be to perform a *Prioritization and Optimization Study* that defines potential regional and sub-regional projects (e.g., de-salters or a regulated brine line) and practices (e.g., new treatment controls or development of new water supplies).

### Get Involved Now to Help Shape Your Future

To meet the water quality challenges of the future, agricultural interests must be proactive in protecting water quality within the new SNMP regulatory framework. The future economic sustainability of agriculture is dependent on this.

Northern agricultural interests must also take note of the impairments to surface and groundwater quality resulting from increased nitrate and salt accumulations in other portions of the Central Valley. Northern agricultural interests must continue to implement best practices and work to avoid further impairment of water supplies.

Participation in CV-SALTS by all agricultural interests is important for the future of the entire Central Valley. If you work in any aspect of irrigated agriculture, you are encouraged to participate and get involved today. To learn more about getting involved, visit [www.cvsalinity.org](http://www.cvsalinity.org).

Commented [MC3]: For me, the benefit are not really spelled out clearly, am I missing something here?

Commented [MC4]: From Pamela