



san joaquin county & DELTA WATER QUALITY COALITION

Watershed News

May 2017

Coalition fees decrease this year

This year you will see a decrease in the fee per acre for the Coalition. Due to improved water quality and prudent fiscal management by the Resource Conservation District Board of Directors which oversees the Coalition, fees will decrease by \$1 per acre to \$4/acre for the fiscal year 2017/18.

Surface water quality has improved,

which means less testing for the Coalition, saving growers money. The Coalition has also joined with coalitions throughout the valley to share expenses in developing a Management Practices Evaluation Program which all coalitions have to complete in order to determine which farming practices are protective of water quality. By joining

with other coalitions to develop a valley-wide program, the Coalition dramatically reduces its expenses. This along with other prudent decisions has decreased the budget expenses for the 2017/18 fiscal year. However, as mentioned in the article below, changes are coming and could drastically impact the budget in future years.

State Water Board - Working to develop new regulations

*By Mike Wackman
Executive Director*

It has been over a year since the State Water Resources Control Board released the revised East San Joaquin Waste Discharge Requirements under the Irrigated Land Regulatory Program (Draft Order). The Draft Order stated all farmers need to report all fertilizer usage on a field level to the Regional Board and enter the data into GeoTracker where all the information is available to the public. It eliminates the high and low vulnerable areas that the Coalitions developed throughout the Central Valley as well as having a precedent setting aspect for the whole Central Valley and

the State. In other words, whatever requirements the State Board determines for the East San Joaquin Water Quality Coalition, the rest of the Coalitions and growers in the Central Valley and the state will be required to meet.

Allowing growers' information to become available to the public exposes individual growers to public scrutiny as well as private nuisance lawsuits by special interest groups or individual citizens. The Coalition has worked diligently to maintain the confidentiality of the Coalition's members information. However, the Coalition does use the growers' information to deter-

mine areas where management practice need to be changed or implemented to improve both surface water quality and groundwater quality.

The elimination of the high and low vulnerable areas that the Coalitions developed ignores the extensive analysis in the Groundwater Assessment Reports (GAR) to determine the areas of high vulnerability to nutrient and pesticide leaching into the groundwater. This evaluation allowed the Coalitions to focus on those areas that have a higher risk of impacting groundwater quality, and to work with those grower/landowners to im-

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Coalition Office Hours and Location

Location:

3294 Ad Art Road, Stockton,
CA 95215

Office hours:

Tuesday-Thursday
9am to 2pm

Phone:

209-851-4204

Website:

www.sjdeltawatershed.org

Email:

info@sjdeltawatershed.org

Farm Evaluations and Nitrogen Summary Reports are not optional

*By Mike Wackman
Executive Director*

All growers in high vulnerable areas must report their nitrogen usage every year. This information is reported to the Coalition on a Nitrogen Management Plan (NMP) Summary Report. The NMP Summary Report requires growers to report the amount of nitrogen ap-

plied to a crop on a per acre basis and the amount of crop removed from the field (yield).

Farmers in the high vulnerable areas (for both surface water and/or groundwater) must also return Farm Evaluation Plans to the Coalition every year. This form provides information on general

farming practices and crop types to help the Coalition determine how growers are being protective of water quality, both in surface water and ground water.

These reports are mandatory under the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board Irrigated Lands Regulatory Program. Cur-

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Improving water quality – effectiveness of focused outreach

By Melissa Turner
Michael L Johnson, LLC

Improved Water Quality

Monitoring results from 2016 demonstrate improving water quality. In 2016, there were five exceedances of water quality trigger limits for pesticides compared to 12 exceedances from the year before. Pesticides detected above the trigger limits in 2016 included chlorpyrifos, diuron, and malathion. Most notably, between 2015 and 2016 there was a decrease in the number of chlorpyrifos exceedances (e.g. Lorsban); 3 exceedances of the chlorpyrifos trigger limit in 2016 compared to 8 the year before.

The San Joaquin County & Delta Water Quality Coalition (SJCDWQC) can attribute the improvement in water quality to grower participation in outreach and education programs and the implementation of management practices effective at reducing water quality impairments.

Focused Outreach

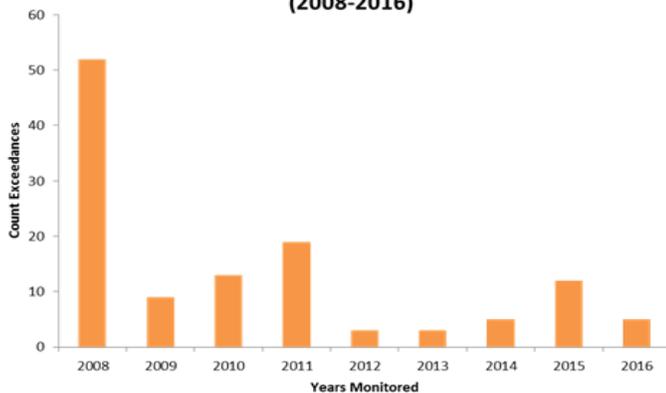
The SJCDWQC developed a “focused outreach” strategy in 2008 to facilitate the implementation of management practices in subwatersheds with water quality impairments. This strategy includes providing outreach and support to growers in order to effectively improve water quality in the SJCDWQC region. The focused outreach process involves:

- ◆ Identify members with the potential to discharge to surface waters causing exceedances.
- ◆ Review the member’s Farm Evaluation to determine the number/type of management practices currently in place, and determine if additional practices are necessary.
- ◆ Hold grower group meetings to inform members of water quality impairments and recommend additional practices as necessary.

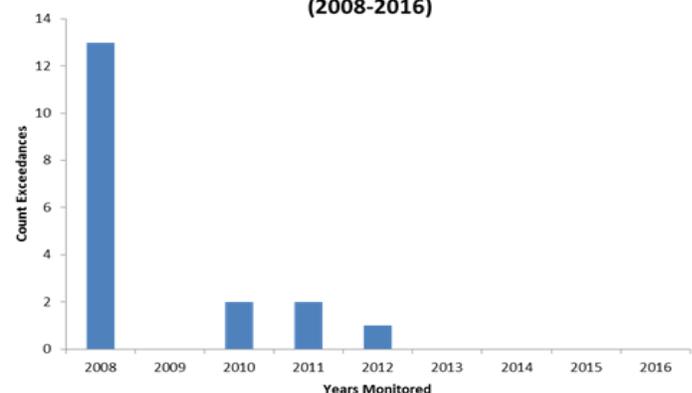
- ◆ Review the member’s Farm Evaluation from the year following initiation of focused activities to document the number/type of new management practices implemented.
- ◆ Evaluate the effectiveness of new management practices through monitoring.

As a result of SJCDWQC members implementing additional practices to manage spray drift and tailwater runoff, the SJCDWQC has been able to remove 64 constituents/ subwatersheds from its Surface Water Quality Management Plans. This is a result of SJCDWQC members implementing additional management practices which lead to improved water quality. The SJCDWQC will continue working with members to address recurring water quality impairments with the goal of demonstrating improved water quality over time.

**Applied Pesticides
(2008-2016)**



**Applied Metals
(2008-2016)**



The success of this strategy is apparent in the reduction of exceedances for applied metals (e.g. copper) and pesticides (e.g. chlorpyrifos).

Farm Evaluations and NMP Summary Reports

(Continued from page 1) Currently over 25% of the growers within the Coalition are out of compliance. What does that mean? It means those growers who have not submitted the correct forms to the Coalition may

receive letters from the Regional Board stating growers need to come into compliance or face penalties.

The Coalition recently sent letters to growers who have not turned in a Farm Evaluation Plan and/or Nitro-

gen Management Plan Summary Report according to the Coalition’s database.

Growers who do not submit the necessary paper work may face compliance

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Sediment and Erosion Control Plans

*By Sarah Lucchetti
Crop Advisor and Sediment and Erosion
Control Specialist*

Many Coalition members are required to complete a Sediment Erosion Control Plan (SECP). Parcels can require the SECP for multiple reasons, including no Farm Evaluation data, answering yes to question A3 on the farm evaluation in regards to sediment leaving the parcel, proximity to a waterway and Revised Universal Soil Loss Equation (RUSLE) model. The coalition is available to help members understand the reasoning behind the requirement and also complete the plan. The development of a SECP is a simple process.

When a member asks the Coalition for SECP assistance, we first evaluate the parcel as to the reasoning it is required to have the SECP. If it was due to an incorrect answer on the FE or no FE data, a grower can request

an information change through the Coalition website and potentially remove the SECP requirement. If a parcel requires a SECP because of RUSLE, proximity to a waterway, or sediment leaving the parcel, the San Joaquin County Resource Conservation District is available to help develop sediment plans for Coalition members for a fee.

The first step in the plan development process is either a call or email to understand more about the parcel. If it can be determined that a large levee runs between the parcel and the waterway the SECP requirement may be able to be removed. If such a determination cannot be made with aerial photos, a field visit may be required. A field evaluation is completed for all plans developed by the Coalition. A visit to the parcel with the grower is necessary to evaluate resource concerns on the parcel that may lead to sediment

movement off the parcel. A drive around the parcel, especially along waterways, to evaluate erosion concerns and discuss possible recommendations with the grower is done. The majority of the evaluations include increasing vegetation to ensure that erosion is not occurring due to bare soil. Conservation practices are discussed and evaluated, both those already existing on the parcel and those that may be of benefit to the grower. The parcels are evaluated with the member and all resource concerns and recommendations are discussed prior to being documented in the plan. Once the plan is developed, it is kept on file by the grower; the plan is not required to be submitted. If a parcel has large resource concerns, the Coalition will recommend that an engineer or other specialist is brought on to complete the SECP. The vast majority of the parcels require simple SECP's that can be completed by the Coalition.

CV Salts - What is it and its effects on agriculture

Central Valley Salinity Alternatives for Long-Term Sustainability (CV-SALTS) is a stakeholder process implemented by the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board and focused on developing a Salt and Nitrate Management Plan and a Basin Plan Amendment for the Central Valley. The process originally was developed to address the drainage of salts to the surface water bodies in the Central Valley; however, over time it also became the process to address nitrates in groundwater in the Central Valley.

The Coalition has had and still has concerns over the process and the effects CV Salts will have on water quality and the sustainability of farming along the San Joaquin River and in the Delta. Several stakeholders from the San Joaquin County region along with the Coalition have participated in the process to insure water

quality is not deteriorated in the region by the solutions CV Salts develops.

A primary goal of the Governor, the legislature and state regulators is to ensure all people have access to clean, and safe drinking water. Currently, ensuring Disadvantage Communities (DACs) have access to safe drinking water is the state's primary focus related to groundwater quality. There are many DACs in the Central Valley that rely on groundwater contaminated with various constituents such as arsenic and nitrate. Contamination comes from various sources, including natural contaminants, agriculture, and waste water.

Due to these priorities, CV Salts over the past 5 years has focused on nitrates in groundwater. The work included the development of a process that will provide an alternative regulatory compliance mechanism that

allows growers to comply with water quality regulations and ensure that water users impacted by salts and nitrates have clean and safe drinking water.

The stated goal of CV-SALTS is to solve two problems. First, water users must have access to clean and safe drinking water. Second, growers must have a viable regulatory compliance path that allows them to continue to farm in the Central Valley.

Agriculture needs a viable regulatory path that allows for the continued discharges of nitrates to groundwater. Although growers can limit nitrate discharges, in many cases they cannot eliminate such discharges. Without a viable regulatory compliance path growers will be vulnerable to various regulatory enforcement actions and possible nuisance suit claims. Given

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State Board *(Continued from page 1)*

prove management practices. The GAR also determined areas in the Delta where groundwater is artesian (water moving upward toward the ground surface) and there is no logical connection between nitrogen application and groundwater.

Currently, the high and low vulnerable areas have different reporting requirements. Members in high vulnerable areas for groundwater have to certify Nitrogen Management Plans (NMP), report all nitrogen applications on a NMP Summary Report, and submit Farm Evaluation Plans to the Water Quality Coalitions yearly. That information is held by the Coalition, aggregated and summarized and reported to the Regional Board.

Growers in low vulnerable areas have to complete a NMP, but do not have to certify them. Growers in low vulnerable areas also have to com-

plete Farm Evaluation Plans; however, they only have to submit them every 5 years. With the new proposed Order, every grower/landowner would be required to report all the information directly to the Regional Board annually.

The Nitrogen Management Plans that all growers currently have to fill out and keep on the farm will be changed to an Irrigation & Nitrogen Management Plan (INMP) in the Draft Order. This new INMP will have to be certified by a license professional who has expertise in nutrient and irrigation management. All growers will have to have their plans certified since the high and low vulnerability determinations have been eliminated. It is unclear if the current Nitrogen Self Certification Classes which California Department of Food and Agriculture in cooperation with the Coalitions have been conducting will allow a person to self certify the newly developed INMP.

Over the past year the San Joaquin County and Delta Water Quality Coalition has participated in meetings with the other coalitions, the State Board and the Environmental Justice community leaders to try and develop consensus on changes that need to be incorporated into the Draft Order. Needless to say there are many areas of disagreement, yet there has been a greater understanding by all parties of the current reporting requirements, the usefulness of that information to determine the amount of nitrogen leaching into the groundwater, and what is needed to protect the drinking water of the people and communities in the Central Valley.

It is anticipated by June of this year we will see another Draft Order be released with some significant changes from the previous Draft Order. Some of those changes will be favorable to agriculture and others may require more reporting and information being collected by the Coalition.

CV Salts *(Continued from page 3)*

the importance and intense focus on ensuring safe drinking water, agricultural interests have been advocating for solutions that resolve both the drinking water problems and agriculture's regulatory compliance problems.

CV-SALTS stakeholders submitted a Salt and Nitrate Management Plan (SNMP) to the Regional Board in late December 2016. In 2017, the stake-

holder group will work with the Board to develop the Basin Plan Amendment (BPA) language necessary to implement the SNMP.

Even though CV Salts' focus has been on nitrates in groundwater, over the next several years the process will focus on maintaining a salt balance in the Central Valley which includes salts within surface waters. As stated before, San Joaquin County and those who live within the Delta need to be vigilant in providing input to

the development of any program that allows salt discharges into the area.

The Regional Board will have workshops and hearing related to the SNMP Basin Plan Amendment process in 2017 with ultimate adoption of the BPA in late 2017 or early 2018.

For more information on CV-Salts visit the Regional Boards website at <http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/centralvalley> or contact the coalition.

David Cory contributed to this article.

Farm Evaluations and NMP Summary Reports *(Continued from page 2)*

checks by the Regional Board and enforcement actions as the Regional Board has done in other Coalition. The following is from the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board's press release dated March 8, 2017:

"The Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board approved pen-

alties for growers in Fresno, Madera, Merced, Stanislaus and Tulare counties who failed to obtain regulatory coverage, or failed to submit required farm evaluations that identify management practices that prevent pollution into surface and groundwater. Penalties ranged from \$8,135 to \$34,490."

The Coalition can provide instruction and help in completing all the necessary forms. A grower can call the office or make an appointment to

have a representative from the Coalition assist in completing the forms.

The Coalition is also developing a web based portal so growers will be able to access their information to determine what forms the Coalition has received, fill out any necessary documents, check on account balance and submit changes to parcels enrolled in the Coalition. This new service will be implemented in the upcoming months.