

IRRIGATED LANDS REGULATORY PROGRAM UPDATE

June 2008

This month's Irrigated Lands Regulatory Program (ILRP) report will provide an update on the activities of the Central Coast, Los Angeles, Colorado River Basin, and San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board programs. Future monthly reports will alternate between the status of the ILRP at the Central Valley Water Board and at other Regional Water Boards. English and Spanish translations of current and past ILRP monthly reports can be found on the [State Water Boards Agricultural Program website](#).

CENTRAL COAST REGION

Presentations and Outreach:

Central Coast Water Board staff gave brief overviews of their Irrigated Agriculture Program at the March meetings of the Morro Bay City Council and Public Works Advisory Board. Staff was invited to speak about the Morro Bay Nitrate Study agenda items. This study identifies agricultural fertilizer as the greatest potential source for nitrate contamination to groundwater at the City well field along Hwy 1. The City Council adopted the nitrate study at their meeting and made recommendations to work with the Central Coast Water Board Irrigated Agriculture Program to address the issue of excessive levels of nitrate in groundwater within the study area. Water Board staff is in the process of developing an approach to address this issue.

Staff made presentations at two grower monitoring workshops and provided an overview of the Irrigated Agricultural Program at a meeting of the general public. Staff has approved 17 classes for agricultural water quality credit this year and posted all classes on the Central Coast Water Board website.

Food Safety:

Central Coast Water Board staff continues their involvement in food safety issues that have the potential to affect water quality. Staff is providing comments on the food safety component of the proposed 2008 federal farm bill. Staff also continues to work with various partner agencies and organizations to increase awareness of the detrimental impact of some food safety practices.

Cooperative Monitoring Program:

Staff approved Central Coast Water Quality Preservation, Inc.'s follow-up monitoring proposals to do continuous flow monitoring and upstream monitoring in several watersheds beginning in 2008. Preservation Inc. is also developing a proposal for education and outreach to address toxicity and irrigation improvement issues in several watersheds. Follow-up projects are funded by regular program fees and by a Proposition 40 grant and are a mandatory component of the Cooperative Monitoring

Program established by the Conditional Waiver.

Inspections:

Central Coast Water Board staff is continuing to conduct inspections throughout the region in order to assess and improve compliance with the agricultural program requirements. Staff has responded to several complaints by conducting inspections and making grower referrals to technical assistance. Staff then schedules follow-up inspections to ascertain whether practices have been implemented. If necessary, staff will issue Notice of Violation letters to non-responsive growers.

Enforcement Actions:

Central Coast Water Board is continuing enforcement actions against farming operations that have not enrolled in the Conditional Waiver for Irrigated Lands. Staff issued five administrative liability complaints in December. So far, four of the farming operations have enrolled and paid all past due monitoring costs and fees. Many new enrollments have come in during the first three months of this year, possibly as a result of increased awareness due to enforcement actions.

LOS ANGELES REGION

Water Quality Monitoring:

Discharger groups in both Los Angeles and Ventura Counties submitted Annual Water Quality Monitoring Reports to the Regional Board. The reports were reviewed by staff and comments were provided to each Discharger group. In

addition, staff met with representatives of each group to discuss the results of the first year of water quality monitoring and potential program improvement strategies. The results of water quality monitoring in both counties demonstrated exceedances of water quality benchmarks established in the Los Angeles Region Conditional Waiver for Irrigated Lands (Order No. R4-2005-0080). Therefore, each group will be developing Agriculture Water Quality Management Plans, which will include the implementation of BMPs to mitigate the exceedances.

Enforcement:

On March 13, 2008, the Regional Board sent notices of violation to approximately 700 growers who had not yet enrolled in the Conditional Waiver program. The NOV letters generated significant feedback from the grower community and numerous growers have requested enrollment forms as a result of receiving the NOV.

Presentations and Workshop:

Regional Board staff continues to participate in meetings and workshops to update the agriculture community on the progress and requirements of the Conditional Waiver program. Staff recently spoke at a row crop workshop in Ventura County organized by the Ventura County UC Cooperative Extension and at the Nursery Growers Association general membership meeting. Likewise, staff presented a poster on the

Los Angeles Region Conditional Waiver for Irrigated Lands at the California Nonpoint Source Conference May 5-7, 2008. The Ventura County Agriculture Irrigated Lands Group held 6 education workshops in April and May to ensure that grower group members meet the requirement for eight hours of continuing education.

COLORADO RIVER BASIN REGION

Introduction:

The Imperial Valley portion of the Salton Sea Transboundary Watershed has been targeted for the purposes of watershed management, including the development and implementation of Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs) and implementation of the state nonpoint source management program plan. Priority water quality issues in the region include management of sedimentation of the New and Alamo Rivers and the Imperial Valley Drains.

To address these water quality issues, the state of California has awarded grant funds to the Imperial Irrigation District and the Imperial County Farm Bureau to implement monitoring and public outreach programs. The progress of these two projects is reported to the Colorado River Basin Regional Board quarterly.

Background:

The Imperial Valley receives more than 2.5 million acre-feet of Colorado River water every year to irrigate approximately 478,000 acres of farmland. The runoff that leaves these fields is collected in an agricultural drainage system consisting of 1,450 miles of surface drains, the Alamo River, the New River, and the Salton Sea. This drainage system is responsible for collecting the surface runoff and subsurface drain flows from agricultural operations, storm water flows, municipal wastewater treatment plant effluent, industrial discharges, and the highly contaminated water that comes from the Mexican portion of the New River.

Section 303(d) of the Clean Water Act identifies the water quality of the Alamo River, New River, Imperial Valley agricultural drains, and Salton Sea as being impaired. These impairments are due to elevated levels of one or more constituents that do not support the designated beneficial uses that the Regional Board has identified for these water bodies. Alamo River impairments include suspended silt, pesticides, and selenium. New River impairments include suspended silt, pesticides, nutrients, and several other impairments that are discharged from a combination of industrial point sources, wastewater, and out-of-state sources. Imperial Valley agricultural drain impairments include suspended silt, pesticides, and selenium. Salton Sea impairments include nutrients and salinity.

Pursuant to Section 303(d) of the Clean Water Act, the Regional Board approved a Siltation/Sedimentation TMDL for the Alamo River in 2001. The TMDL was developed because sediment concentrations in the river violate the water quality standards established by the Regional Board to protect the beneficial uses of the river. The

Implementation Plan of the TMDL identifies the monitoring and tracking of the pollutants of concern to determine compliance with the TMDL.

Imperial County Farm Bureau (ICFB):

ICFB's TMDL Voluntary Compliance Program (Program) is currently funded primarily by Clean Water Act 319(h) monies with local matching funds.

The primary goal of the Program is continued reduction of silt, and other TMDL constituents, being transported from agricultural fields into the Imperial Valley drainage system. Using previously awarded 205(j) and 319(h) grants, the ICFB has been facilitating this Program by enlisting the practical knowledge of its growers to develop realistic water quality goals and devise workable Farm Water Quality Management Plans. The very large (478,000 farmable acres) drainage system has been divided into ten sub-regions (drainsheds) that are of a workable size and can be hydrologically isolated. The drain-shed working groups meet periodically to combine individual efforts and to share experiences with Best Management Practices (BMPs) and other aspects of good water quality stewardship.

The Program focuses on the implementation of on-farm BMPs within each drain-shed through technical assistance to growers and participation within the drain-shed working groups, as guided by the TMDL process. In order to achieve and maintain widespread cooperation of individual growers, it is imperative to actively encourage the use of BMPs through the Voluntary TMDL Compliance Program's outreach efforts. The Program also seeks to demonstrate the effectiveness of recommended practices, and to facilitate the implementation of BMPs by providing training and on-farm consultation services.

Between October 1, 2007 and December 31, 2007, the ICFB met several quarterly objectives of the Voluntary TMDL Compliance Program, such as the following:

- Promoted the program using various media sources;
- Compiled a list of farmers/growers who failed to update their required Farm Water Quality Plans. ICFB contacted each one and all updates were completed;
- The On-Farm Consultant visited twelve farmers/growers to assess the field conditions and offered suggestions on how to improve problem erosion areas on their fields. In addition, the consultant monitored drain maintenance activities;
- A series of telephone consultations for local farmers/growers were conducted by the On-Farm Consultant;
- ICFB met with the Imperial Irrigation District and the Regional Board staff to continue discussing drain maintenance issues affecting the TMDL program;
- One report was added to the ICFB's TMDL website, providing Program participants with information on upcoming events and new regulations; and
- The ICFB also maintains a database of farmers/growers participating in the

TMDL Program. Parameters include participant names, addresses, field location, crop type, and BMP activity (in-use and planned).

Imperial Irrigation District (IID):

As part of the Drain Water Quality Improvement Plan, IID monitors the Imperial Valley Drains monthly at various sites for a variety of constituents, including flow in acre-feet. Water samples were analyzed by an outside laboratory and analytical results were input into an Excel spreadsheet.

The overall objective of this project is to obtain valid data of known and documented quality, which can be utilized in determining the compliance with the water quality objectives as set forth in the Alamo River Sediment TMDLs.

The project consists of monthly and quarterly sampling events, in which water samples will be collected and field measurements taken at 14 sampling stations.

SAN DIEGO REGION

San Diego County Farm Bureau (SDCFB) adopts workplan to form a region-wide monitoring group. Mr. Eric Larson, Executive Director of the SDCFB, reported that the SDCFB's Board of Directors recently adopted a detailed workplan for putting in place a region-wide agricultural monitoring group in time to submit a Notice of Intent (NOI) to the San Diego Water Board by the deadline of December 31, 2010. Submittal of an NOI, either as part of a monitoring group or as an individual grower, is required of growers by a condition of the new waiver for irrigated agricultural discharges. All growers who elect to join the monitoring group would be covered by the SDCFB's NOI. The SDCFB has also communicated with the Riverside and Orange County Farm Bureaus to inform them that there will be growers in those counties who may wish to be included in the SDCFB NOI. Mr. Larson stated that, to date, the Riverside and Orange County Farm Bureaus are supporting the SDCFB's work on this issue. In brief, the year by year workplan tasks are as follows:

2008:

- Study existing monitoring group structures in California;
- Choose best case models;
- Select legal and professional consultants for recommendations on group structure;
- Submit organizational alternatives to SDCFB board for consideration; and
- Select organizational structure.

2009:

- Create monitoring group as a legal entity and organize;
- Begin first phase of education for grower community;
- Solicit RFP's from firms qualified to do monitoring and reporting;

- Select firm;
- Set fee structure for participants; and
- Develop recruitment material.

2010:

- Recruit monitoring group participants; and
- Submit NOI to San Diego Water Board.

In addition to the workplan for the monitoring group and NOI, the SDCFB has talked to the University of California Cooperative Extension Service about how SDCFB can help growers meet the waiver's educational land record keeping requirements this year. Although San Diego Water Board staff has not reviewed the workplan, we appreciate and commend the SDCFB for its proactive work on timely compliance with the conditions of the new waiver for irrigated agricultural discharges.