

**STATE OF CALIFORNIA
REGIONAL WATER QUALITY CONTROL BOARD
CENTRAL COAST REGION**

DRAFT STAFF REPORT FOR REGULAR MEETING OF MAY 28-29, 2015

Prepared on February 25, 2015

ITEM NUMBER: Pending

SUBJECT: Issuance of Waste Discharge Requirements for Windset Farms (California), Inc.; Santa Maria Greenhouses; Santa Barbara County; Order No. R3-2015-0007

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KEY INFORMATION

Location: 1650 Black Road, Santa Maria, Santa Barbara County, California
Type of Discharge: Sanitary, agricultural, industrial, and stormwater
Design Capacity: Sanitary wastewater: 8,000 gpd
Agricultural and industrial wastewater: up to 750,000 gpd
Current Capacity: Current discharge volume varies based on weather and crop demands
Treatment: Septic tank and leach pits for sanitary wastewater.
Screening detention for stormwater. Denitrification (wood chip bioreactor) for agricultural wastewater. Denitrification of shallow groundwater to remove nitrates that did not originate from the Discharger.
Disposal: Sanitary wastewater is disposed of via leachfields
Reclamation: Agricultural drainage is re-circulated internally and both agricultural and industrial wastewater is ultimately used for fodder crop irrigation
Existing Orders: 97-10-DWQ

This Action: Adopt Order No. R3-2015-0007

SUMMARY

Irrigated agriculture poses the greatest salt and nutrient threat to the Santa Maria Valley's water quality. The Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board (Central Coast Water Board) has made efforts to better regulate discharges from irrigated agriculture. In regulating irrigated agriculture, the Central Coast Water Board emphasizes best management practice (BMP) implementation to protect aquatic habitats and to reduce fertilizer, pesticide, salt, nutrient, and sediment discharges. Windset Farms is an individual farm that implements irrigated agricultural BMPs to a high degree, such as:

- ◆ Enclosing growing areas within a climate-controlled, pressurized building (roof, walls, and floor/liner)
 - ~ Rain does not drive pollutants to surface water or groundwater
 - ~ Growing requires no soil disturbances that can result in erosion and sedimentation
 - ~ The greenhouse provides barriers to pests, which reduces the need for pesticides
 - ~ Evapotranspired water and wall condensate are captured as
 - ~ Producing remarkable crop yields while minimizing land use "footprint" and environmental impacts

- ◆ Collecting and re-using agricultural drainage/tailwater and wall condensate
 - ~ Highly efficient use of water, pesticides, and nutrients
 - ~ No fugitive water, pesticides, and nutrients
- ◆ Treating wastewater for nitrates, then recycling treated wastewater for agronomic fodder crop irrigation

The proposed WDRs regulate Windset Farms' discharge while acknowledging and accounting for Windset Farms' implementation of industry-leading BMPs. The proposed WDRs were therefore developed from a context that considered greater Central Coast Water Board priorities and cross-program needs, rather than the conventional context of isolated point-source considerations.

Of particular note, the proposed WDRs allow Windset Farms to:

- ◆ Remediate shallow groundwater nitrates that did not originate from Windset Farms' discharge, and
- ◆ Contribute, in lieu of on-site groundwater monitoring, financial resources towards filling in data gaps in
 - ~ a basin-wide salt/nutrients management plan effort, and
 - ~ the Central Coast Water Board's Santa Maria River salt TMDL.

The above special proposals align with Central Coast Water Board priorities and will mutually benefit Windset Farms and the Water Board (this will be explained in greater detail later in this staff report).

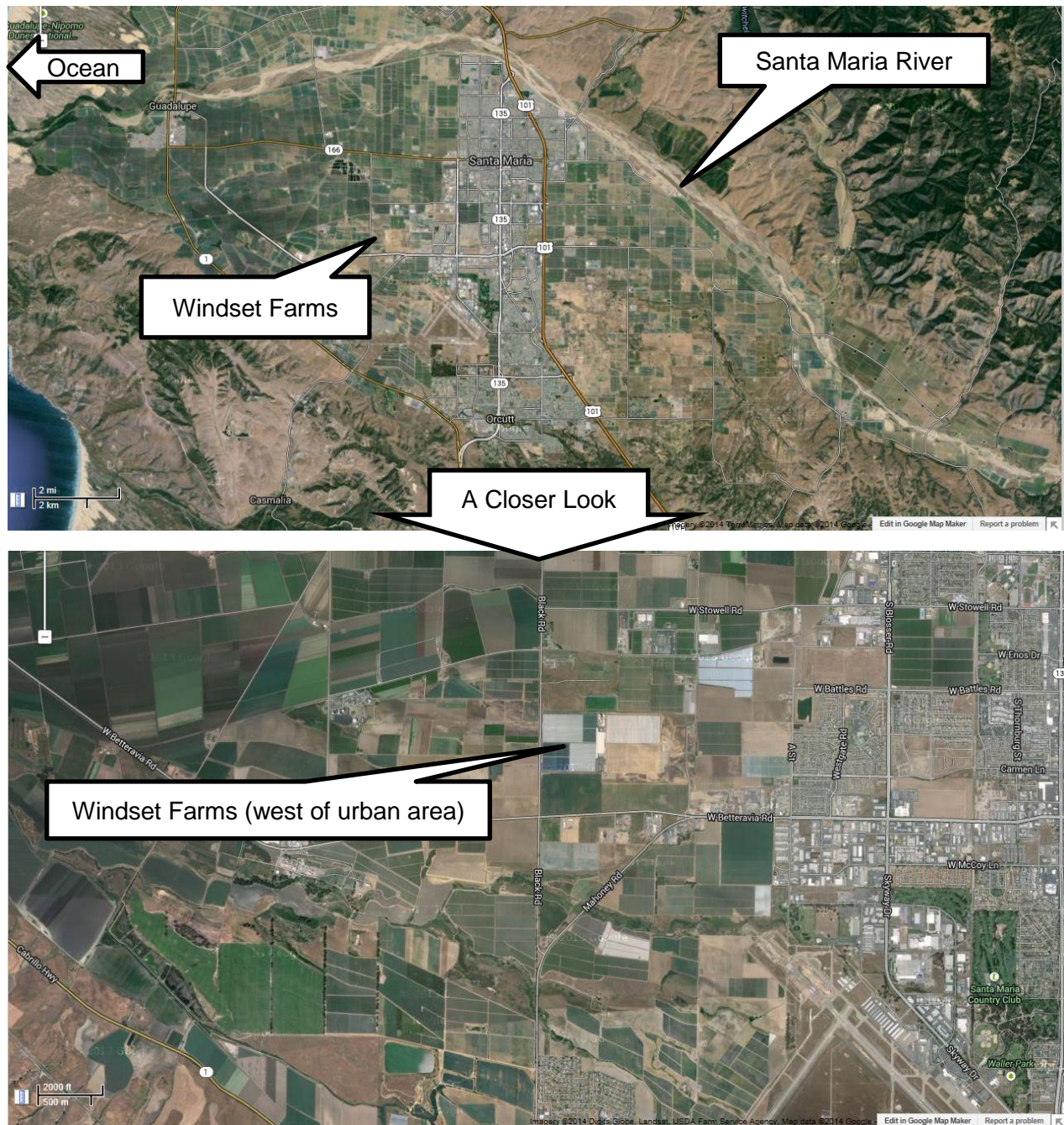
Staff recommends adoption of the proposed WDRs to regulate Windset Farms in a way that advances the Central Coast Water Board's greater cause of irrigated lands BMP implementation, groundwater nitrate remediation, and TMDL development.

DISCUSSION

Background

Windset Farms owns and operates a relatively new, modern hydroponic greenhouse and packing business in Santa Maria. The properties span the western city limit of Santa Maria, at and near 1650 Black Road (Lat/Long 34.92649, -120.48364). The Windset Farms properties occupy land situated in Santa Maria's flat, alluvial valley, amongst many other farms, as shown in Figure 1. The City of Santa Maria's Wastewater Treatment Plant lies less than two miles north of Windset Farms and the Laguna County Sanitation District Wastewater Treatment Plant lies about two and a half miles south of Windset Farms.

Figure 1
Regional Aerial View

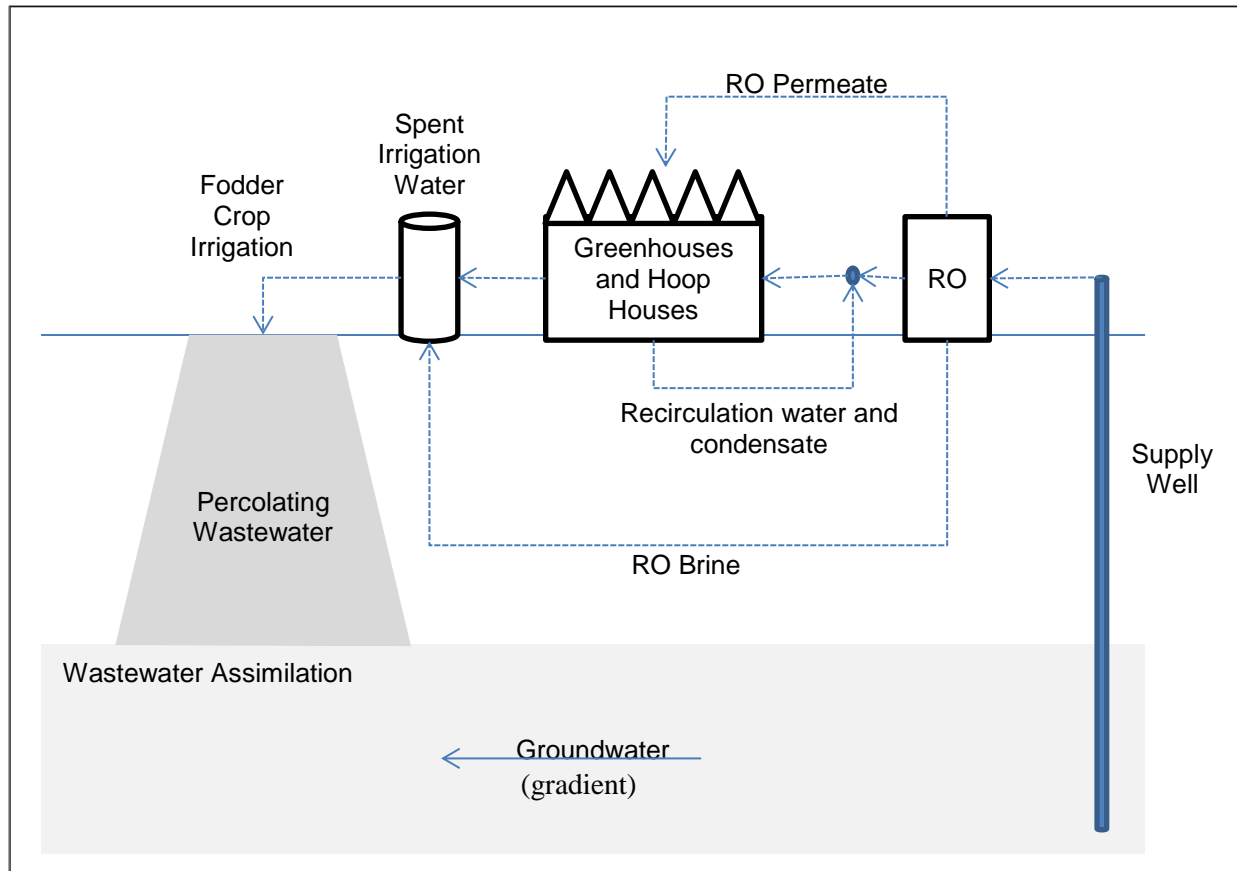


At 1650 Black Road, Windset Farms operates four 32-acre greenhouses that surround a packing facility. Adjacent and west of the greenhouses (at the northwest corner of Betteravia and Black Roads), Windset Farms will construct two 22.5-acre high tunnel hoop houses for produce production. The greenhouses and hoop houses will share an effluent treatment and agricultural wastewater recycling operation.

At the greenhouses, Windset Farms grows a variety of crops (primarily tomatoes and cucumbers). At the hoop houses, Windset Farms intends to grow strawberries. All growing is conducted hydroponically using a coco peat substrate. Coco peat is a natural fiber made out of coconut husks. The substrate supports the plants' roots, but does not provide nutrients to the plants. The plants obtain nutrients through fertigation. Coco peat has some cation exchange capacity, holds water well, re-wets well from dry and holds around 1000 times more air than soil. The Discharger claims that hydroponic greenhouses produce 25 to 35 times greater crop yields when compared to traditional agricultural operations.

As shown in the Figure 2, Windset Farms extracts groundwater, splits that groundwater into two reverse osmosis (RO) streams (permeate and brine), irrigates with the RO permeate stream, collects and recirculates the irrigation drainage, recombines any spent irrigation drainage with the RO brine stream, then recycles the recombined water for agronomic fodder crop irrigation.

Figure 2
Windset Farms Water Flow Diagram



Santa Maria Water Quality Setting

Windset Farms discharges to land within the Santa Maria Watershed. Although Windset Farms discharges to land (the discharge ultimately percolates to groundwater), streams in the lower

Santa Maria watershed all have groundwater as a significant source of flow.¹ So, surface and groundwater quality are interrelated. As mentioned above, there is a need to better understand the Santa Maria groundwater aquifer's salt and nutrient quality, and the Santa Maria River needs a salt TMDL.

Surface Water - California's 2010 303 (d) list of impaired water bodies identifies surface waters in the Santa Maria River watershed as being impaired for fecal indicator bacteria, nutrients, toxicity, pesticides, and salts. TMDL projects for fecal indicator bacteria, nutrients, toxicity and pesticides have been adopted by the Central Coast Water Board. Those TMDLs include implementation plans. Implementing a TMDL for an impaired water body involves applying the pollution control practices necessary to reduce the pollutant loads to the extent determined necessary in the TMDL. These practices usually consist of point source control permits and/or non-point source control Best Management Practices (BMPs).

Groundwater - The State Water Resources Control Board established a Policy for Water Quality Control for Recycled Water (Recycled Water Policy). The Recycled Water Policy states that some groundwater basins in the state contain salts and nutrients that exceed or threaten to exceed water quality objectives established in the applicable Water Quality Control Plans (Basin Plans), and not all Basin Plans include adequate implementation procedures for achieving or ensuring compliance. Therefore, the Recycled Water Policy calls for local stakeholders to develop regional or sub-regional salt and nutrient management plans. Those salt and nutrient management plans should provide for management of salts and nutrients from all sources in a manner that ensures attainment of water quality objectives and protection of beneficial uses in the basin or sub-basin.

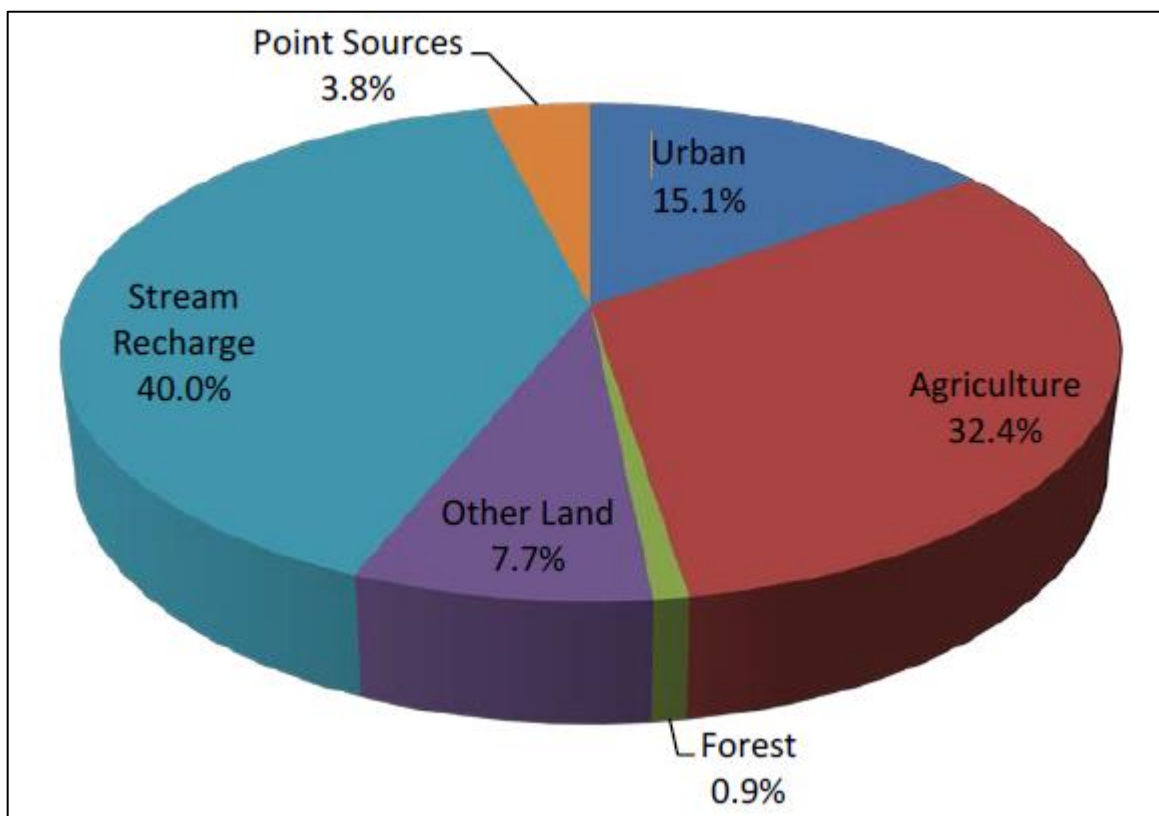
As part of the update to the Santa Barbara County Integrated Regional Water Management (IRWM) Plan under development by local interests, a Santa Maria Valley salt and nutrient management workgroup has prepared an assessment to evaluate sources, transport and fate of "salts" and "nutrients" (nitrate and other forms of nitrogen) in surface water and groundwater within the Santa Maria Valley. The goals of the assessment are to identify regulatory requirements, gather data, summarize key issues, and provide recommendations to support future development of a Santa Maria Valley salt and nutrient management plan envisioned by the Recycled Water Policy.

The Santa Maria Valley salt and nutrient management workgroup found that, on a watershed-wide basis, salt inputs and outputs are balanced and sustainable; the salts entering the aquifer roughly equal the salts leaving the aquifer. They also noted that irrigated agriculture is the largest source of controllable salt loading. When irrigation water is applied to crops, uptake by crops and evaporation leaves salts in the soil, which can build up over time. Salt accumulation in the root zone from irrigation occurs when salts are left in the soil due to insufficient leaching. As excess salts impair crop growth, growers must apply enough water to ensure that there is sufficient flushing to maintain root zone salt concentrations within crop tolerance levels. In the Santa Maria watershed, growers generally rely on a combination of winter rains and excess irrigation prior to planting ("pre-irrigation"), if needed, to ensure sufficient flushing. Irrigation during the growing season occurs primarily via drip irrigation (Peter Meertens, personal communication, Central Coast Water Board). Drip irrigation is a more efficient means of water delivery, but the reduced water volumes used can cause a greater accumulation of salts in soils due to decreased leaching.

¹ Santa Maria Watershed TMDL – Salt Modeling Report, Tetra Tech, Inc., March 1, 2013

That Santa Maria Valley salt and nutrient management workgroup also found that, on a watershed-wide basis, irrigated agriculture is the largest source of controllable salts (TDS) loading as can be seen from Figure 3

Figure 3
Proportion of TDS Loads to the Santa Maria Aquifer from Different Source Categories



Source: Santa Maria Watershed TMDL – Salt Modeling Report, March 1, 2013

Proposed Order Contents

Arguably, Windset Farms implements our desired farm BMPs more so than any other farm in our region. Compared to typical farming practices, Windset Farms' management practices,

- ◆ Improve land use efficiency by drastically increasing crop yield per acre
- ◆ Improve water use efficiency by
 - ~ Exclusive use of drip irrigation techniques, computer controlled amounts to exactly meet the growing needs of the crops. Irrigation is not on timers as in residential uses but computer monitored to meet the exact moisture content set by the growers, no more, no less.

- ~ Reducing the moisture requirements of the growing substrate (since the coco peat is contained in an impervious plastic bag that only drains out its bottom, water is confined to the root zone; no water is wicked away by non-root-zone soils)
 - ~ Collecting and re-using crop drainage to grow more vegetables, then, ultimately, recycling that water for fodder crop irrigation
 - ~ Capturing most evapotranspiration water via condensation on interior greenhouse walls
 - ~ Reducing evaporative water losses by controlling warm weather growing environment temperatures
- ◆ Put a roof over farmland, which
 - ~ Eliminates stormwater contamination
 - ~ Stops precipitation from flushing pollutants to groundwater
 - ◆ Preclude soil disturbances, which stops sedimentation
 - ◆ Places physical barriers to pests around crops, thus reducing pesticide use
 - ◆ Minimizes fertilizer use by collecting and recycling agricultural drainage water for additional irrigation
 - ◆ Treats crop drainage to reduce nitrates before release to the environment

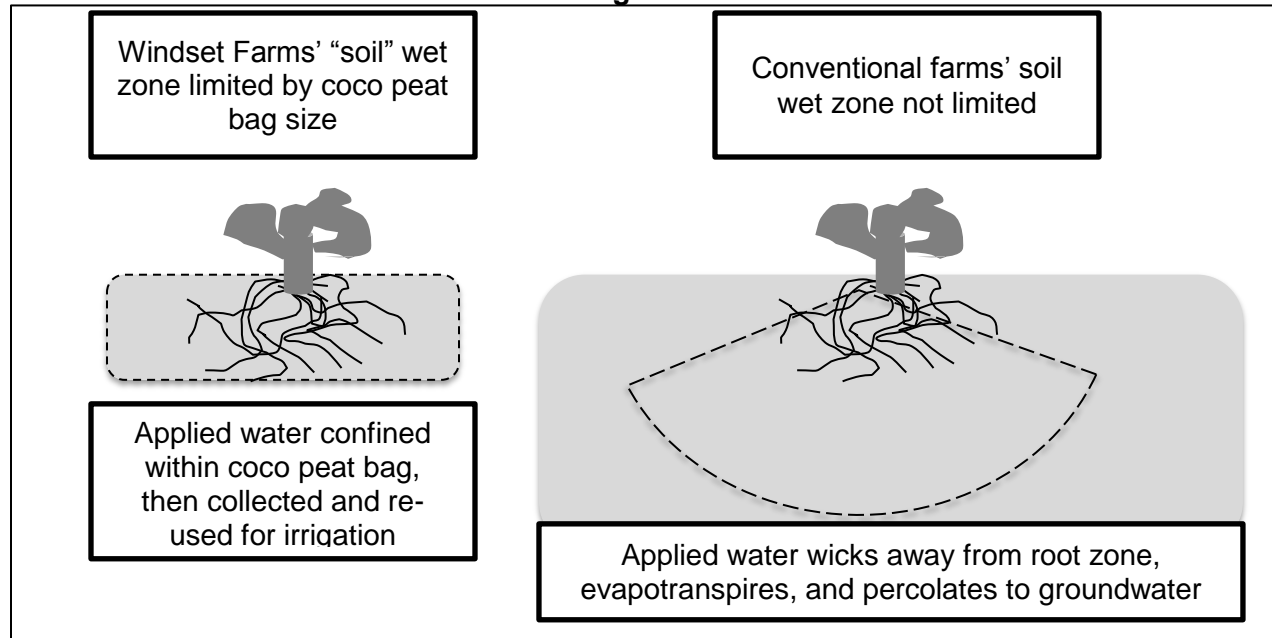
Since Windset Farms is an agricultural operation that does not fall within the scope of the Central Coast Water Board's Ag Order, or any other general order, staff is proposing to regulate Windset Farms using individual WDRs. The individual WDRs contextualize the regulation of Windset Farms within the Central Coast Water Board's framework of goals, plans, policies, and priorities. The individual WDRs hybridize the differing approaches that the Central Coast Water Board takes with irrigated agriculture and point-source discharges, tending towards the non-point source approach. Like the agricultural control strategy, the proposed individual WDRs emphasize BMP implementation over a strict numeric focus on effluent concentrations as they relate to numeric Basin Plan water quality objectives.

The threats from Windset Farms' discharge include pathogens, putrescible organic material, pH, earthen materials (i.e., sedimentation), pesticides, fertilizers (i.e., nutrients), and soluble inorganics (i.e., "salts," which are represented by total dissolved solids). How the proposed WDRs address those threats is summarized below.

Flow –The proposed WDRs do not include a flow limit. Like all other irrigated agriculture, Windset Farms uses water as needed to grow crops. The amount of water needed depends on the type of crop and weather conditions. Windset Farms has a flow history that includes a maximum daily flow of 800,000 gallons per day from the four 32-acre greenhouses. At the time this staff report was prepared, the strawberry greenhouses were not constructed, so there is no historic flow data for those flows. While the proposed WDRs do not include a flow limit, the monitoring and reporting program proposes flow reporting.

Windset Farms likely produces less wastewater than a similarly yielding conventional irrigated farm. Also, Windset Farms loses less water to soil wicking and percolation, as depicted in Figure 4.

Figure 4
Water Wicking and Percolation



Fecal Indicator Bacteria - Fecal indicator bacteria indicate the presence of pathogens. Windset Farms discharges to land. A properly functioning land disposal area holds and deactivates pathogens. The proposed WDRs require proper discharge to land. So, Windset Farms' discharge to land constitutes a satisfactory pollution control practice in conformance with the fecal indicator bacteria TMDL.

Putrescible Organic Material - Windset Farms discharges organically weak wastewater to land. A properly functioning land disposal area will hold putrescible organic material in the soil and soil bacteria will stabilize the putrescible organic material. The proposed WDRs require a properly functioning land disposal area.

pH - A properly functioning land disposal area will buffer pH. The proposed WDRs require a properly functioning land disposal area.

Earthen Materials - Because Windset Farms' growing area is paved and lined, there is little threat from the discharge of earthen materials. The proposed WDRs require Windset Farms to confine its farming to paved and lined areas.

Pesticides - Windset Farms entirely encloses its crops within greenhouses and maintains a positive air pressure within the enclosure to minimize pest infestations. When pest infestations occur, Windset Farms employs modern Integrated Pest Management (IPM) practices to reduce the need for pesticides. Pesticides are applied inside the greenhouse only when necessary, after other IPM practices have proven ineffective. There may be small amounts used by the groundskeepers for the landscaping areas but that area is insignificant relative to the size of the

facility, as well as implementing integrated pest management practices. The proposed WDRs require Windset Farms to continue their pesticide reduction BMPs.

Nutrients - Windset Farms addresses its nutrient threat by collecting all of its agricultural drainage water and treating that water using a nitrate bioreactor. The nitrate bioreactor reduces effluent nitrate concentrations to acceptable levels. So, Windset Farms implements a nutrient point source control that complies with the Central Coast Water Board's nutrient TMDL implementation plan. In fact, Windset Farms proposes to go above and beyond controlling its nutrient discharges by remediating additional nitrates found in local, shallow groundwater.

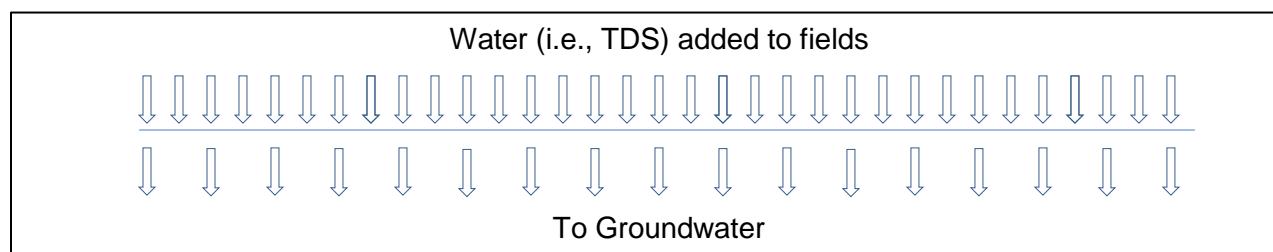
Windset Farms' nitrate bioreactor is sized to handle a peak flow; however, Windset Farms does not always produce that peak flow due to the vagaries of crop demand and meteorological factors. So, there will be many occasions where Windset Farms' nitrate bioreactor will have low flows. Low nitrate bioreactor flows can cause hydrogen sulfide gas generation problems if not properly managed. Also, the nitrate bioreactor will operate most efficiently under steady-state conditions.

Regionally, Santa Maria Valley-wide agricultural practices have resulted in nitrate-impacted shallow groundwater. To minimize low and fluctuating flow conditions in its nitrate bioreactors, Windset Farms proposes to install shallow ground water extraction wells and add extracted shallow groundwater to the nitrate bioreactor flows. By extracting shallow groundwater and routing that groundwater through their nitrate bioreactor, Windset Farms would be remediating others' groundwater nitrate in addition to maintaining its optimal nitrate bioreactor flows. That is a win/win situation that would yield somewhere around 5.2 million gallons of basin water (i.e., water that would otherwise not be treated) being denitrified per year. Another benefit of remediating shallow groundwater nitrate is that the practice will also dilute Windset Farms' effluent TDS concentrations.

The proposed WDRs require Windset Farms to continue bioreacting its agricultural drainage to reduce effluent nitrate concentrations to acceptable levels. The proposed WDRs also allow Windset Farms to remediate additional, non-Windset Farms nitrate found in local, shallow groundwater.

Total Dissolved Solids (TDS) - TDS is problematic in most Central Coast Water Board-regulated discharges. TDS treatment is not an economical option for nearly all dischargers. Source control is the only current economic option to reduce effluent TDS. As mentioned earlier, when conventional farms apply irrigation water to crops, uptake by crops and evaporation leaves salts in the soil, which can build up until rain or intentional over-irrigation flushes it "away." The flushing of conventional farming's salts produces an "unseen," non-point source salt discharge, as depicted in Figure 5.

Figure 5
Conventional Farm TDS Discharge



While conventional farms' TDS discharges are hidden underground, they nonetheless exist. In fact (as stated earlier), irrigated agriculture is the largest source of controllable TDS in the Santa Maria Valley, as Figure 3 depicts.

The Basin Plan says² that, for irrigated agriculture to continue production into the foreseeable future, the problem of gradual accumulation of salts in soils and waters must be faced and kept under control at acceptable levels. For each basin, not only do the rates of import and export of salts need to be in reasonably close balance, but the balance must also be maintained at a sufficiently low level of salinity to meet the quality demands of the various designated beneficial uses. This is often referred to as maintenance of a "favorable salt balance." The Santa Maria Basin's aquifer-wide salt model³ indicates an approximately steady-state sustainable salt condition. The Basin Plan's Implementation Plan (found in Chapter 4) includes a discussion of the need for irrigation operations' salt management and improved salt management techniques. To a great degree, that discussion centers on irrigation efficiency. Windset Farms' exceptional water use efficiencies include,

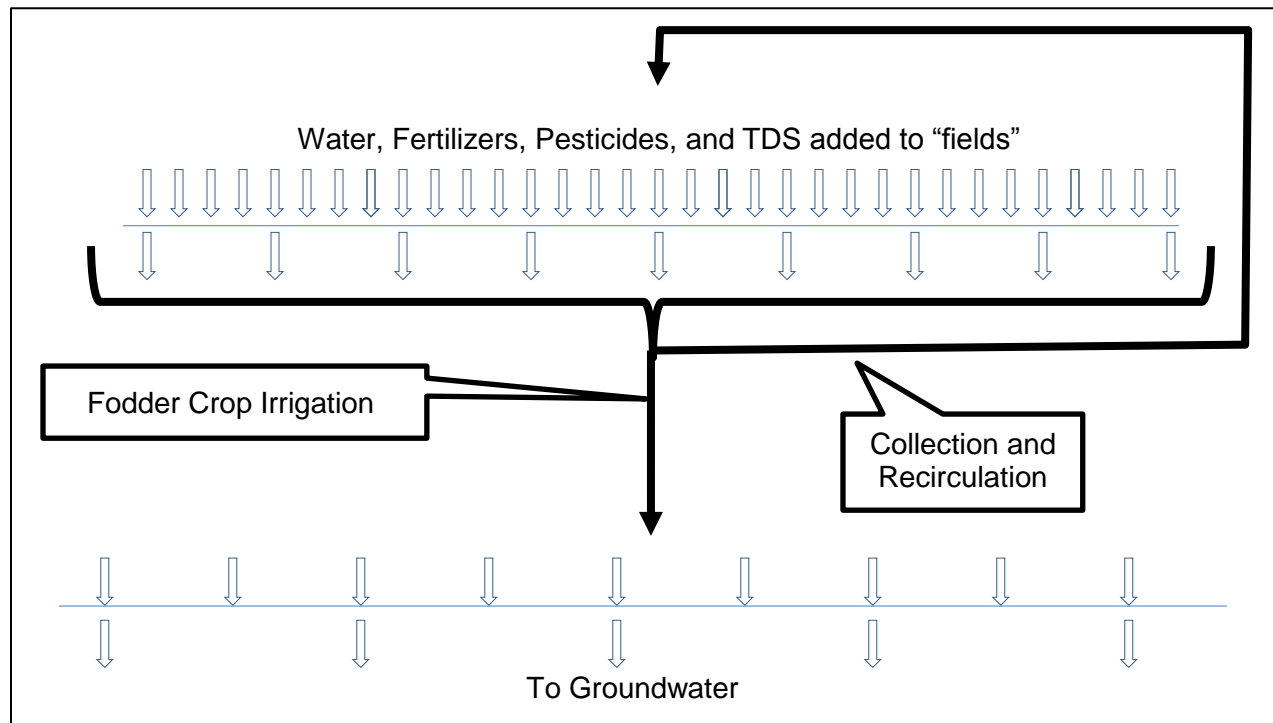
- ◆ Losing less water to soil wicking and percolation (as mentioned earlier),
- ◆ Collecting and re-using "field" drainage"
- ◆ Minimizing evaporative losses by controlling the growing climate
- ◆ Collecting and re-using evapotranspiration condensate

Windset Farms' water efficiency practices make its brine stream more obvious than conventional farming's brine streams; however, Windset Farms does not add any more salts than a conventional farm. It is more likely that conventional farms produce a greater TDS load per crop. Conventional farms continually irrigate fields to replenish soil water. Each water application loads TDS minerals. Those minerals migrate to groundwater during flushing or over-irrigation. If one were to collect and re-use that migrating, mineral-laden water, one would not need as much replenishment water – i.e., one would not load as much TDS mass. Windset Farms collects and re-uses migrating water, as depicted in Figure 6.

² See section VIII.C.3. Irrigation Operations - Need For Salt Management

³ Santa Maria Watershed TMDL – Salt Modeling Report, March 1, 2013

Figure 6
Windset Farms TDS Discharge



In addition to collecting and re-circulating salts accumulated in soil prior to discharge, Windset Farms also hauls off a portion of accumulated salts. Their "soil" is coco peat. Coco peat has some cation exchange capacity, so it can bind salt cations. Because Windset Farms frequently replaces the coco peat, Windset Farms removes salts bound in their "soil." Conventional farms do not do that; they flush the salts. Windset Farms' discarded "soil" gets recycled as compost by others at an off-site location. In that respect, Windset Farms generates less salt loading than conventional farms. So, Windset Farms implements maximal salt management techniques recommended in Basin Plan Section VIII.C.4.

From a Santa Maria aquifer perspective, 1) the *Santa Maria Watershed TMDL – Salt Modeling Report*, and 2) the *Santa Barbara County Integrated Regional Water Management Plan, Salt and Nutrient Planning Workgroup's Santa Maria Valley Groundwater Assessment* suggest that aquifer TDS inputs and outputs are balanced and sustainable. The salts entering the aquifer roughly equal the salts leaving the aquifer and meet the quality demands of the various designated beneficial uses. Given the scale of the aquifer model, the Windset Farms discharge is unlikely to alter the salts balance and sustainability. As shown in Figure 7 **Error! Reference source not found.**, potential water users within Windset Farms' assumed assimilation gradient consist of agricultural users for many miles. It appears that the nearest domestic supply wells are near the City of Guadalupe, which is miles downgradient. Windset Farms' discharge is most probably assimilated by that time, and is less than that of other closer irrigated agriculture operations.

Figure 7
Photo Indicating Water Users in the Vicinity of Windset Farms



Monitoring - Conventional on-site groundwater monitoring at Windset Farms would provide very local, very specific information about the immediate impact of Windset Farms' discharge. That information would likely reveal that Windset Farms' discharge results in an assimilation gradient. Such gradients can be tolerated as long as the assimilation gradient does not impair beneficial uses of local water and maintains greater water body sustainability. So, conventional on-site groundwater monitoring would confirm the expected, but not provide useful data about the overall health of the watershed.

Lower Santa Maria surface waters have groundwater as a significant source of flow.⁴ So, surface and groundwater quality are interrelated. Surface water and groundwater salts need to be understood and controlled. Under the Santa Barbara County Integrated Regional Water Management Plan,⁵ a Salt and Nutrient Management Plan (SNMP) workgroup is attempting to understand Santa Maria groundwater salts. Also, in a parallel (but separate) process, a Santa Maria River salt TMDL is under development. Both the TMDL and the SNMP have major data gaps that need filling. Rather than perform conventional on-site groundwater monitoring at Windset Farms, the discharger proposes to provide funds to help fill those data gaps.

Specifically, the discharger proposes to fund the acquisition, installation, and operation and maintenance of two stream gages that will monitor the two perennial streams that flow out of the Santa Maria groundwater basin. The gages will provide information on the amount of water and salts leaving the basin. Understanding the inputs and outputs of the basin are crucial for determining the basin's water and salt balance, which is a key component of the Salt TMDL and the SNMP effort. The gages will also serve to monitor the flow into sensitive and highly impaired aquatic habits of Oso Flaco Lake and the Santa Maria Estuary. Nutrient and pesticide TMDLs have been developed for these waters and the gages will provide valuable information on

⁴ Santa Maria Watershed TMDL – Salt Modeling Report, Tetra Tech, Inc., March 1, 2013

⁵ Santa Maria Valley Groundwater Assessment, Santa Barbara County, California, Salt and Nutrient Planning Workgroup, Santa Barbara County IRWM Plan 2013, April 12, 2013

loading. The proposed stream gages will provide more scientifically valuable information than would be provided using conventional on-site groundwater monitoring.

Windset Farms' monitoring proposal is consistent with other related monitoring approaches. For example, to determine the effectiveness of its irrigated agriculture regulatory program, the Central Coast Water Board implements, for the most part, a regional monitoring strategy that tends to take scrutiny/emphasis off of individual farms. Windset Farms' proposal to provide funds to help fill regional data gaps is in the spirit of the irrigated agriculture regulatory program's regional monitoring approach. Also, the monitoring and reporting programs for the nearby wastewater treatment plants (i.e., City of Santa Maria and Laguna Sanitary District) allow those entities to propose regional projects in lieu of on-site monitoring.

Compliance History - Windset Farms' first phase involved operating two greenhouses with an associated packing operation. Windset Farms claims that they did not anticipate wastewater discharges problems because its Santa Maria facility's design was based on their Delta, Canada facility's design, and their Delta, Canada facility did not have a salt issue to deal with (its source water is mostly relatively pure snow melt or rain water collected in large basins). As such, no mention of discharge was included in the original project description beyond the sanitary discharge from the septic system. In 2012, after construction of its Santa Maria greenhouses 1 and 2 went on line, Windset Farms realized that the conditions in California (weather and starting water quality requiring desalination) were significantly different than the conditions in Canada. So its added wastewater tanks, constructed the entire wastewater handling system, and approached the Central Coast Water Board staff to obtain a process wastewater permit.

When Windset Farms revealed their process wastewater discharge to staff, RWQCB staff 1) considered an enforcement action for illegally discharging and 2) began the process of regulating Windset Farms' process water discharge. After staff confronted Windset Farms with illegal discharge allegations, Windset Farms eagerly took cooperative actions to satisfy staff's needs. Windset began collecting data in cooperation with the RWQCB staff and submitted an initial Report of Waste Discharge (ROWD) on November 15, 2012. RWQCB staff direction at that time was to continue data collection while aggressively pursuing internal process improvements to reduce or eliminate waste flows. Data collection has been continuous ever since. Windset Farms performed several technology studies at bench-level and field-level pilot tests to evaluate methods of reducing or removing compounds from the waste stream. With the exception of the wood chip de-nitrification technology, none of the other technologies was readily applicable to the greenhouse growing process. It was during this technology evaluation process that the RWQCB staff took enforcement by issuing a Notice of Violation (NOV). While Windset Farms was collecting data, staff determined the ROWD was incomplete and issued an NOV to foment a complete ROWD. Windset Farms complied and the NOV requirements were satisfied. Because of Windset Farms' cooperation, staff no longer proposes to impose an enforcement action against Windset Farms.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUMMARY

The City of Santa Maria is the lead agency pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) (Cal. Pub. Res. Code Section 15367). As the lead agency, the City certified a Mitigated Negative Declaration on May 27, 2009, for the project. The Mitigated Negative Declaration did not identify any potentially significant environmental effects with respect to the adoption of these waste discharge requirements and within the jurisdiction of the Central Coast Water Board.

The Central Coast Water Board is a responsible agency pursuant to CEQA (CEQA Guidelines

Section 15096). The Central Coast Water Board has considered the Mitigated Negative Declaration and makes its own conclusions in this Order on whether and how to approve the waste discharge requirements for the project. Since the Mitigated Negative Declaration has not identified any potentially significant environmental effects within the Central Coast Water Board's jurisdiction, the Central Coast Water Board is not required to make any specific finding pursuant to CEQA Guidelines 15096. The proposed waste discharge requirements will result in improved water quality in the Santa Maria Basin since they allow the Discharger to remediate shallow groundwater nitrates and improve the understanding of the Santa Maria groundwater basin, which is a goal of the Recycled Water Policy.

These proposed waste discharge requirements are for an existing facility and are exempt from the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (Public Resources Code, Section 21000, et. seq.) in accordance with Section 15301, Article 19, Chapter 3, Division 6, Title 14 of the California Code of Regulations.

COMMENTS

Pending

ATTACHMENTS

1. Proposed Waste Discharge Requirements Order No. R3-2015-0007
2. Proposed Monitoring and Reporting Program No. R3-2015-0007

RECOMMENDATION

In many ways, Windset Farms' management practices embody the desired outcome of the Central Coast Water Board's irrigated lands regulatory program. Windset Farms leads the field in agricultural field practices and should be commended. Windset Farms' proposed practices will also result in environmental benefit. From that context, the proposed WDRs impose appropriate and fair regulatory controls. These proposed waste discharge requirements are highlighted by;

- ◆ Formalizing Windset Farms' praiseworthy agricultural management practices
- ◆ Windset Farms' voluntary remediation of others' groundwater nitrate contamination, and
- ◆ Windset Farms' proposal to contribute to regional water quality assessment efforts in lieu of performing conventional, point-source on-site groundwater monitoring – a proposal that considers the Central Coast Water Board's cross-program priorities and maximizes the Central Coast Water Board's ability to address scientific and regulatory priorities.

Staff recommends adoption of Order No. R3-2015-0007 as proposed.