



Regional Water Quality Control Board  
11020 Sun Center Drive #200  
Rancho Cordova, CA 95670-6114

September 27, 2008

Re: Renewal of Discharge Permit, Woodland Waste Water Treatment Plant (Yolo County)

Dear Members of the Regional Water Quality Control Board,

I am writing on behalf of the Central Valley Bird Club and its 550 members. I was recently informed that the Board is attempting to require that the Woodland Wastewater Treatment Plant fence off its ponds and eliminate any access to the public, including birders and wildlife biologists who have been surveying birds there for many years. The Woodland Wastewater Treatment ponds, along with many other similar sewage ponds throughout the Central Valley and California, are very important shorebird and waterfowl areas that have hosted a majority of our noteworthy birds. In fact more than half of all significant shorebird records in the Central Valley have come from sewage ponds and a large proportion of significant Yolo County records have come from the Woodland Wastewater Treatment Ponds. Additionally, these ponds are critical survey areas for monitoring shorebird populations in the valley and Yolo County. Equally important are the recreational opportunities that these ponds provide for many birders throughout the region. Sewage ponds, including the Woodland Wastewater Treatment Ponds, have a long history of birding visitations.

From what I have heard, the Board is concerned with the health risks in allowing birders and the public to walk along levees at sewage pond facilities. I have personally visited nearly all of the sewage ponds in California over the past 37 years and I know of hundreds of other birders who have visited many sewage ponds as well. Never during those decades has any birder ever come into contact with wastewater nor would I anticipate that situation ever happening. It stretches credibility to suggest that a birder would fall off a levee into a wastewater pond. To shut off access to birders to these ponds would be a tragedy for the birding world that would severely reduce our understanding of bird status and distribution in the future. Please maintain our existing access to these remarkable ponds.

On a personal note, I am currently writing a book on the status and distribution of birds of California. During my research for the book, the value of bird records from sewage ponds has been reinforced in my mind. Without these records, many shorebird and waterbird species would remain unrecorded in the Central Valley and especially in most of the state's 58 counties. More importantly, the relative abundance and migration dates of many uncommon and common species would be poorly understood. To assure our future knowledge of changes in bird distribution and status, I implore you to allow us to continue to look for birds in these ponds.

Thank you for your time and understanding in this matter,

John Sterling

President of the Central Valley Bird Club