



Media Release

State Water Board Approves Frost Protection Regulations for the Russian River Watershed

New Rules to Be in Place for Spring 2012 Frost Season

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Sacramento — Regulations requiring management of diversions for frost protection in the Russian River watershed were approved today by the State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board) and are expected to be in place by March 2012.

The State Water Board voted unanimously to establish a regulatory framework under which growers in the Russian River watershed will be able to better manage their use of water to protect crops during frost season. The rules are intended to prevent diversions for frost protection from causing salmonid mortality due to rapid decreases in stream stage that can strand small, developing fish.

The new rules require regular monitoring of the effects of water diversions for frost protection on stream flows between March 15 and May 15, beginning in 2012. The monitoring may, in some cases, also apply to groundwater diversions.

The monitoring information will be reported annually to the State Water Board. The data will be evaluated to ensure that diversions are being managed to prevent salmonid mortality due frost protection. In cases where stranding mortality occurs, corrective measures and a timetable for implementation will be devised by the governing body.

Growers will have the option of handling their own monitoring and reporting, or sharing costs and resources with a cooperative body experienced in that kind of data gathering and management. The regulations do not apply to diversions upstream of Warm Springs Dam in Sonoma County or Coyote Dam in Mendocino County.

A frost event is possible when overnight temperatures in a field or vineyard drop below freezing for four hours or longer. Evenly applying water to crops can maintain a temperature of 32 degrees Fahrenheit during a prolonged frost event, which in many cases is sufficient to avoid frost damage. However, this kind of even water application requires on average 50 gallons per acre, per minute. Too many growers drawing directly from the watershed at the same time may reduce flows in ways that are harmful to salmonids. Therefore, effective and timely management of pumps and application becomes essential.



The regulatory effort by state water officials followed a request of the federal National Marine Fisheries Service, which had observed fish stranding incidents involving endangered species during the 2008 frost season.

Following adoption by the State Water Board, the rulemaking record for the regulation is then compiled and submitted to the state Office of Administrative Law for review and approval. The State Water Board anticipates that the regulation will become effective in time for the Spring 2012 frost season.

The State Water Resources Control Board's mission is to preserve, enhance and restore the quality of California's water resources, and ensure their proper allocation and efficient use for the benefit of present and future generations.

For more information on this issue, visit the frost protection regulation website at:
http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/waterrights/water_issues/programs/hearings/russian_river_frost/