

STATE OF CALIFORNIA  
REGIONAL WATER QUALITY CONTROL BOARD  
CENTRAL COAST REGION

STAFF REPORT FOR REGULAR MEETING OF JUNE 17-18, 2026

Prepared on May 22, 2026

**ITEM NUMBER:** 16

**SUBJECT:** Workshop on Proposed Order R3-2021-0040-A1, as Amended by State Water Resources Control Board Order WQ 2023-0081

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**KEY INFORMATION**

Location: Region-Wide  
Type of Discharge: Agricultural  
Existing Orders: Order R3-2021-0040

**ACTION:** Information/Discussion

**SUMMARY**

This public workshop, hosted by the Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board (Central Coast Water Board), provides members of the public with an opportunity to provide input on the proposed revisions to the Central Coast Ag Order (R3-2021-0040).<sup>1</sup> Comments will be accepted on the Proposed Order (*Order R3-2021-0040-A1, as amended by State Water Board Order WQ 2023-0081*)<sup>2</sup> and supporting documents. Central Coast Water Board staff will also provide presentations on the Proposed Order at the workshop. Although a quorum of Central Coast Water Board members is expected to attend this workshop, no Board action will be taken.

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<sup>1</sup> Ag Order R3-2021-0040, *General Waste Discharge Requirements for Discharges from Irrigated Lands*: [https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/centralcoast/water\\_issues/programs/ilp/regulatory\\_information.html](https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/centralcoast/water_issues/programs/ilp/regulatory_information.html)

<sup>2</sup> The Proposed Order, attachments thereto, and other supporting documents are available at: [https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/centralcoast/board\\_decisions/tentative\\_orders/](https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/centralcoast/board_decisions/tentative_orders/)

The proposed revisions to the Central Coast Ag Order are responsive to the State Water Quality Control Board (State Water Board) remands and direction to develop an alternative water supply program in Order WQ 2023-0081.<sup>3</sup>

A Public Notice<sup>4</sup> announcing the availability of the Proposed Order and associated documents was released on May 26, 2026, and provides information on how to download or request documents available for public comment. Written public comments will be received between May 26, 2026, and 5 PM on July 10, 2026. Written comments will only be accepted on the proposed revisions to the Ag Order and the attachments thereto, including (but not limited to) the development of the alternative water supply program. Documents available for public comment include the following (see footnote 2 above for link to documents):

- Proposed Order R3-2021-0040-A1 and attachments:
  - Attachment A - Findings
  - Attachment B - Monitoring and Reporting Program
  - Attachment C - Acronyms and Definitions
  - Attachment D - Assessment of Interim Drinking Water Needs and Costs in Central Coast Areas Affected by Agricultural Nitrate Groundwater Contamination
    - An Executive Summary of the *Assessment of Interim Drinking Water Needs and Costs* (available in English and Spanish).
- Remands Summary Table of the revisions to address all State Water Board remands (in English and Spanish)
- Summary of Drinking Water Solutions Program Regulatory Requirements (in English and Spanish)

## DISCUSSION

### Background

On April 15, 2021, the Central Coast Water Board adopted Ag Order R3-2021-0040. After adoption, the Ag Order was petitioned (by Grower-Shipper Association of Central California, et al., and by the California Coast Keeper Alliance et. al.). The State Water Board took up the two petitions and in response, issued Order WQ 2023-0081, which remanded portions of the Ag Order to the Central Coast Water Board with direction for revisions. In addition to the remands, and recognizing the critical drinking water impacts associated with groundwater nitrate contamination, the State Water Board directed the Central Coast Water Board to “*to incorporate a requirement or reach an agreement in which dischargers or their third-party representatives provide short-term and long-term alternative water supplies for residents relying on groundwater in areas where the*

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<sup>3</sup> Order WQ 2023-0081, *In the Matter of Review of General Waste Discharge Requirements for Discharges from Irrigated Lands Order R3-2021-0040*:

[https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/public\\_notices/petitions/water\\_quality/docs/2023/wqo2023-0081.pdf](https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/public_notices/petitions/water_quality/docs/2023/wqo2023-0081.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> The Public Notice is available on the Central Coast Water Board’s Public Notices webpage:

[https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/centralcoast/public\\_notices/public\\_notices.html](https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/centralcoast/public_notices/public_notices.html)

*maximum contaminant level (MCL) for nitrate is exceeded as a result of agricultural operations.”*

The Proposed Order is responsive to all the requirements in the State Water Board’s Order WQ 2023-0081 including direction to develop an alternative water supply program (AWSP).<sup>5</sup> The Proposed Order and its attachments considered public input from the August 2025 public comment period and public workshop held at a regular meeting of the Central Coast Water Board on the development of an AWSP.<sup>6</sup>

### **Drinking Water Solutions Program**

The Proposed Order includes the Drinking Water Solutions Program which provides two compliance pathways for Dischargers to choose: either the Individual Drinking Water Protection (IDWP) or AWSP compliance pathways. In the proposed IDWP compliance pathway, Dischargers are not required to provide alternative water supplies but must comply with Proposed Order requirements individually. By contrast, the AWSP compliance pathway requires the provision of alternative water supplies but allows approved third-party administrators to fulfill Proposed Order requirements on behalf of dischargers. A summary of the AWSP and IDWP compliance pathways and of related requirements is included in the *Summary of Drinking Water Solutions Program Regulatory Requirements* document available for public comment (see link in footnote 2).

The following provides additional context for some of the proposed AWSP compliance pathway requirements.

### **AWSP Timeline**

The Proposed Order includes approximately ten years of requirements, Administrative Milestones, and compliance schedules for the AWSP. The Proposed Order requirements focus first on outreach and provision of interim water supplies and later phases in planning and prioritization for long-term drinking water solutions. This allows Dischargers to begin implementing an AWSP immediately rather than delaying the provision of safe drinking water while attempting to resolve all long-term details in advance. Development of requirements for the implementation of long-term drinking water solutions will grow from initial program implementation and lessons learned during the first decade of program implementation.

We anticipate that the Central Coast Water Board will revisit the program and consider updates within that ten-year timeframe to address the following: a) the nitrogen discharge target and schedule in the context of new data, science and information; b) future requirements for the implementation of long-term drinking water solutions after planning and prioritization is completed; and c) any new precedential requirements of

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<sup>5</sup> A Remands Summary Table is available with the other public comment documents linked in footnote 2.

<sup>6</sup> August 2025 Central Coast Water Board Agenda, see Item 8:

[https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/centralcoast/board\\_info/agendas/2025/aug/agenda-aug-english.pdf](https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/centralcoast/board_info/agendas/2025/aug/agenda-aug-english.pdf)

the State Water Board (e.g., in response to the Second Statewide Agricultural Expert Panel<sup>7</sup> recommendations, currently in draft).

### **Flexibility for AWSP Dischargers and Administrators**

**Need and Cost Estimates:** There is uncertainty regarding the future need for and cost of both interim alternative water supplies and long-term drinking water solutions. As more data are gathered through drinking water well testing, groundwater quality trend monitoring, and planning and prioritization efforts, the scope and financial needs of an effective AWSP will become clearer. The Proposed Order allows for AWSP administrators to develop, and submit for approval, a revised need and cost assessment.

**AWSP Funding:** AWSP administrators will determine program participation fees/dues needed to implement the required elements of the AWSP and may seek co-funding such as state, federal, or philanthropic financial support.

**AWSP Administrators:** Qualified third-party administrators may fulfill AWSP compliance pathway requirements on behalf of Dischargers. Under the current framework, the State Water Board or any entity that meets the administrator criteria in the Proposed Order is eligible to serve in this role. Regardless of the administrator selected, Dischargers, or the administrator acting on their behalf, must implement all AWSP monitoring and reporting requirements prescribed in the Proposed Order and the performance-based nitrogen discharge target schedule is dependent on meeting Administrative Milestones.

A State Water Board administered AWSP may have many advantages and benefits. The State Water Board can leverage its expertise from administering the Safe and Affordable Funding or Equity and Resilience (SAFER) program to implement a Central Coast AWSP using established processes, partnerships, and community engagement practices that align well with the goals of the AWSP. This type of arrangement could streamline program implementation and centralize administrative responsibilities. At the same time, a State Water Board administered AWSP may be a highly efficient compliance pathway that minimizes the need for Dischargers to navigate complex program requirements, build administrative capacity, or manage contractors.

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<sup>7</sup> The Second Statewide Agricultural Expert Panel:  
[https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water\\_issues/programs/agriculture/2025-expert-panel.html](https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/agriculture/2025-expert-panel.html)