

ITEM: 20

SUBJECT: Basin Plan Amendments to the Water Quality Control Plan for the Sacramento River and San Joaquin River Basins to Establish Salinity Water Quality Objectives for the Lower San Joaquin River – *Board Hearing to Consider Adoption*

BOARD ACTION: *Consideration of Approval of Environmental Documentation and Adoption of Proposed Basin Plan Amendments*

BACKGROUND: In 2004, the Board adopted a Control Program for salt and boron discharges to the Lower San Joaquin River (LSJR). Phase 1 of the Control Program is focused on meeting the salinity objectives at Vernalis. The current draft Basin Plan Amendments would address Phase 2 of this Control Program by setting salinity objectives for Reach 83 of the LSJR (Merced River to Vernalis).

The draft Basin Plan Amendments incorporate the results of work performed by Board staff from 2005 through 2010 and continued by the LSJR Committee between May 2010 and the end of 2015. The LSJR Committee, a subcommittee of the CV-SALTS initiative, includes stakeholders that deliver water to, divert water from, or discharge to the LSJR as well as other interested persons. The LSJR Committee developed recommendations for salinity objectives that would be protective of beneficial uses, along with a performance goal that would apply during certain months and water year types and that is based on modeling results of expected water quality. The LSJR Committee also recommended an implementation plan and a monitoring and surveillance program for the Board's consideration.

The draft Basin Plan Amendments would establish an electrical conductivity (EC) objective of 1,550 micro Siemens per centimeter ( $\mu\text{S}/\text{cm}$ ) as a 30-day running average in the LSJR, except during Extended Dry Periods, when the objective will be 2,470  $\mu\text{S}/\text{cm}$  as a 30-day running average and 2,200  $\mu\text{S}/\text{cm}$  as an annual average (using at a minimum the previous four consecutive quarterly samples). The proposed objectives provide protection of beneficial uses in this section of the LSJR, including Agricultural Supply (AGR) and Municipal and Domestic Supply (MUN). Furthermore, a performance goal of 1,350  $\mu\text{S}/\text{cm}$  during certain months and water year types is also being proposed to promote the achievement of the best possible water quality under variable conditions. An implementation program to achieve proposed salinity objectives and a monitoring plan will verify compliance with the proposed EC and existing boron objectives and to gauge success in meeting the EC performance goal. The draft Basin Plan Amendments propose that the Board reevaluate the EC objectives and compliance with the boron objectives in ten years.

The proposed Basin Plan Amendments and a supporting Draft Staff Report were released for public review and comment on 27 February 2017. The deadline for written comments was until 14 April 2017. A Board Hearing

was conducted on 6 April 2017 to receive oral comments on the proposed Amendments. Based on comments received during the public comment period, an updated Staff Report was released to the public on 10 May 2017 to provide additional information on historic salinity concentrations and limitations as well as aquatic life beneficial uses. Agenda materials include an updated Executive Summary with proposed Basin Plan Language, a draft Resolution for adopting the proposed Amendments, the written comment letters, and the responses to public comments received within the comment period.

The full, updated Staff Report and supplemental reference documents are available on the Board's website at:

[http://waterboards.ca.gov/centralvalley/water\\_issues/salinity/upstream\\_salt\\_boron/index.shtml](http://waterboards.ca.gov/centralvalley/water_issues/salinity/upstream_salt_boron/index.shtml)

#### ISSUES:

Comments were received from four interested persons at the 6 April 2017 hearing, and thirteen written comment letters were received within the comment period. Overall broad issues included:

- Concern over the impact that the proposed upstream salinity objectives would have on the salinity water quality objectives (WQOs) at Vernalis and in the south Delta.
- Concern that the proposed salinity objectives would require the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) to increase the number of dilution flow releases from New Melones Reservoir on the Stanislaus River to maintain the salinity objectives at Vernalis.
- Concern with the use of the steady-state Hoffman model for predicting soil salinity.
- Concern that the 15 percent leaching fraction chosen for modeling soil salinity may not be indicative of actual farming practices or studies in the Lower San Joaquin River Basin.
- Concern that the proposed water quality objectives are not adequately protective of the aquatic life beneficial use.

#### RECOMMENDATION

Adopt the proposed Basin Plan Amendments and approve the environmental document.

Mgmt. Review \_\_\_jec\_\_\_

Legal Review \_\_\_pep\_\_\_

8/9 June 2017

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