

Smith, Megan

From: Valerie Zentner [valeriez@edcfb.com]
Sent: Monday, 27 September 2010 12:11
To: ILRP Comments
Cc: 'Scheuring Chris'; 'Bruce Houdesheldt'; 'Carolyn Mansfield'; pcreedon@waterboards.ca.gov
Subject: ILRP Comments
Attachments: FB ILRP comments on e-ltr 9-10.pdf

Attached are the comments from the El Dorado County Farm Bureau regarding the proposed Long Term ILRP. A fax copy will also be sent to ensure delivery on time. Thank you for your consideration.

Valerie Zentner

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September 24, 2010

ILRP Comments
Ms. Megan Smith
630 K Street, Suite 400
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Comments on the Draft Program Environmental Impact Report for a Waste Discharge Program for Irrigated Lands within the Central Valley Region

Dear Ms. Smith,

We appreciate this opportunity to comment on the reference document, The El Dorado County Farm Bureau represents over 1300 member families, many of whom will be affected by the proposed regulation of irrigated agricultural lands.

1. The Sierra Foothills Setting. In El Dorado County, the majority of our irrigated agricultural operations are contained within the 1,000 to 3,500 foot elevation range. While much of our agriculture occurs in designated Agricultural Districts throughout the western slope, there are no areas where agriculture is truly the dominant land use. Of the 1.1 million acres of land located within the El Dorado Subwatershed Coalition, the enrolled acres for irrigated agriculture represent 3,330 acres, or roughly .003% of this area. The average size of operation is approximately 10 acres and our farms and ranches are nestled in among recreational uses, undeveloped open space, rural subdivisions, and public roads.

2. No Ground Water Basins identified. While some of our agriculturists receive irrigation water from two purveyors, a number of our farmers and ranchers rely solely on well water sources. The topography and hydrology of the western slope require that deep wells be drilled through fractured rock to water interstices whose water origins are unknown. Within this region of the county, which is included in the proposed regulation, there are no ground water basins or sub-basins identified by DWR Bulletin 118 and there are no Hydrogeologically Vulnerable areas or DPR Groundwater Protection Areas within the county.

Since there is no vulnerability for leaching identified in this region, El Dorado County is rendered a low priority area or, stated another way, it presents no threat to ground water quality from agricultural sources. Based on these unique characteristics it is inappropriate to require ground water sampling and monitoring programs of El Dorado's agriculture as there is no way that a representative water sample could be obtained.

Water Code Division 6, Chapter 1, Part 2.11, Section 10921 states that *"the monitoring of ground water elevations in an area that is not within a basin or sub-basin is not required"*. We assert that for consistency the state should apply that principle to the reference regulation. In fact, we would recommend that the Board develop a lower tier regulation that does not require ground water sampling but allows agriculturists to continue to manage their operations for water quality using proven management practices where water basins do not exist.

3. Economic Analysis is Flawed. The economic analysis and EIR understate the impact that ground water sampling would have on our local agriculturists and, indeed, the surrounding economy. The estimate for drilling monitoring wells is grossly understated for the mountain regions where wells are often drilled deep with typical well depths ranging between 300 and 750 feet. It also does not recognize that well drilling does not always result in the discovery of water, so the possibility that more than one well would be drilled is not addressed. In a business where drilling is charged "by the foot", the estimate of \$5,000 cost per monitoring well is significantly understated for the costs that would actually be experienced by our farmers and ranchers.

The proposed regulation identifies a "loss of agricultural production" as a significant but unavoidable impact. In the case of El Dorado's agriculture, being faced with a costly and onerous regulatory burden that cannot be met, you could well see a drastic reduction of agricultural operations. In a region where permanent cropping exists and where even mature crops must receive some irrigation water during the average season, our farmers are unable to fallow their land. The collateral impact to the surrounding economy cannot be understated.

The economic analysis failed to evaluate the effect of value-added production of agricultural crops. All crop values in the comparative analysis for all alternatives look at raw crop values sold "Freight on Board" as shown in the County's crop reports. El Dorado County does not generally compete on a "commodity" basis. Due to the topography, climate, and water supply challenges, our small farms and ranches rely on their ability to sell direct to the consumer. The value-added component of processing grapes into wine, apples into pies, and berries into jams for the benefit of sale at a higher value has been disregarded. Therefore, the true impact to our agriculture must be viewed from the value-added sales that comprise our agriculture that supports the tourism and visitor serving industries of our county.

4. Recommendation. Our Agricultural Subwatershed Coalition is already participating in a management practices based "Pilot Program" to maintain surface water quality. We feel that the protection of ground water is already occurring with the practices being implemented. We recommend that the Regional Board develop a least regulated tier approach that continues the management practices-based program to preserve our excellent surface water quality and provide ground water protections.

5. Program Objectives. We appreciate the development of the program objectives for the proposed regulation. For the Sierra foothill regions like El Dorado the staff recommended alternative fails to meet the objective to "provide incentives for agricultural operations to minimize state discharge".

We agree with the objective to coordinate efforts with other government programs for groundwater protections. By relying on other program data it should be apparent that El Dorado irrigated agriculture has no demonstrated negative impact to ground water basins or sub-basins within the state because none are identified.

We agree that implementation of management practices can be utilized to maintain water quality, but we feel that this regulation will in fact "jeopardize the economic viability" for our small farms and ranches.

By taking a "one size fits all" view of the millions of acres that comprise the Central Valley watersheds, the regulation fails to recognize that not all agricultural operations are managed the same. The environmental and economic analyses fail to characterize adequately the regions where ground water basins and sub-basins do not exist. Finally, the economic analysis does not adequately address the value-added nature of irrigated agriculture in the foothills as compared to the large commodity-based farms and ranches in the valley. The secondary, and tertiary, negative impacts that would occur to the local economy if agricultural operations failed due to the burdensome costs associated with ground water monitoring have not been identified. There is a disproportionate impact that the cost of compliance brings to the small family farms and ranches that populate El Dorado County. We do not consider the potential loss of these operations an acceptable "unavoidable" impact of this regulation.

We would welcome the opportunity to work with the Regional Board to develop a tiered approach that would provide ground water protections without sacrificing the economic viability of El Dorado County's small farms and ranches.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Merv de Haas". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Merv de Haas, President

cc: Bruce Houdesheldt, Sacramento Valley Regional Water Quality Coalition
Pamela Creedon, Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board
Carolyn Mansfield, El Dorado County Agricultural Water Quality Management Corporation
Chris Scheuring, California Farm Bureau Federation