



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
REGION IX
75 Hawthorne Street
San Francisco, CA 94105-3901

DEC 17 2018

Patrick Pulupa, Executive Officer
Regional Water Quality Control Board
Central Valley Region
11020 Sun Center Drive
Rancho Cordova, California 95670

Subject: Approval of the Amendments to the Water Quality Control Plan for the Sacramento San Joaquin River Basins (Basin Plan) to Establish Salinity Water Quality Objectives in the Lower San Joaquin River (Mouth of Merced to Vernalis)

Dear Mr. Pulupa:

I am pleased to approve the subject amendments that adopt new salinity water quality objectives for the lower San Joaquin River. The Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board submitted a complete package to EPA on April 20, 2018. The Basin Plan amendments are consistent with the requirements of Clean Water Act section 303(c) and EPA's implementing regulations at 40 C.F.R. § 131 including public notice requirements at 40 C.F.R. § 131.20. The State has appropriately established water quality criteria for electrical conductivity in the lower San Joaquin River.

Today's approval includes new site-specific water quality criteria for electrical conductivity (at 25°C) that shall not exceed 1550 micromhos/cm (as a 30-day running average), except during Extended Dry Periods, when concentrations shall not exceed 2470 micromhos/cm (as a 30-day running average) and 2200 micromhos/cm (as an annual average using at a minimum the previous four quarterly samples).

The site-specific water quality criteria apply to the San Joaquin River between the Mouth of Merced River and the Airport Way Bridge near Vernalis. EPA finds that these site-specific water quality criteria are protective of agricultural supply beneficial uses, municipal and domestic supply beneficial uses, and all other current beneficial uses in the lower San Joaquin River. The scope of EPA's review is enclosed.

I look forward to our continued partnership to realize water quality improvements in the Lower San Joaquin River. Please call me at (415) 972-3337 if you would like to discuss this further, or have your staff contact Matthew Mitchell at (415) 972-3508.

Sincerely,



Tomás Torres
Director, Water Division

December 17, 2018

Enclosure

cc: Rebecca Fitzgerald, SWRCB
Anne Littlejohn, CVRWQCB
Jim Brownell, CVRWQCB

Enclosure

Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board Electrical Conductivity in the Lower San Joaquin River Water Quality Standards Amendments

I. Background

The subject amendment was adopted by the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board (Regional Board) on June 9, 2017 under Resolution No. R5-2017-0062, adopted by the California State Water Resources Control Board (State Board) under Resolution No. 2018-0002, and was certified by the California Office of Administrative Law on April 19, 2018. EPA considers the State's submittal complete as of the date of receipt of the full submittal, April 20, 2018.

The amendment makes various revisions to the Basin Plan in Chapter III (Water Quality Objectives), Chapter IV (Implementation), and Chapter V (Surveillance and Monitoring).

Pertinent changes that are under the authority of Clean Water Act (CWA) section 303(c) include: the addition of new water quality objectives for electrical conductivity to Table III-3 (Water Quality Objectives), the definition of Extended Dry Period to Chapter IV, and the effective date of implementation to Chapter IV.

II. Basis for Revisions

Section 303(c) of the federal CWA requires that states hold public hearings for review of water quality standards (beneficial uses, water quality objectives, and antidegradation policy) at least once every three years. As part of the 2014 Triennial Review for the Basin Plan, the Regional Board approved the 2014 Triennial Review Issue List and Work Plan, which included issues to be addressed during State fiscal years 2014-2017 in compliance with federal and state requirements for periodic review of water quality standards and water quality control plans. The Basin Plan amendments included here address the major priorities identified during the 2014 Triennial Review.

III. Amendments Pertaining to Water Quality Objectives

California adopted the following water quality standards amendments which are subject to CWA 303(c) review:

Modify the Basin Plan under the heading, "Salinity" (page III-6.02), as follows:

Electrical Conductivity and Total Dissolved Solids—Special Cases in the Sacramento and San Joaquin River Basins Other Than the Delta

The objectives for electrical conductivity and total dissolved solids in Table III-3 apply to the water bodies specified. To the extent of any conflict with the general Chemical Constituents

water quality objectives, the more stringent shall apply, with the exception of the electrical conductivity water quality objectives for Reach 83 of the San Joaquin River, which the Board has determined to be protective of all beneficial uses within Reach 83.

Modify the Basin Plan under the heading, “Salinity (Table III-3 on page III-7.00, as follows:

Table III-3

ELECTRICAL CONDUCTIVITY AND TOTAL DISSOLVED SOLIDS

<u>PARAMETER</u>	<u>WATER QUALITY OBJECTIVES</u>	<u>APPLICABLE WATER BODIES</u>
<u>Electrical Conductivity (at 25°C)</u>	<u>Shall not exceed 1550 micromhos/cm (as a 30-day running average), except during Extended Dry Periods^{4a} when concentrations shall not exceed 2470 micromhos/cm (as a 30-day running average) and 2200 micromhos/cm (as an annual average using at a minimum the previous four quarterly samples)</u>	<u>San Joaquin River between the Mouth of Merced River and the Airport Way Bridge near Vernalis (83)</u>

^{4a} See ~~Chapter~~ Page IV-32.00 for definition of Extended Dry Period

Modify the Basin Plan under the heading, “Control Program for Salt and Boron Discharges into the Lower San Joaquin River (LSJR)” (pages IV-32.00 through IV-32.07), as follows:

An Extended Dry Period is based in part on the water year type numeric indicator identified in the State Water Board’s San Joaquin Valley “60-20-20” Water Year Hydrologic Classification² as follows:

- Wet – 5
- Above Normal – 4
- Below Normal – 3
- Dry – 2
- Critically Dry – 1

The indicator values will be used as follows to determine when an Extended Dry Period is in effect:

- An Extended Dry Period shall begin when the sum of the current year’s 60-20-20 indicator value and the previous two year’s 60-20-20 indicator values total six (6) or less.

- An Extended Dry Period shall be deemed to exist for one water year (12 months) following a period with an indicator value total of six (6) or less.

²The method for determining the San Joaquin Valley Water Year Hydrologic Classifications is defined in the State Water Board Revised Water Right Decision 1641, March 2000, Figure 2, page 189. This method uses the best available estimate of the 60-20-20 San Joaquin Valley water year hydrologic classification at the 75% exceedance level using the best available data published in the California Department of Water Resources' ongoing Bulletin 120 series.

Water Quality Objectives Upstream of the Airport Way Bridge near Vernalis

1. The electrical conductivity water quality objectives for the San Joaquin River between its confluence with the Merced River and the Airport Way Bridge near Vernalis will be implemented by 1 January 2020.

IV. ESA Consultation and Water Quality Standards Approvals

This EPA approval action is subject to the consultation requirement of section 7(a)(2) of the Endangered Species Act (ESA). EPA has initiated discussions with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) regarding consultation for this action. EPA has the authority to take additional action regarding the established water quality objectives for salinity in the lower San Joaquin River, if the consultation with NMFS identifies deficiencies in the objectives requiring remedial action by EPA.

V. EPA's Assessment of the Basin Plan Amendments

EPA concludes that the Regional Board has provided reasonable explanations to support the adopted Basin Plan amendments. The new water quality objectives for electrical conductivity are based on new data and analysis and protect current beneficial uses in the lower San Joaquin River between its confluence with the Merced River and the Airport Way Bridge near Vernalis.