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## North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board

August 18, 2023

Certified Mail No. 7021 0950 0001 6500 1407

Ruben Florez  
PO Box 2124  
Ukiah CA, 95482

Dear Ruben Florez:

**Subject: Notice of Violation, Transmittal of Report for July 20, 2023 Inspection of Mendocino County Assessor's Parcel Numbers 34-010-46-00, 034-010-67-00, and 034-010-68-00, and Recommendation to Respond within 30 days**

**File:** Cannabis Program Inspections, Mendocino County, 2023, Ruben Florez, CIWQS Place ID 889654

### **THIS LETTER HAS RECOMMENDATIONS THAT YOU ACT WITHIN 30 DAYS**

This letter is to notify you of observed violations of the requirements listed below, and cited in Attachment A, at the property identified as Mendocino County Assessor's Parcel Numbers 34-010-46-00, 034-010-67-00, and 034-010-68-00 (the Property):

1. California Water Code (Water Code) Sections 13260 and 13264
2. State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board) Cannabis Cultivation Policy Principals and Guidelines for Cannabis Cultivation (Cannabis Policy).

According to our records, the cannabis cultivation operation located on this Property is not enrolled for coverage under Order No. WQ 2019-0001-DWQ General Waste Discharge Requirements and Waiver of Waste Discharge Requirements for Discharges of Waste Associated with Cannabis Cultivation Activities (Cannabis General Order). On July 20, 2023, North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board (Regional Water Board) staff (Staff) inspected the Property and observed cannabis cultivation exceeding one acre in size. Accordingly, we recommend that you address the violations noticed

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HECTOR BEDOLLA, CHAIR | VALERIE QUINTO, EXECUTIVE OFFICER

herein. Within 30 days, please contact Staff to discuss your plan to correct the observed violations.

## **Background**

Land Vision records show Ruben Martinez Florez owns the Property with the last transfer of ownership occurring on August 8, 2016. According to review by Staff on August 17, 2023, of aerial imagery available from Google Earth, cannabis cultivation activities are evident on the Property as early as May 30, 2014.

On July 20, 2023, during the execution of a criminal search warrant served by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), Staff, accompanied by personnel from CDFW, the Department of Cannabis Control, the State Water Resources Control Board Division of Water Rights, and various law enforcement agencies, inspected the Property. The purpose of the inspection was to evaluate onsite development and conditions, and to identify and assess any impacts or threatened impacts to the quality and beneficial uses of waters of the state. During the inspection, Staff observed cannabis cultivation operations of sufficient size and scope to require regulatory coverage under the Cannabis General Order. According to CDFW personnel, the requisite state and local authorizations for commercial cannabis cultivation are not associated with the Property.

Attached is a copy of the water quality inspection report (Attachment B – Property Inspection Report). Please review the inspection report carefully and completely. The inspection report contains recommendations for correcting observed violations and advises you of the Regional Water Board permits necessary for projects/activities that result in discharges of waste to.

## **Relevant Requirements**

During the inspection, Staff identified features and conditions on the Property that represent violations of water quality requirements and regulations. Attachment A – Regulatory Citations, provides references to these, and related, requirements and regulations.

## **Observed Violations**

As documented in the report of the July 20, 2023 inspection: Staff observed large-scale cannabis cultivation and associated activities that were being conducted without first obtaining regulatory coverage for associated waste discharges, in violation of Water Code section 13260 in the vicinities of WQ2; Staff observed violations of the California Water Code section 13264 for unauthorized discharges cannabis cultivation wastes to land in the vicinity of WQ1; and the cannabis cultivation occurring at WQ2 violated the Cannabis Policy.

## **Legal Requirements**

The State Water Board adopted the Cannabis Policy and the Cannabis General Order on October 17, 2017, and updates on February 5, 2019, which remain in effect today. The purpose of the Cannabis Policy is to ensure that the discharge of waste and diversion of water associated with cannabis cultivation does not have a negative impact on water quality, aquatic habitat, riparian habitat, wetlands, and springs. The Cannabis Policy applies to cannabis cultivation activities throughout California including, Commercial Recreational, Commercial Medical, and Personal Use Medical. The Policy does not apply to recreational cannabis cultivation for personal use, which is limited to six plants under the Adult Use of Marijuana Act (Proposition 64, approved by California voters in November 2016).

The Cannabis General Order is the statewide water quality permit that implements the Cannabis Policy through the overarching general Waste Discharge Requirements (WDRs) in accordance with the California Water Code and is available for eligible cannabis cultivators to enroll under. The Cannabis General Order regulates waste discharges from cultivation sites including sediment, irrigation runoff, fertilizers, pesticides/herbicides, petroleum, agricultural related chemicals, cultivation related waste, and refuse. Threats of waste discharge may be from irrigation runoff, over fertilization, pond failure, road construction, grading activities, domestic and cultivation related waste, refuse placement, etc. All commercial cannabis cultivators must obtain coverage under the Cannabis General Order, including for both indoor and outdoor cultivation.

Cultivation activities on the Property requires conformance with the Cannabis Policy and enrollment under the Cannabis General Order. For more information, please visit the [Regional Water Board's website](https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/northcoast/water_issues/programs/cannabis/) at:  
([https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/northcoast/water\\_issues/programs/cannabis/](https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/northcoast/water_issues/programs/cannabis/))

As documented in the inspection report, the site conditions observed on the Property do not meet the requirements of the Cannabis Policy. Please provide a written response supporting documentation, including photos if relevant, explaining how the Property will be restored in compliance with the Policy.

## **Additional Potential Liabilities**

The Regional Water Board is in the process of considering whether the violations of the Water Code and Cannabis Policy warrant further enforcement. We encourage you to take steps to correct the violations as soon as possible, and secure any applicable permits from this and other agencies prior to conducting work. Please note that the existing conditions, as observed and documented in the Inspection Report, may represent continuing violations of the Water Code and Cannabis Policy.

Please note that correcting the conditions of non-compliance at the Property does not preclude enforcement for the violations alleged in this notice. As noted above, the Regional Water Board reserves its right to fully enforce the law against any violation and threatened violation by taking enforcement actions such as a cleanup and abatement order, time schedule order, administrative civil liabilities, and referral to the California Attorney General's office. Administrative civil liabilities may be assessed on a daily basis in the amount up to \$5,000 for each day the violation occurs or up to \$10 per gallon, but not both, pursuant to Water Code section 13350.

### **Inspection Report Recommendations**

As mentioned above, the Inspection Report provides recommendations to correct the alleged violations, as well as to address features and conditions that threaten to impact water quality. **Within 30 days of this letter**, please advise Staff Brian Fuller of your intentions, plan, and schedule to implement recommendations in the inspection report. If you have questions about what is required of you to comply with the requirements outlined above, and to advise as to your plan and schedule to correct the alleged violations, please contact Regional Water Board staff Brian Fuller by email at [Brian.Fuller@waterboards.ca.gov](mailto:Brian.Fuller@waterboards.ca.gov) or by phone at 707-576-2806.

Future correspondence regarding this matter will be sent to you at this address unless an alternative address is provided to the Regional Water Board. Failure to accept mail from the Regional Water Board is not a valid excuse for non-compliance with any future enforcement orders, and a failure to respond or otherwise appear at a future enforcement proceeding could subject you to a default order and the imposition of administrative civil liability.

You may also contact me at [Jeremiah.Puget@waterboards.ca.gov](mailto:Jeremiah.Puget@waterboards.ca.gov) or by phone at 707-576-2835. Additionally, we are available to meet with you if you wish to discuss this letter or our waste discharge regulatory programs in further detail.

Sincerely,

Jeremiah Puget  
Senior Environmental Scientist  
Enforcement Unit

Attachments: Attachment A – Regulatory Citations  
Attachment B – Inspection Report

Certified Mail – Return Receipt requested.

**cc: North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board**

[Northcoast.Cannabis@waterboards.ca.gov](mailto:Northcoast.Cannabis@waterboards.ca.gov)

Claudia Villacorta, [Claudia.Villacorta@waterboards.ca.gov](mailto:Claudia.Villacorta@waterboards.ca.gov)

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**Division of Water Rights**

Jessica Monroy, [Jessica.Monroy@Waterboards.ca.gov](mailto:Jessica.Monroy@Waterboards.ca.gov)

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Taro Murano, [Taro.Murano@waterboards.ca.gov](mailto:Taro.Murano@waterboards.ca.gov)

**Department of Fish and Wildlife**

Kalyn Bocast, [Kalyn.Bocast@Wildlife.ca.gov](mailto:Kalyn.Bocast@Wildlife.ca.gov)

Erika Winner, [Erika.Winner@Wildlife.ca.gov](mailto:Erika.Winner@Wildlife.ca.gov)

Warden Justin Rhoades, [Justin.Rhoades@wildlife.ca.gov](mailto:Justin.Rhoades@wildlife.ca.gov)

Captain Douglas Willson, [Douglas.Willson@wildlife.ca.gov](mailto:Douglas.Willson@wildlife.ca.gov)

**Mendocino County Sheriff's Office**

Sergeant Clinton Wyant, [WyantC@mendocinocounty.org](mailto:WyantC@mendocinocounty.org)

**Mendocino County**

[cannabisprogram@mendocinocounty.org](mailto:cannabisprogram@mendocinocounty.org)

Sean Crackbons, [crackbons@mendocinocounty.org](mailto:crackbons@mendocinocounty.org)

**Department of Cannabis Control**

Jaime Masuda, [Jaime.Masuda@cannabis.ca.gov](mailto:Jaime.Masuda@cannabis.ca.gov)

## Attachment A – Regulatory Citations

| Regulatory Section                     | Citation   |
|--|--|
| California Water Code Section 13260    | <p>“(a) Each of the following persons shall file with the appropriate regional board a report of the discharge, containing the information that may be required by the regional board:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">(1) A person discharging waste, or proposing to discharge waste, within any region that could affect the quality of the waters of the state, other than into a community sewer system.</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">(2) A person who is a citizen, domiciliary, or political agency or entity of this state discharging waste, or proposing to discharge waste, outside the boundaries of the state in a manner that could affect the quality of the waters of the state within any region.”</p>                                 |
| California Water Code Section 13261(a) | <p>“A person who fails to furnish a report or pay a fee under Section 13260 when so requested by a regional board is guilty of a misdemeanor and may be liable civilly in accordance with subdivision (b).”</p>  |
| California Water Code Section 13264(a) | <p>“No person shall initiate any new discharge of waste or make any material changes in any discharge, or initiate a discharge to, make any material changes in a discharge to, or construct, an injection well, prior to the filing of the report required by Section 13260 and no person shall take any of these actions after filing the report but before whichever of the following occurs first: (1) The issuance of waste discharge requirements pursuant to Section 13263. (2) The expiration of 140 days after compliance with Section 13260 if the waste to be discharged does not create or threaten to create a condition of pollution or nuisance and any of the following applies:... (3) The issuance of a waiver pursuant to Section 13269.”</p> |
| California Water Code Section 13265(a) | <p>“Any person discharging waste in violation of Section 13264, after such violation has been called to his attention in writing by the regional board, is guilty of a misdemeanor and may be liable civilly in accordance with subdivision (b). Each day of such discharge shall constitute a separate offense.”</p>  |

| <b>Regulatory Section</b>                              | <b>Citation</b>  |
|--|--|
| Cannabis Policy and General Order No. WQ 2019-0001-DWQ | State Water Resources Control Board <a href="#">Cannabis Cultivation Policy</a> and <a href="#">General Waste Discharge Requirements Order No. WQ 2019-0001-DWQ for Discharges of Waste Associated with Cannabis Cultivation Activities</a><br><br>Available at:<br><a href="https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/cannabis/docs/policy/final_cannabis_policy_with_attach_a.pdf">https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/cannabis/docs/policy/final_cannabis_policy_with_attach_a.pdf</a> and<br><br><a href="https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/board_decisions/adopted_orders/water_quality/2019/wqo2019_0001_dwq.pdf">https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/board_decisions/adopted_orders/water_quality/2019/wqo2019_0001_dwq.pdf</a> |



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## North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board

TO: Jeremiah Puget

FROM: Brian Fuller

DATE: August 18, 2023

### **Report of July 20, 2023 Warrant Inspection, Mendocino County**

**Assessor's Parcel Number (APN) 034-010-46-00, 034-010-67-00, and 034-010-68-00  
(the "Property")**

File: Cannabis Program Inspections, Mendocino County, 2023, Ruben Florez,  
CIWQS Place ID: 889654

#### **Property information:**

Watershed: Eel River Hydrologic Unit; Middle Fork Eel River Hydrologic Area;  
Round Valley Hydrologic Subarea; (HU/HA/HSA 111.72; see Table 2-1 of the Water  
Quality Control Plan for the North Coast Region (Basin Plan), for beneficial uses)

#### **Inspection information:**

Date/time: Jul 20, 2023 / afternoon

Weather: sunny

Type: Warrant Inspection

#### **Background/Objective:**

Objectives for Regional Water Board staff included observing site development and activities and identifying and assessing onsite features or conditions that are causing or may cause adverse impacts to the quality and beneficial uses of receiving waters, including surface and groundwater.

**Inspection Map:**

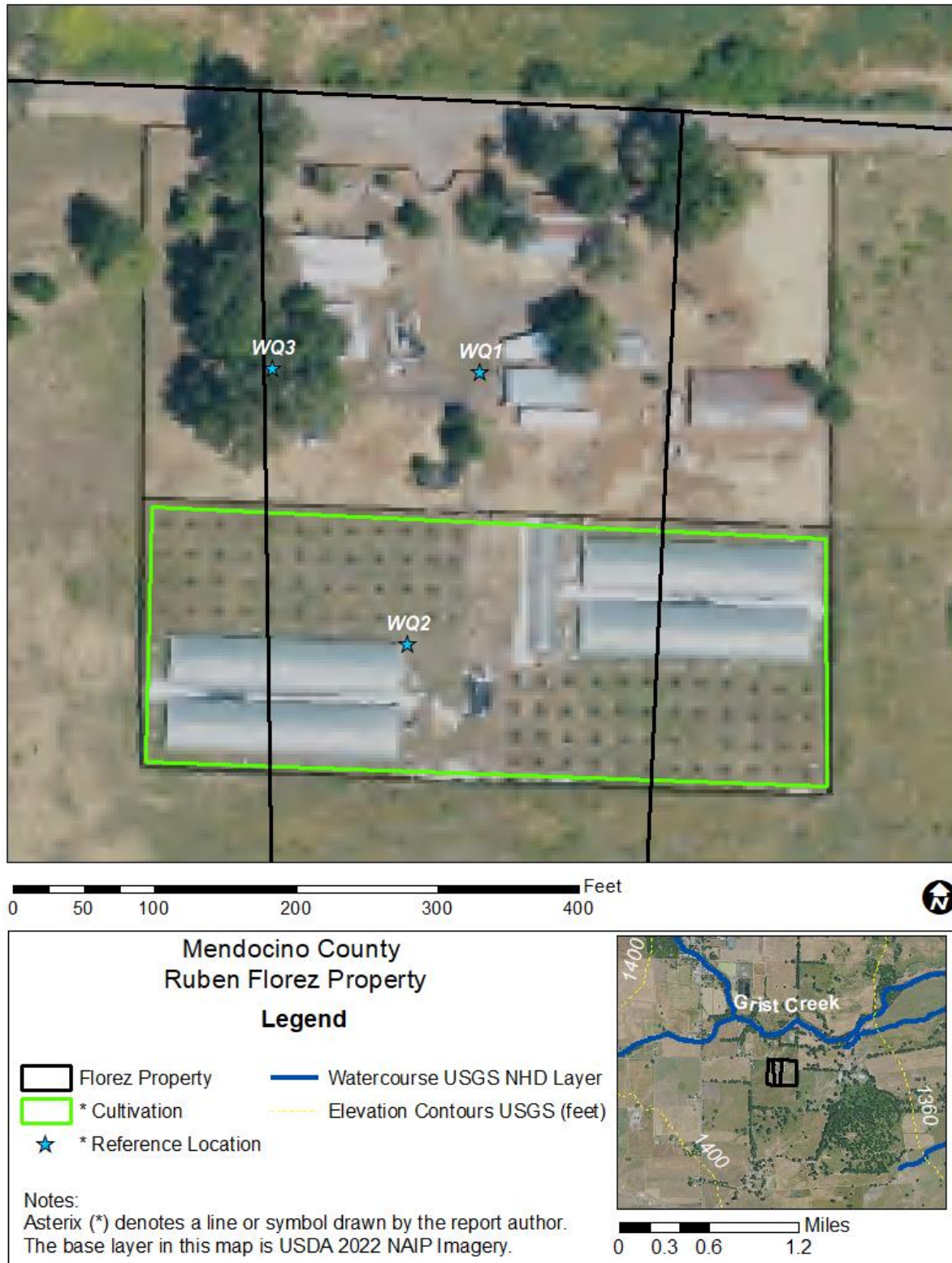


Figure 1—Aerial image/map showing inspection points discussed in this report.

**Inspection Narrative:**

The inspection was associated with a criminal search warrant, and I viewed only portions of the Property. See the above Inspection Map and below Aerial Imagery and Photo Appendix for locations and details about features of concern to water quality. I entered the Property from the north and observed a large pile of cannabis cultivation waste, including plant stalks and root balls in potted growth medium, at WQ1. I continued walking south and observed cannabis plants growing fully outdoors and within greenhouses in a fenced area of the property exceeding one-acre in size. At WQ2 I observed a nutrient mixing tank that was full of liquid.

At WQ3 I observed electrical wires entering a shed. I observed a pump above a well surrounded by an approximately six-inch-tall concrete berm. I did not observe a sanitary seal in the well-hole. I observed that the floor of the shed was flooded with water. The ground surrounding the shed was saturated and water was flowing from the bottom of the shed into a small concrete-lined pool.

**Recommendations for the Discharger:**

1. Collect and dispose of all cannabis cultivation waste in a manner consistent with the requirements of the Cannabis Cultivation Policy<sup>1</sup>.
2. Prior to cultivating cannabis or developing a property for cannabis cultivation, enroll for coverage under the Cannabis General Order<sup>2</sup>.
3. Retain a qualified professional to either close or repair the groundwater well at WQ3 according to Mendocino County's well ordinance and well standards.

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<sup>1</sup> [The Cannabis Cultivation Policy](https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/cannabis/docs/policy/final_cannabis_policy_with_attach_a.pdf) can be found at:  
[https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water\\_issues/programs/cannabis/docs/policy/final\\_cannabis\\_policy\\_with\\_attach\\_a.pdf](https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/cannabis/docs/policy/final_cannabis_policy_with_attach_a.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [Details about enrolling](https://public2.waterboards.ca.gov/mt/Home/Index) in the Cannabis General Order can be found at:  
<https://public2.waterboards.ca.gov/mt/Home/Index>

**Aerial Imagery:**



*Figure 2—Aerial image of the Property taken on May 30, 2014, obtained from Google Earth. The image shows structures in the northern part of the Property and a plowed field in the southern part of the Property.*



*Figure 3—Aerial image of the Property taken on August 12, 2017, obtained from Google Earth. The image shows a hoop-type greenhouse and rows of regularly spaced plants that are similar in size and pattern to that of commonly observed outdoor cannabis cultivation.*

**Photo Appendix:**



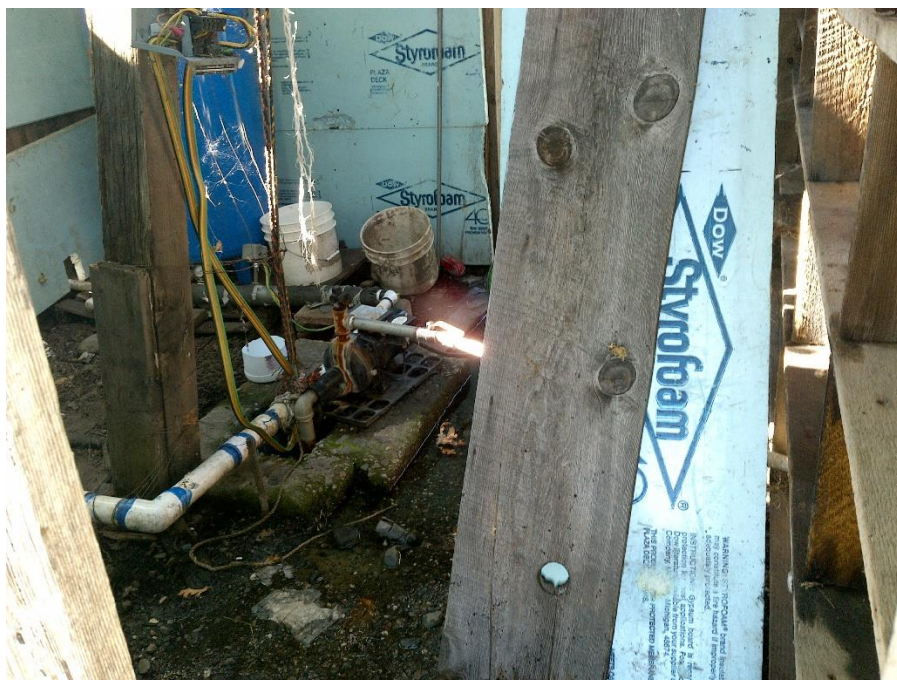
*Figure 4—Looking east from WQ1 at a pile of cannabis cultivation waste including plant stalks and root balls in potted growth medium.*



*Figure 5—Looking west from WQ2 at cannabis growing outdoors in raised garden beds. A greenhouse is visible in the top left of the image.*



*Figure 6—Photo of a nutrients mixing tank at WQ2. The tank is full of liquid and algae is visible growing in the liquid.*



*Figure 7—Photo of well in shed at WQ3. The shed floor is flooded and the ground surrounding the shed is saturated with ground water. There is a concrete berm surrounding the well hole, but no sanitary seal.*



*Figure 8—Photo of concrete lined pool. The well-shed at WQ3 is barely visible in the top-center of the image.*