

Order No: R1-202X-XXXX

Attachment D: Stewardship Category Requirements

I. Eligibility: Operation-Level Determination

1. The Stewardship Category applies at the operation level. An Irrigated Lands parcel qualifies for the Stewardship Category only if the owner or operator demonstrates that all applicable criteria in the Stewardship Category Criteria described in Section D are satisfied across all Irrigated Lands and Associated Grazing Lands under their ownership or operational control.

II. Application Process

1. An owner or operator seeking a Stewardship Category determination shall submit a Stewardship Category Application to the Executive Officer within the established enrollment period specified in Section II.A of this Order. An operator who initially enrolls in this Order may subsequently apply for the Stewardship Category upon achieving the criteria specified in Section D.
2. The Stewardship Category Application shall include:
 - a) All information required in the Notice of Intent under Section II.A of this Order;
 - b) A Stewardship Documentation Report addressing each applicable criterion in described in Section D, with supporting evidence as specified therein;
 - c) A site map at a scale sufficient to identify all Irrigated Lands, Associated Grazing Lands, perennial, intermittent, and ephemeral watercourses as described in the United States Geological Survey's National Hydrography Dataset, Streamside Areas, jurisdictional wetlands, instream restoration project sites, Appurtenant Agricultural Roads, and the spatial relationship between the Irrigated Lands and receiving waters;
 - d) A self-certification statement signed by the owner or operator attesting that the information provided is true and correct and that the Irrigated Lands are currently in compliance with all applicable management measures and prohibitions of this Order.
3. The Executive Officer shall review the Stewardship Category Application and conduct a Threat-to-Water-Quality Assessment as described in Section V of this Attachment
4. The Executive Officer shall issue a written determination within 180 days of receipt of a complete Stewardship Category Application:

- a) Determining that the operation qualifies for the Stewardship Category, with or without conditions; or
 - b) Denying the acceptance into the Stewardship Category, with a written explanation of the criteria not satisfied and any additional stewardship actions the operator could take to qualify for the Stewardship Category.
5. An owner or operator of Irrigated Lands whose Stewardship Category Application is denied may:
- a) Enroll under this Order within 60 days of the denial; or
 - b) Reapply after implementing corrective actions identified in the denial.

III. Inapplicability of Individual Criteria

1. Where an individual criterion described in Section D of is not applicable to an Irrigated Lands parcel due to site conditions (e.g., the parcel has no Appurtenant Agricultural Roads, no jurisdictional wetlands, or no riparian frontage on perennial, intermittent, or ephemeral watercourses), the operator shall document the basis for inapplicability in the Stewardship Documentation Report. The Executive Officer shall confirm inapplicability during the Threat-to-Water-Quality Assessment. A criterion confirmed as inapplicable shall be deemed satisfied.

IV. Stewardship Category Criteria

1. Irrigated Lands qualify for the Stewardship Category upon demonstrating satisfaction of each of the following criteria that is applicable to the operation:

a) Compliance with Order Requirements

The owner or operator of the Irrigated Lands demonstrates current and sustained compliance with all requirements and prohibitions of this Order, and:

- i) No unpermitted discharge of waste to waters of the state attributable to the Irrigated Lands within the preceding five (5) years;
- ii) No outstanding enforcement action, cleanup and abatement order, or notice of violation issued by the North Coast Water Board or State Water Board against the owner or operator attributed to the Irrigated Lands;
- iii) No unresolved Executive Officer directive to submit a management plan, technical report, or monitoring data.

b) Irrigation Efficiency

Irrigated Lands have no discharge of tailwaters to perennial and intermittent streams and have achieved Maximized Irrigation Efficiency for the irrigation method(s) in use as of the effective date of this Order, as demonstrated by one or more of the following:

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- i) A current, NRCS-approved Irrigation Water Management Plan (IWMP) (Conservation Practice Standard 449) reviewed or updated within the preceding five (5) years, with documentation of implementation;
- ii) A distribution uniformity evaluation conducted by a certified irrigation technician, Agricultural Engineer, Certified Crop Adviser, NRCS field office, or University of California Cooperative Extension within the preceding five years, demonstrating the following benchmarks are met:
- iii) Documentation of conversion from a less efficient to a more efficient irrigation method completed within the preceding ten (10) years;
- iv) Documentation that a tailwater recovery and reuse system is installed and operational on all fields where tailwater is generated by surface/flood irrigation;
- v) Other equivalent documentation acceptable to the Executive Officer that irrigation efficiency has improved and water use has been reduced in the preceding ten (10) years.

Irrigation Method	Applicable NRCS Practice Standard	Efficiency Benchmark
Surface / Flood	CPS 388, CPS 449	Distribution uniformity $\geq 70\%$
Sprinkler (<i>including LESA, linear move, center pivot</i>)	CPS 442, CPS 449	Distribution uniformity $\geq 80\%$ (LESA) / $\geq 75\%$ (standard sprinkler); application rate does not exceed soil infiltration rate
Drip / Micro-irrigation	CPS 441, CPS 449	Distribution uniformity $\geq 85\%$; application rate does not exceed soil infiltration rate

c) Riparian Restoration, Wetland Improvement, and Instream Restoration

The landowner or operator has implemented restoration and enhancement projects addressing riparian, wetland, and instream conditions on parcels that would otherwise be subject to enrollment, as follows:

- i) Riparian Planting and Protection

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1. The owner or operator has planted or otherwise established native riparian vegetation along at least 70 percent of the operation's total frontage on perennial watercourses, measured as linear stream feet. For purposes of this criterion:
2. "Frontage" means the total length of perennial watercourse banks within the Irrigated Lands parcel;
3. Planted areas must include species appropriate to the site's ecological potential and capable of providing effective stream shade at maturity;
4. Existing mature native riparian vegetation that has been preserved and protected from livestock damage and agricultural encroachment may be counted toward the 70 percent threshold;
5. The owner or operator shall provide any planting records, project maps, photo-point documentation, and current condition assessments.

ii) Wetland Improvement

The Irrigated Lands have wetland improvement, restoration, or enhancement projects addressing at least 70 percent of jurisdictional wetlands (as delineated under Clean Water Act Section 404 or applicable state wetland definitions) on parcels that would otherwise be subject to enrollment. Projects may include hydrologic restoration, invasive species removal, native planting, livestock exclusion, and water quality treatment functions. The owner or operator shall provide any project descriptions, permit documentation, and current condition assessments.

iii) Instream Restoration

The Irrigated lands have habitat restoration projects on at least 70 percent of perennial stream frontage on parcels that would otherwise be subject to enrollment. Projects may include bank stabilization using bioengineering techniques, large woody debris placement, beaver dam analogues, spawning gravel augmentation, fish passage barrier removal, or floodplain reconnection. The operator shall provide project descriptions, permit documentation, and current condition assessments.

iv) Permitting Verification

All restoration projects implemented within jurisdictional waters must have been properly authorized by all applicable permitting agencies, including but not limited to:

1. U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Clean Water Act Section 404);
2. North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board (Clean Water Act Section 401);

3. California Department of Fish and Wildlife (Fish and Game Code Section 1602);
4. National Marine Fisheries Service and/or U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Endangered Species Act, if applicable).

Projects implemented without required permits shall not be credited toward the 70 percent thresholds.

d) Soil Health

For Irrigated Lands with no riparian frontage or wetlands, the owner or operator has implemented soil health improvement practices across at least 70 percent of irrigated acres, as demonstrated by one or more of the following:

1. Implementation of practices consistent with the NRCS Soil Health Management System, including but not limited to cover cropping (CPS 340), nutrient management (CPS 590), residue and tillage management (CPS 329/345), and prescribed grazing (CPS 528), documented by an NRCS conservation plan or comparable technical documentation;
2. Implementation of a California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) Healthy Soils Program (Incentives Program or Demonstration Project) or equivalent on the enrollable parcels, with documentation of project completion and compliance with grant terms where applicable;
3. Third-party verification of increasing soil organic carbon attributable to the operator's farming practices, based on soil sampling and laboratory analysis conducted by a qualified soil scientist, NRCS field office, University of California Cooperative Extension, or accredited soil testing laboratory. Samples may be collected by the owner or operator. Verification shall include baseline and current soil organic carbon measurements from representative sample locations across at least 70 percent of irrigated acres, with a minimum of two (2) sampling events separated by at least three (3) years;
4. Other equivalent documentation acceptable to the Executive Officer demonstrating measurable improvements in soil health parameters (e.g. soil organic carbon, soil structure, soil water-holding capacity) and/or reductions in sediment discharge.

e) Road Hydrologic Disconnection

The Irrigated Lands have achieved Hydrologic Disconnection of all Appurtenant Agricultural Roads on parcels that would otherwise be subject to enrollment. The operator shall provide:

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1. An inventory and map of all Appurtenant Agricultural Roads on enrollable parcels;
2. Documentation of disconnection measures implemented (e.g., rolling dips, outsloping, cross-drains, road decommissioning);
3. Photo documentation of completed work;
4. A maintenance plan describing how disconnection features will be maintained over time.

Where the Irrigated Lands parcel has no Appurtenant Agricultural Roads on enrollable parcels, the owner or operator shall document this fact and this criterion shall be deemed satisfied.

V. Threat-to-Water-Quality Assessment

1. Upon receipt of a complete Stewardship Category Application, North Coast Water Board staff will conduct a Threat-to-Water-Quality Assessment of the applicant's Irrigated Lands including a site visit to observe on the ground conditions. The assessment shall evaluate, at minimum:
 - a) The current condition of the operation's discharges (or absence thereof) to receiving waters;
 - b) The adequacy and condition of implemented restoration projects, irrigation infrastructure, soil health practices, and road treatments;
 - c) The current condition of riparian vegetation, streambanks, and instream habitat on and adjacent to the operation;
 - d) Consistency of observed conditions with the documentation submitted in the Stewardship Category Application;
 - e) Any monitoring data, complaint records, or inspection reports relevant to the operation;
2. The assessment will include a site visit by North Coast Water Board staff, conducted with the consent of the landowner or pursuant to Water Code section 13267.
3. Based on the assessment, staff shall assign a threat level:

Threat Level	Description	Exemption Eligibility
Level A — Low Threat	Sustained compliance; all applicable criteria met; no evidence of ongoing or threatened discharge; measures related to Stewardship Category criteria functional and well-maintained	Eligible for Stewardship Exemption
Level B — Moderate Threat	Most criteria met but one or more partially met, or site assessment reveals conditions requiring monitoring or minor additional actions	Conditionally eligible — Stewardship Category determination may be granted with conditions (e.g., additional monitoring, completion of actions within a defined timeframe)
Level C — High Threat	One or more criteria not met, or active discharges, degraded conditions, or significant deficiencies observed	Not eligible — operator must enroll

4. The Executive Officer's written determination shall include the threat level and factual basis.

VI. Conditions and Obligations of Stewardship Category Operations

1. Irrigated Lands determined to meet requirements of the Stewardship Category remain subject to the following:
 - a) Continued fulfillment of criteria. The owner or operator shall maintain the functional condition of all management measures, restoration projects, irrigation systems, soil health practices, and road treatments that formed the basis for inclusion in the Stewardship Category. Should the owner or operator choose to implement changes to the measures that formed the basis for inclusion in the Stewardship Category (e.g. upgrading to a more efficient irrigation system), the operator shall notify the North Coast Water Board in writing.

- b) Abbreviated annual reporting. The owner or operator shall submit a Stewardship Status Report to the North Coast Water Board by [February 1 / March 1] of each year, including:
 - i) A brief narrative confirming continued implementation of Stewardship Category Criteria ;
 - ii) Photo-point documentation of riparian, wetland, and instream restoration project sites (minimum one photo per project site per year, from established photo points);
 - iii) Notification of any material changes to the operation (changes in acreage, ownership, irrigation method, livestock management, or project condition);
 - iv) Notification of any discharge events or operational failures.
- c) Periodic reassessment. The Executive Officer may conduct a follow-up Threat-to-Water-Quality Assessment at any time and may conduct a reassessment once every ten (10) years. If the reassessment determines that the operation no longer meets Stewardship Category criteria or that the threat level has increased to Category C, the Executive Officer may revoke Stewardship Category status pursuant to the Revocation Process described in Section G All discharge prohibitions of this Order apply to Stewardship Category Irrigated Lands.
- d) Enforcement authority. The Executive Officer retains full enforcement authority under the Water Code with respect to Stewardship Category Irrigated Lands. Exclusion from enrollment does not constitute an exemption from the Porter-Cologne Water Quality Control Act or this Order's prohibitions.

VII. Revocation of Stewardship Category Status

1. The Executive Officer may revoke Stewardship Category status upon a finding that:
 - a) The Irrigated Lands no longer satisfies one or more of the criteria in Section D;
 - b) The owner or operator has failed to maintain implemented measures in functional condition;
 - c) The Irrigated Lands have caused or substantially contributed to a continuing or recurring exceedance of applicable water quality objectives, or to a continuing or recurring condition of pollution or nuisance.

- d) The owner or operator has failed to submit required Stewardship Status Reports;
 - e) The owner or operator provided materially false or misleading information in the Stewardship Category Application;
 - f) A reassessment under Section E results in reclassification to Level C.
2. The Executive Officer shall provide 30 days written notice of the intent to revoke, including the factual basis. The operator may submit a written response within the 30-day notice period.
 3. Upon revocation, the owner or operator shall enroll the Irrigated Lands under this Order within 60 days of the effective date of revocation and shall comply with all Order requirements.
 4. An operator whose Stewardship Category status is revoked may request reconsideration the North Coast Water Board at a noticed public meeting. Requesting reconsideration does not relieve the 30-day limit file a petition with the State Water Board to challenge an action of the North Coast Water Board.

VIII. Group Stewardship Projects as Alternative Qualification Pathway

1. Eligibility. As an alternative to individually satisfying the criteria of Section D.5(c) (Riparian, Wetland, and Instream Restoration) a group of three (3) or more owner or operators of Irrigated Lands within the same watershed (Scott River or Shasta River) may propose a Group Stewardship Project that collectively achieves equivalent or superior water quality outcomes. Each participating operator must individually satisfy Sections D.5(a) (Compliance), D.5(b) (Irrigation Efficiency), and D.5(d) (Soil Health), and Section D.5(e) (Road Hydrologic Disconnection). The Group Stewardship Project substitutes for the individual requirements of Sections D.5(c).
2. Proposal submission. The group shall submit a Group Stewardship Project Proposal to the Executive Officer including:
 - a) Identification of all participating operators, including names, contact information, parcel locations, and acreage;
 - b) A description of the proposed project, including goals, location, design, and expected water quality benefits;
 - c) Demonstration that the project addresses at least two (2) miles of continuous or cumulative perennial stream frontage within the watershed;
 - d) A description of how the project addresses, in an integrated manner, the functional equivalents of the individual criteria in Section D.5(c), including:
 - i. Riparian planting and protection;

- ii. Wetland improvement or restoration;
 - iii. Instream habitat restoration (which may include floodplain reconnection, levee setback or removal, large wood placement, beaver dam analogues, fish passage improvements, or comparable actions);
 - iv. Hydrologic disconnection of appurtenant agricultural roads
 - e) An implementation schedule with milestones, including a projected completion date not to exceed ten (10) years from proposal approval;
 - f) A monitoring and reporting plan describing how the group will document implementation progress, measure environmental outcomes, and report to the North Coast Water Board;
 - g) A funding plan identifying committed or anticipated funding sources;
 - h) A governance structure describing how participating operators will coordinate, make decisions, and allocate responsibilities;
 - i) Identification of all permits required and status of applications;
 - j) A contingency plan describing response to participant withdrawal, funding loss, or significant delays.
2. Review and approval. The Executive Officer shall review the proposal and may:
- a) Approve, granting participating operators conditional Stewardship Category status effective upon approval and contingent upon timely implementation;
 - b) Approve with modifications, requiring changes to scope, schedule, monitoring, or governance;
 - c) Deny, with written explanation. The group may revise and resubmit.
3. Reporting. The group shall submit semi-annual progress reports during implementation and annual status reports thereafter, documenting milestones achieved, permits obtained, monitoring results, and any changes.
4. Participant withdrawal.
- a) A withdrawing owner or operator shall enroll their Irrigated Lands in this Order within 60 days;
 - b) Remaining participants' exemptions are not affected provided the project maintains the two-mile riparian frontage threshold and minimum three participants, and a revised plan is submitted within 120 days;
 - c) If withdrawal causes the project to fall below thresholds, the Executive Officer shall reassess viability and may revoke Stewardship Category status pursuant to Section G.

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5. Project failure. If the project fails to meet its schedule or milestones, the Executive Officer may require a revised plan to be submitted within 120 days, impose additional monitoring, or revoke conditional Stewardship Category status.