

EXECUTIVE OFFICER'S SUMMARY REPORT
9:00 a.m., Thursday, May 5, 2011
Wharfinger Building
#1 Marina Way
Eureka, California

ITEM: 11

SUBJECT: Update on Agriculture and Irrigated Lands Water Quality Program in the North Coast Region and the Statewide Grazing Program

DISCUSSION

This is an informational item. Regional Water Board staff will be presenting an update on progress towards developing a water quality program for agriculture in the North Coast Region.

The last presentation to the Regional Water Board on this topic was in June 2010. Since that time, staff has reconsidered the scope of the agriculture program. In June 2010, the proposed scope included a focus on discharges associated with both irrigated agriculture and grazing in the Klamath River Basin. Staff has since decided to recommend expansion of the geographic scope of the program to include all of the North Coast Region, while at the same time limiting the types of discharges covered to those associated with irrigated lands.

Discharges associated with dryland grazing activities have been removed from the scope of the regional program due to a recent decision to develop a statewide approach to address grazing activities on non-federal lands. This statewide effort is being coordinated by the State Water Resources Control Board, with direct participation by all Regional Water Boards where grazing is a significant land use within the region.

North Coast Regional Water Board staff will be actively involved in the process to ensure the statewide program adequately addresses the water quality concerns and the unique nature of dryland grazing within ranching communities in the North Coast Region. The statewide grazing program is scheduled to be completed by 2013.

There are several reasons for the expansion in geographic scope to the entire North Coast Region for irrigated lands. Developing a regionwide program utilizes staff resources more efficiently by consolidating program development efforts and precluding the need for separate programs around the region. Expanding the scope also provides an opportunity for all the agriculture-based stakeholders to participate in the development of this key program at the same time. Having a regionwide program will create a level playing field, while maintaining the flexibility for growers to form

watershed or commodity-based groups and develop management plans specific to their area. Staff intend to develop a program that is both feasible for growers to implement and protective of water quality.

Regional Water Board staff have contracted with the Center for Collaborative Policy (CCP) to assist with stakeholder involvement throughout the development of the North Coast Region's irrigated lands program. A stakeholder involvement strategy is currently under development. The initial steps in the strategy are as follows:

1. Discuss program development concepts with key stakeholders;
2. Survey stakeholders to gauge interest in participating in program development, likely via a stakeholder advisory group;
3. Develop mailing list and distribute outreach materials;
4. Create stakeholder advisory group(s), which may be multiple geographically-based or commodity-based focus groups throughout the region or, alternatively, one large group of 50 or fewer stakeholders; and
5. Initiate workgroup process and draft a working group charter.

The specific timeline for the stakeholder process will be determined based on the results of the initial stakeholder outreach effort. The initial outreach will continue through the summer of 2011 with the first stakeholder advisory group meetings planned to begin before the end of 2011. Aside from changes to the timeline due to the shift in scope, staff are maintaining the timeline and workplan tasks presented to the Board in June 2010, including the endpoint of a Board adoption hearing in December 2012.

Stakeholders can subscribe to the mailing list and stay informed on the latest program developments at the following webpage:
http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/northcoast/water_issues/programs/grazing_and_irrigated_agriculture/.

PRELIMINARY

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

This is an informational item only.