



Media Release

North Coast Regional Water Board Adopts Order for Cannabis Cultivation and Similar Activities

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SANTA ROSA – The North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board (North Coast Regional Water Board) today adopted California’s first regional water quality regulatory order to protect the environment from discharges of waste associated with cannabis cultivation.

Much of California’s cannabis cultivation occurs in the North Coast region, increasing in recent years in both number of sites and size of operations. The order establishes water resource protection requirements, provides a mechanism for water quality compliance, and enables the North Coast Regional Water Board to better focus its enforcement resources.

“This is a giant step forward in protecting North Coast water resources,” said John Corbett, North Coast Regional Water Board chair.

Starting Feb. 15, 2016, growers with cannabis cultivation areas of 2,000 square feet or more must enroll in one of three tiers, depending on site conditions and threat to water quality. Tier 1 is a low-threat tier based on compliance with defined standard conditions and site characteristics. Tier 2 is a management tier, which requires the development and implementation of a water resource protection plan to meet standard conditions. Tier 3 is a cleanup tier, which requires the development and implementation of a cleanup and restoration plan.

The order includes standard conditions to address erosion control and drainage features, stream and wetland buffers, spoils management, water storage and use, irrigation runoff, fertilizers and pesticides, petroleum products and other chemicals, other wastes, and remediation, cleanup and restoration activities. Discharges of waste from new site development are not covered by the order. Enrollees are not exempted from the need to comply with applicable local ordinances or state and federal laws.

The order allows approved third party programs to assist cultivators with enrollment, compliance activities, and monitoring and reporting. Enrollment fees specific to the tier levels will be set by the State Water Board. Property owners with operations that have similar environmental effects to cannabis cultivation may opt to, or be required to enroll in and comply with the requirements of the order.

“The adoption of this order is intended to address the harmful impacts and threat of devastation that unregulated cannabis cultivation can have on our fragile North Coast ecosystems,” said Matt St. John, the executive officer of the Regional Water Board.





The majority of the streams in the North Coast are impacted by excess sediment, nutrients and elevated temperatures. The problems are often associated with poorly planned forest clearing and earth-moving activities resulting in polluted stormwater runoff to streams. Dry-season surface water diversions and the severe drought intensify these water quality impacts. The order is consistent with other existing general orders addressing nonpoint source discharge land use activities such as timber harvesting.

The North Coast Regional Water Board's order is part of a pilot program initiated to address increasing water quality impacts associated with cannabis cultivation in Northern California. In addition to the regulatory order adopted today, the pilot program includes interagency coordination between the Department of Fish and Wildlife and the Regional and State Water Boards, education and outreach, and enforcement.

For more information on the North Coast Regional Water Board's regulatory order, visit [here](#).

The North Coast Regional Water Board is currently comprised of six part-time members appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Senate. The Water Board's mission is to protect and restore water quality in the northwest portion of the state, including the counties of Del Norte, Humboldt, Mendocino, Modoc, Siskiyou, Sonoma, Trinity, and portions of Glenn, Lake, and Marin counties. For more information visit the Regional Water Board homepage at: <http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/northcoast/>.

The Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board is also working on a [draft general order](#) to establish rules for marijuana cultivation. A public comment period opens this week on the Central Valley proposal, and that Regional Water Board is expected to consider adoption in early October.

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