



Enforcement News

Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board
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Southern California Edison to Pay \$3 Million for Clean Water Act, Fish and Game Violations at Shaver Lake Dam Project

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SACRAMENTO -- Today the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board (Central Valley Water Board), along with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), reached a settlement agreement with public utility company Southern California Edison for \$3 million related to alleged violations of the Clean Water Act and California Fish and Game Code. The alleged violations stem from a repair project at Shaver Lake Dam, which caused the discharge of highly turbid, sediment-laden water resulting in thousands of fish being killed and irreparable impairment of downstream aquatic habitat.

Shaver Lake and the dam are part of Southern California Edison's Big Creek hydroelectric system, which features lakes, tunnels and hydroelectric plants to produce power and deliver water for beneficial use.

The alleged violations took place when Southern California Edison was performing work to install a geomembrane liner to the upstream side of Shaver Lake Dam in Fresno County. This project was being done to prevent leaks within the dam and to shore up its structural integrity. Part of the work required water to be completely drained from the base of the dam and sediment needed to be temporarily excavated.

On Dec. 6, 2011, after the lake was dewatered to levels where work could be done to install the membrane, turbidity levels (cloudiness in the water due to suspended sediment) above acceptable levels were reported downstream of the dam. On Dec. 7, 2011, CDFW staff reported seeing highly turbid water in Stevenson Creek, a downstream tributary of Shaver Lake, and noticed a large number of dead fish. CDFW staff, along with Southern California Edison, agreed that the fish kill was a result of high turbidity due to the release of sediment from behind the dam during the Shaver Lake drawdown to complete dam work. CDFW staff allege thousands of fish died because the high turbidity.

High levels of turbidity in waterways can be detrimental to aquatic life as excess levels of sediment can cloud water, blocking sunlight from entering and making it difficult for fish and other aquatic lifeforms to survive.

As part of the settlement, Southern California Edison agrees to pay \$2,077,053 to the Central Valley Water Board for the alleged Water Code violations, and \$922,947 to CDFW to resolve alleged Fish and Game Code violations. Of the \$2,077,053 paid to the Central Valley Water Board, \$1,038,553 will be paid to the State Water Resources Control Board's [Cleanup and Abatement Account](#); the remaining amount will be split equally to fund a suite of environmental projects implemented by the Rose Foundation and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation benefitting communities in Kern, Madera, Fresno and Tulare counties. These environmental projects will address water quality issues and habitat restoration.

“Protecting the state’s waterways and the ecosystems that live in and around them is a high priority of the Central Valley Water Board. Which is why when incidents such as this take place, it’s necessary for the board to bring enforcement,” said Pamela Creedon, executive officer for the Central Valley Water Board. “This Administrative Civil Liability and settlement agreement will go toward making sure incidents such as these are stopped, and help clean up other waterways that may face environmental challenges.”

For more information on the settlement agreement and the Administrative Civil Liability, see the Central Valley Water Board’s enforcement [webpage](#).

The Central Valley Regional Water Quality Board is a California state agency responsible for the preservation and enhancement of water quality. For more information on the Central Valley Water Board, visit its [website](#).

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