

Regional Water Quality Control Board
North Coast Region

Executive Officer's Summary Report
April 15, 2021

ITEM: 3

SUBJECT: Public Hearing on Resolution No. R1-2021-0006 to consider adoption of proposed Resolution Approving Groundwater Basin Evaluation and Prioritization Results Supporting Salt and Nutrient Management Planning as Required by State Water Resources Control Board Recycled Water Policy. (*Chris Watt*)

BOARD ACTION: The Board will consider adoption of Resolution No. R1-2021-0006.

BACKGROUND: The 2018 amendment to the statewide Recycled Water Policy incorporated groundwater basin prioritization to implement the Salt and Nutrient Management Planning provision of the Recycled Water Policy. The Amendment includes language requiring regional water boards to evaluate groundwater basins within their region for the potential threat to groundwater quality from salts and nutrients. Based on that evaluation, the regional water boards will prioritize the need for salt and nutrient management planning. In the latter half of 2020, North Coast Water Board staff evaluated and prioritized the 63 groundwater basins of the North Coast Region. The technical process was informed by the following: a) the Groundwater Ambient Monitoring and Assessment (GAMA) Groundwater Information System; b) the Department of Water Resources (DWR) Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) Basin Prioritization Process; and c) the seven groundwater basin evaluation factors listed in the Recycled Water Policy. The seven evaluation factors used by staff consist of: 1) status and trends in the concentrations of nitrate and salts (as total dissolved solids -TDS) in groundwater; 2) contribution of imported water and recycled water to the basin water supply; 3) reliance on groundwater; 4) population and growth; 5) number and density of on-site wastewater treatment systems; 6) acres of irrigated agriculture and density of confined animal facilities; and 7) five basin specific factors (depth to groundwater, aquifer thickness, surface water impairment from nutrients and/or pathogens, hydrogeologically vulnerable areas, and number of open groundwater cleanup cases. At the December 2020 meeting of the Regional Water Board, staff presented an information item on the basin evaluation and prioritization process along with preliminary results.

The groundwater basin evaluation and prioritization process is a component of the North Coast Groundwater Protection Strategy which was developed and has evolved over the last 20 years in response to numerous statewide policies, new data sources, and new laws/regulations. The purpose of the Strategy is to (1) establish water quality objectives, (2) identify priority basins, and (3) identify and implement strategies to protect high groundwater quality of the region and improve groundwater quality in areas where it is degraded.

DISCUSSION: Building on the basin evaluation and prioritization process described at the December 2020 board meeting, the Staff Report for this item, titled *North Coast Hydrologic Region Salt and Nutrient Management Planning Groundwater Basin Evaluation and Prioritization*, includes a background section on groundwater conditions in the North Coast, a description of the technical process used to evaluate basins, prioritization results, and potential implementation pathways. Resolution No. R1-2021-0006 includes recommended Priority Basins that would benefit from salt and nutrient management planning and includes direction to staff to proceed with developing a Policy Statement for Groundwater Protection which outlines a range of strategies to protect high groundwater quality and improve degraded groundwater quality within the region and to present the Policy Statement for Board consideration within the shortest time practicable. The draft Resolution and Staff Report were made available for public comment from January 4 to February 3, 2021. Following public review, Staff identify 17 of 62 DWR Basins as a priority for salt and nutrient management planning (see list below). Adaptive management pathways and potential implementation options are described in the Staff Report and include the following: 1) continued technical analysis; 2) implementation of existing regulatory tools; 3) stewardship actions; and 4) possible amendments to the Basin Plan. The purpose of this action item is for the Board to consider adoption of Resolution No. R1-2021-0006 which accepts the 17 priority groundwater basins recommended by staff and which provides direction to staff on follow-up actions.

| Priority Category | Basin or Subbasin |
|-------------------|---|
| 1 | Santa Rosa Plain |
| 2 | Smith River Plain, Scott River Valley, Mad River Lowland, Eureka Plain, Eel River Valley, Anderson Valley, Fort Bragg Terrace Area, Ukiah Valley, Sanel Valley, Alexander Area, Cloverdale Area, Healdsburg Area, Rincon Valley, Wilson Grove Formation Highlands, Lower Russian River Valley, Fort Ross Terrace Deposits |

RESPONSE TO COMMENTS: During the 30-day public comment period, staff received eight comments from public agencies in the North Coast Region and one private citizen. A public agency, which also submitted a timely comment, submitted additional comments after the public comment period closed. Regional Water Board staff held tele-conferences and had email exchanges with several of the commenters. Comments can generally be grouped into the following categories: 1) clarify the relationship between SGMA and this basin prioritization process; 2) consider additional data which may affect the evaluation process; and 3) refine the impacts of recycled/imported water on the evaluation process. Some revisions to the Staff Report and Resolution were made in response to written comments and based on information provided during tele-conferences and email exchanges with commenters. In addition,

staff prepared a written response to each timely comment which is included with the agenda materials.

Based on additional groundwater data and mapping products obtained during and after the public comment period, as well as a modification in the treatment of non-detect data, the priority ranking of four groundwater basins were adjusted. The additional groundwater data and modification in the treatment of non-detect data resulted in slight changes to salt and nutrient trend lines and the mapping products increased the number of OWTS in the Smith River Plain. Staff also elected to change the priority categories from descriptive (i.e. Critical, High, Medium, Low) to numerical in order to remove potential conflation with SGMA basin priority categories as was noted by several commenters. One late comment was received from Permit Sonoma which was similar to their timely comment. No written response was prepared for the late comment. Staff also added two statements to the resolution acknowledging that as provided for in the Recycled Water Policy, basin priorities will be updated a minimum of every 5 years and determining priority is within the authority of the Executive Officer.

RECOMMENDATION: Adopt Resolution No. R1-2021-0006, as proposed.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS:

1. Proposed Resolution No. R1-2021-0006
2. Final Staff Report for North Coast Hydrologic Region
Salt and Nutrient Management Planning
Groundwater Basin Evaluation and Prioritization
3. Response to Comments
4. Public Notice
5. Public Comments are provided to Board Members. The public may request email copies of public comments by contacting the lead staff person for this item at chris.watt@waterboards.ca.gov.