

Regional Water Quality Control Board
North Coast Region

Executive Officer's Summary Report
Wednesday, December 13, 2017
Regional Water Board Office
Santa Rosa, California

ITEM: 11

SUBJECT: Update on Regional Water Board's Post Fire Response and Recovery Actions

BOARD ACTION: Information only; no action needed.

BACKGROUND: On October 8, 2017, wildfires began in Mendocino, Napa, Solano, Sonoma and Yuba counties. The fires ravaged close to 200,000 acres, destroyed or damaged 9,000 structures, and caused 43 fatalities. On October 9, 2017, the Governor issued an emergency proclamation for Napa, Sonoma and Yuba counties due to the effects of multiple fires, including the Tubbs, Nuns, and Atlas fires, which have damaged critical infrastructure, threatened thousands of homes and caused the evacuation of residents. In addition, the fires created new and exacerbated existing threats to water quality.

Due to the fires, the Regional Water Board office was closed from October 9 to 13. Over the two week period after the fires began the main focus was to ensure the health and safety of all staff and their families. Four of our current staff and four of our retirees lost their homes, as did many colleagues of partner agencies and organizations. Many of our staff were evacuated for multiple weeks after the fires began.

Starting the week of October 16, 2017, two Regional Water Board staff participated in the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) Watershed Emergency Response Teams (WERTs) for Tubbs Fire and Nuns Fire to assess and prioritize fire damage. In the ensuing weeks, we have been working with U.S. EPA, FEMA, the California Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES), CAL FIRE, and other state, local entities and volunteer groups to conduct post-fire emergency response and recovery activities to protect human health and the environment. U.S. EPA has assigned a staff person and provided consultant support to assist the Regional Water Board in fire response and recovery activities in Sonoma and Mendocino Counties. On November 17, 2017, CAL FIRE declared it has completed its emergency response activities. The purpose of this information item is to provide an overview of the Regional Water Board's key short-term response actions and long-term recovery plans, as summarized below.

DISCUSSION: On November 3, 2017, the Regional Water Board received a Fire Response Mission Task Assignment (2017-SOC-42661) from Cal OES directing our agency to conduct water quality risk assessments and provide technical recommendations to Cal OES and CAL FIRE for protection measures. Using CAL FIRE WERT data and other GIS data layers provided by Sonoma County, Regional Water Board staff identified priority catchment areas to assess threats to water quality within the Russian River watershed. Regional Water Board staff developed survey forms, a project tracking database, and a Threat Mitigation Form to communicate recommended threat mitigation tasks to CalOES and CalFire. Survey crews were formed, trained, equipped and deployed starting Saturday November 4th.

Non-Urban and Urban Areas

- The Regional Water Board staff formed multiple teams to assess and prioritize high risk areas for protection in the Mark West Creek and Porter Creek area. Staff then communicated threat mitigation tasks to Cal OES and CAL FIRE.
- Cal OES and CAL FIRE used the threat mitigation information from our teams to perform mitigation activities. In addition, we also assigned technical specialist to each CAL FIRE team to oversee deployment of erosion and other pollutant control best management practices (BMPs).
- In coordination with City of Santa Rosa and County of Sonoma, we deployed urban field response teams to assess water quality threats in the fire-affected neighborhoods of Coffey Park, Larkfield/Wikiup, Fountaingrove, and Skyfarm.
- Also in coordination with the City of Santa Rosa and County of Sonoma, the Regional Water Board field crews installed various erosion, sediment, and pollutant control measures (i.e. weighted wattles, gravel bags) in City and County storm drain inlets to mitigate the impacts of fire related wastes in our local streams.
- On November 3, 2017, the Executive Officer issued a letter to the City of Santa Rosa and on November 28, 2017, the Assistant Executive Officer issued a letter to the County of Sonoma with direction to implement BMPs to control the pollutants in the runoff to the maximum extent practicable.
- We intend to work with the City and the County on how to rebuild the fire-affected neighborhoods to increase community and landscape resiliency.
- Regional Water Board staff, along with many other federal, state, and local agencies and organizations, also regularly attend the Sonoma County Watershed Recovery and Debris Task Forces, along with more intermittent participation in the Mendocino Task Force meetings. Regional Water Board staff are also participating in several working groups of the Watershed Recovery & Resiliency Collaborative (Collaborative), convened by the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District. Working with 70 different local and state agencies, county departments, local NGOs, and community groups, the Collaborative plans to produce a report with recommended short, medium, and long-term actions needed for recovery and resiliency of watershed lands in Sonoma County.

Funding

- In early November the State Water Board approved a total of \$500,000 (two separate projects) from the Cleanup and Abatement Account for purchasing critical erosion and sedimentation control materials for installation in fire damaged areas. On November 21, 2017, the State Water Board approved an additional \$300,000 for this purpose.

- On October 25, 2017, the Regional Water Board compiled a list of the most relevant grants and loans for fire recovery and posted the list on our web page.

Fire Wastes Management

- On November 3, the Regional Water Board Executive Officer signed a temporary Conditional Waiver of waste discharge requirements (Order No. R1-2017-0055) specifying the conditions for the disposal of disaster-related wastes generated from emergency cleanup activities through December 31, 2017. This temporary Order allows entities such as the City and County to dispose of fire-related wastes resulting from its cleanup activities. Additionally, this order allows Republic Services, Inc., the operator of the Sonoma County Central Landfill, to accept fire-related debris and wastes.
- On November 10, 2017, staff circulated a comparable Conditional Waiver (Order No. R1-2017-0056) for public comments; the proposed Order will be considered for adoption by the Regional Water Board at the December 13, 2017 Board hearing (see Item #9). Once approved by the Board, the proposed Order would expire on January 1, 2023, unless rescinded, revised, or renewed by the Board.

Monitoring

- **Fire Response Monitoring:** We are collaborating with the Sonoma County Water Agency, City of Santa Rosa, USGS and others to monitor post-fire water quality conditions in the several tributaries to the Russian River (Mark West Creek, Santa Rosa Creek, and Piner Creek). The intent of the monitoring is to 1) characterize what fire-related pollutants are entering surface water from these urban areas, and 2) determine the effectiveness of the BMPs implemented.
- **Long-term Monitoring of Watershed Recovery:** We are in the initial planning stages of determining a collaborative process for assessing the long-term recovery of the Russian River watershed from the devastating fires. We will continue to engage with other entities assessing water quality and post-fire watershed recovery as we develop our long-term monitoring strategy.
- We intend to coordinate the monitoring and share the monitoring data by various entities through the Russian River Regional Monitoring Program (R3MP).

Data and Information Management

- To support the field assessment and reporting efforts, staff has collaborated with a number of local and state agencies to map and assess high risk areas in both urban and non-urban areas with recommended BMPs. In coordination with the City and County staff plans to continue to track the implementation and maintenance of these BMPs.

- To streamline implementation and necessary permitting for fire-related emergency response such as repair or replacement of culverts, bridges, and roads, staff has been working with San Francisco Estuary Institute to simplify permit application and project reporting processes via an online tool (i.e., Project Tracker/[EcoAtlas](#)). In the long run, the same tool can be used for planning, sequencing and tracking restoration projects to accelerate watershed recovery.

RECOMMENDATION: N/A

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS:

- A. Governor's Emergency Proclamation dated October 9, 2017
<http://www.oesnews.com/governor-brown-declares-state-of-emergency-in-napa-sonoma-and-yuba-counties-due-to-fires/>
- B. Incident Information
 - a. Atlas Fire
http://www.fire.ca.gov/current_incidents/incidentdetails/Index/1866
 - b. Nuns Fire
http://www.fire.ca.gov/current_incidents/incidentdetails/Index/1868
 - c. Pocket Fire
http://www.fire.ca.gov/current_incidents/incidentdetails/Index/1883
 - d. Redwood Valley Fire
http://www.fire.ca.gov/current_incidents/incidentdetails/Index/1874
 - e. Tubbs Fire
http://www.fire.ca.gov/current_incidents/incidentdetails/Index/1867