

Salinas River Channel Coalition

Established 1995

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January 3, 2011

Mr. Jeffrey Young
Chairman
Regional Water Quality Control Board
895 Aerovista Pl, Ste 101
San Luis Obispo, CA 93401-7906
Fax: 805-543-0397
agorder@waterboards.ca.gov

Re: CCRWQB Request for Public Comments on Draft Agricultural Order dated November 19, 2010

Dear Mr. Young:

This letter is intended to provide comments to you, the regional board members and staff as to our concerns of the requirements in the draft order dated November 19, 2010. The Salinas River Channel Coalition (SRCC) represents landowners, growers, municipalities and other interested parties in issues surrounding the Salinas River and its tributaries; focus of the SRCC is the Channel Maintenance Program. We are concerned about the channel maintenance program for flood capacity, recharge, reservoir releases, and protection of infrastructure (i.e. roads & bridges) and controlling invasive, noxious weeds that are intense in water consumption, pose a flood and erosion threat to our land and reduces fish and wildlife habitat quality.

The Board of Directors and Members of the Salinas River Channel Coalition have been proactive and involved for many years with water quality solutions on the Central Coast. The first Ag Waiver process was about improvement of water quality which is documented we believe that on ground work needs to be done but, this current draft order has become nothing more than a regulation to develop fines and fees.

The Salinas River Channel Coalition Board is concerned that the staff does not understand the Salinas Valley, nor the watersheds of the Salinas River examples are as follows;

- "1,000 foot setback of 303(d) listed water bodies" within the tiers is NOT based on threat to water quality in many cases the private property owners have levees or have graded the agricultural farming operations away from the Salinas River.
- That operators must protect existing aquatic habitat by maintaining riparian functions such as stream bank shading, aquatic and wildlife support and maintain naturally occurring mixed vegetative cover in aquatic habitat areas that may not be the appropriate for maintaining the channel for flood control.
- That by October 1, 2012 Tier 2 and 3 dischargers with operations adjacent to or containing an impaired water body for sediment, temperature or turbidity must conduct photo monitoring to document the condition of the water body including the estimated widths of vegetative filter

strips and management practices or measures to address impairment. There are research gaps in the effectiveness of the use of vegetative filter strips for water quality improvement.

- That by October 1, 2015, Tier 3 dischargers with operations adjacent to or containing an impaired water body (listed in Table 1) must submit a Water Quality Buffer Plan that protects the water body and its associated perennial and intermittent tributaries that includes a minimum 30 foot buffer measured horizontally from the top of bank on either side of the waterway, vegetated zones within the buffer to control temperature, reduce velocity, control sediment deposition, provide treatment through infiltration. The terms, conditions and or requirements of the Water Quality Buffer Plan are unclear and again we believe there are research gaps in effectiveness for water quality improvements.
- Operations and/or ownership of 1000 acres or greater. Using ownership 1,000 acre standard appear to have nothing to do with the risk a growing operation poses to water quality.
- Proposed Standards and Timelines cannot currently be met the science and research must be completed that requires time. Some of these levels listed are due to agriculture (as a non-point source) and there is certainly room for growers to improve practices that impact water quality, but we request that you not set timelines and milestones for improvement in a matter of a few years to problems that were caused many years ago. Achieving real improvements to water quality in our region required standards have realistic goals and focus on where the problems truly lie.

The Salinas River Channel Coalition Board has been very involved with public/private partnerships in order to find solutions in balancing the many interests within its basin. Furthermore, the scope of the draft proposal which includes literally hundreds of pages of text due to its various attachments, all of which must be read, reviewed, and digested before comments may be intelligently does require that more time should be given to the public to prepare and make their comments. We request you to consider our comments and re-evaluative an Ag Waiver that is designed with achievable objectives, along with a transparent and collaborative process that encourages agricultural stakeholders and owners an opportunity to improve water quality— balancing all the interests those on the Central Coast.

Sincerely,



Benny Jefferson, Chairman
Salinas River Channel Coalition (SRCC)

cc: Board Members