



## State Water Quality Fees Paid By Growers

State-mandated fees have been on the increase the past few years and the water quality arena is no exception, as Kings River growers have recently discovered.

Thousands of members of the Kings River Sub-Watershed Coalition recently paid a Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board acreage assessment mandated under its agricultural water discharge conditional waiver program.

The fees passed along from the state to Coalition members were modest – 12 cents per acre, plus \$8 per bill for processing – and were intended to cover the \$72,000 in conditional ag discharge waiver fees assessed in the Kings River region this year by the State.

There is no guarantee that fees will remain the same in the future because costs of a portion of such activities like water quality monitoring, as well as other costs, may be added.

The assessment came as a surprise to many Kings River growers. "There was some confusion," said David Cone, who administers the Coalition.

He noted that the conditional ag discharge waiver issue is not well understood by the public and has not had a high news coverage profile. A number of growers simply forgot that they were among the owners of some 600,000 acres of farmland within the Kings River region who had joined the Coalition.

Another puzzling factor to many growers involves what constitutes a "discharger." The Regional Board terms "discharge" as any irrigation or storm water runoff from an average storm event leaving a grower's irrigated property.

Cone said the Coalition will meet a July 31 deadline to submit a membership list to the Regional Board staff.

Coalition members' irrigated properties are located throughout the area but there are also many thousands of acres of lands whose owners and operators did not enroll properties.

The greatest percentage of enrolled irrigated lands remains generally along the lower Kings River reaches and in the Tulare Lake bed, Cone said.

The conditional ag discharge waiver issue has been evolving since 2002 when a 20-year agricultural water discharge exemption from needing water discharge permits came to an end. There have since been a series of Regional Board conditional waiver programs, rules and procedures that have tended to change.

The Coalition and most agricultural water agencies, including the Kings River Conservation District, have made an all-out push to encourage growers to take advantage of Coalition representation under the conditional ag waiver program.

Those growers who have opted against coverage under a watershed coalition group or through a separate individual irrigated land conditional waiver process will need to seek a grower-specific permit, according to the Regional Board. Unregistered properties may also face enforcement action if the Regional Board determines a property has a risk of discharging into "waters of the United States."

## New Agency Being Formed To Take Over Kings Coalition

A new joint powers agency is in the process of being formed to take over policy direction and administration of the Kings River Sub-Watershed Coalition that has been providing regulatory representation for enrolled growers and their irrigated lands.

Most Kings River public irrigation and water districts, as well as privately held canal companies, are part of the joint powers agency proposal, as is the Kings River Conservation District.

Once organized, the new agency's board would oversee the Coalition and would be expected to arrange staff assistance through an existing agency, most probably KRCD.

The change will not affect Coalition membership by growers seeking to comply with the conditional ag water discharge waiver program requirements.

# Irrigated Lands Workshops Will Be Offered November 5

Two free workshops will be offered in Parlier and Riverdale on Monday, November 5, to help growers with best management practices for irrigated lands.

The Kings River Sub-Watershed Coalition will present the workshops, which will cover the same material. The first will be from 9 a.m.-12 noon at the University of California's Kearney Agricultural Center. The second will be that afternoon from 1-4 p.m.

at the Riverdale Community Center.

Updates will be given on the conditional ag water discharge waiver program and the latest information on best management practices technology for stone fruit farm operations will be provided.

Free best management practices publications will be distributed. It is possible that PCA licensees may be able to receive credit hours.

## "Big Coalition" Continues Work In Water Quality

Water quality issues and regulatory concerns have grown enormously in recent years and have resulted in new organizations that can seem confusing.

One such organization is the Southern San Joaquin Water Quality Coalition, of which the Kings River Conservation District and Kings River Water Association are charter members and continue to participate.

The Kings River Sub-Watershed is one of the four sub-watersheds under the "big coalition". It was organized to provide Kings River area growers and owners of irrigated lands regulatory representation under the conditional ag water discharge waiver program and Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control board regulations.

"The Southern San Joaquin Coalition was actually formed prior to the ag discharge waiver becoming such a big issue" said David Cone, KRCD Deputy General Manager. "It has two functions – dealing with the ag waiver program, which takes a tremendous amount of time, and providing information and representation to member agencies on water quality issues and common interests such as salinity."

KRCD General Manager David Orth is the Southern San Joaquin Coalition Coordinator. The Coalition includes agencies representing the Kaweah, Tule and Kern rivers.

## Kings River Water Quality Remains Very Good

Water quality within the Kings River continues to be very good as shown from results of extensive monitoring at different locations.

"Water quality is very good and any pesticides detected are present in such tiny amounts that they fail to register a meaningful number," said David Cone, KRCD Deputy General Manager.

KRCD is advising state regulators that testing for reduced algae growth in Kings River water samples is being discontinued. Reduced algae growth, a potential sign of water quality troubles, has been occurring under all water conditions and in different reaches, and may be the result of the Kings River's pristine Sierra Nevada origins. No toxic substances have ever been found that would have caused the reduced algae growth.

"There are water quality problems within portions of the lower Kings, mostly on the South Fork but some on the North Fork," Cone said. "It is possible that these situations may not be covered by the ag waiver program but by other Regional Board programs." Those concerns deal with sub-surface drainage and salinity.

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