

Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board

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Governor's Office of Planning & Research

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CERTIFIED MAIL

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STATE CLEARINGHOUSE

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COMMENTS TO REQUEST FOR REVIEW FOR THE MITIGATED NEGATIVE DECLARATION, KING FIRE RESTORATION PROJECT, SCH#2019049080, EL DORADO AND PLACER COUNTIES

Pursuant to the State Clearinghouse's 12 April 2019 request, the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board (Central Valley Water Board) has reviewed the *Request for Review for the Mitigated Negative Declaration* for the King Fire Restoration Project, located in El Dorado and Placer Counties.

Our agency is delegated with the responsibility of protecting the quality of surface and groundwaters of the state; therefore our comments will address concerns surrounding those issues.

I. Regulatory Setting

Basin Plan

The Central Valley Water Board is required to formulate and adopt Basin Plans for all areas within the Central Valley region under Section 13240 of the Porter-Cologne Water Quality Control Act. Each Basin Plan must contain water quality objectives to ensure the reasonable protection of beneficial uses, as well as a program of implementation for achieving water quality objectives with the Basin Plans. Federal regulations require each state to adopt water quality standards to protect the public health or welfare, enhance the quality of water and serve the purposes of the Clean Water Act. In California, the beneficial uses, water quality objectives, and the Antidegradation Policy are the State's water quality standards. Water quality standards are also contained in the National Toxics Rule, 40 CFR Section 131.36, and the California Toxics Rule, 40 CFR Section 131.38.

The Basin Plan is subject to modification as necessary, considering applicable laws, policies, technologies, water quality conditions and priorities. The original Basin Plans were adopted in 1975, and have been updated and revised periodically as required, using Basin Plan amendments. Once the Central Valley Water Board has adopted a Basin Plan amendment in noticed public hearings, it must be approved by the State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board), Office of Administrative Law (OAL) and in some cases, the United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA). Basin Plan amendments

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only become effective after they have been approved by the OAL and in some cases, the USEPA. Every three (3) years, a review of the Basin Plan is completed that assesses the appropriateness of existing standards and evaluates and prioritizes Basin Planning issues.

For more information on the *Water Quality Control Plan for the Sacramento and San Joaquin River Basins*, please visit our website:

http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/centralvalley/water_issues/basin_plans/

Antidegradation Considerations

All wastewater discharges must comply with the Antidegradation Policy (State Water Board Resolution 68-16) and the Antidegradation Implementation Policy contained in the Basin Plan. The Antidegradation Implementation Policy is available on page 74 at:

https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/centralvalley/water_issues/basin_plans/sacsjr_201805.pdf

In part it states:

Any discharge of waste to high quality waters must apply best practicable treatment or control not only to prevent a condition of pollution or nuisance from occurring, but also to maintain the highest water quality possible consistent with the maximum benefit to the people of the State.

This information must be presented as an analysis of the impacts and potential impacts of the discharge on water quality, as measured by background concentrations and applicable water quality objectives.

The antidegradation analysis is a mandatory element in the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System and land discharge Waste Discharge Requirements (WDRs) permitting processes. The environmental review document should evaluate potential impacts to both surface and groundwater quality.

II. Permitting Requirements

Forest Activities Program

Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) is proposing the Project to address post fire conditions created by the King Fire. The goal of the Project is to: reduce the risk from falling dead, dying, and damaged trees, remove dead trees in strategic fire management areas, manage severely burned areas to facilitate restoration and resilience, recover timber killed by the fire for the purpose of generating funds to offset the cost of restoration activities, and to promote scientific research to increase knowledge regarding the effects of large fires on the environment. The Project will treat 16,682 acres of National Forest System lands. The proposed action would involve hand and mechanical harvesting methods to remove hazard trees from the landscape, pile burning, and conifer planting.

As background, state law assigns responsibility for protection of water quality within central valley watersheds to the Central Valley Water Board. The Central Valley Water Board implements and enforces the Porter-Cologne Water Quality Control Act ("Porter-Cologne Act," California Water Code §13000 et seq.) and the *Water Quality Control Plan for the*

Sacramento and San Joaquin Basins (Basin Plan). All forest projects must comply with all substantive and procedural requirements of the Porter-Cologne Act and the Basin Plan.

Central Valley Water Board Order No. R5-2017-0061, *Waste Discharge Requirements General Order for Discharges Related to Timberland Management Activities For Non-Federal and Federal Lands* (Order), waives certain activities conducted on National Forest System Lands from the waste discharge requirements of Article 4 (commencing with Section 13260) of Chapter 4, Division 7 of the California Water Code, except as provided within the Order. To receive coverage under the Order, the Project must meet specific eligibility criteria and conditions. A guidance document and pertinent forms are available for review and can be downloaded at the following web address: https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/centralvalley/water_issues/forest_activities/#forestgo

Please accept the following comments based on the information provided in the Project Comment Letter:

1. The Basin Plan contains water quality objectives, implementation plans for meeting those objectives, and other policies, including State Water Resources Control Board and federal policies, which are applicable to operations on National Forest System lands within California. The Project must be designed and implemented to meet the water quality standards outlined in the Basin Plan. Additionally, the project must be in compliance with any total maximum daily load (TMDL) that has been developed for the watersheds in which the Project will occur.
2. For project enrollment, the 2017 Order states that after project approval by the United States Forest Service (USFS) and at least 15 days prior to commencement of on-the-ground activities, a Notice of Intent (NOI) and Order Application shall be filed with the Central Valley Water Board. The NOI certifies that the USFS understands and intends to comply with the Order. A letter granting coverage must be received by the USFS prior to initiating activities.
3. The USFS shall include specific on-the-ground prescriptions designed to meet the USFS Best Management Practices (BMPs) within the environmental document prepared pursuant to NEPA. The specific prescriptions shall also be included in all contracts, agreements, and other instruments used to direct the activities of contractors, USFS personnel, volunteers, or any other third parties specified in this Order. The intent is to provide clarity and transparency in how the BMPs will be implemented and to facilitate the monitoring of BMP implementation.
4. In addition to providing specific on-the-ground prescriptions, the USFS shall provide copies of this Order to contractors, USFS volunteers, and any other third parties specified in this Order, and notify them of their responsibilities to comply with the Order.
5. Notification must be given prior to the application of herbicides on the Project. The 2017 Category 5B Order Application Procedures states that:

"The Discharger shall notify the Central Valley Water Board, in writing, at least 15 days prior to any proposed application of pesticides; the notification does not need to include information on hack and squirt or individual stump applications. The written notification shall include the pesticide product(s) to be applied, the proposed date(s) of application, the method(s) of application, project name, area(s) of application (include map), and a description of measures that will be employed to assure compliance with the applicable Basin Plan. Subsequent changes to the proposal must be submitted in writing no less than 48 hours prior to pesticide application."

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the SNC King Fire Restoration Project. We would appreciate receiving copies of the environmental documents for review and comment. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Jonathan Meurer at (916) 464-4626.

Construction Storm Water General Permit

Dischargers whose project disturb one or more acres of soil or where projects disturb less than one acre but are part of a larger common plan of development that in total disturbs one or more acres, are required to obtain coverage under the General Permit for Storm Water Discharges Associated with Construction Activities (Construction General Permit), Construction General Permit Order No. 2009-009-DWQ. Construction activity subject to this permit includes clearing, grading, grubbing, disturbances to the ground, such as stockpiling, or excavation, but does not include regular maintenance activities performed to restore the original line, grade, or capacity of the facility. The Construction General Permit requires the development and implementation of a Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP).

For more information on the Construction General Permit, visit the State Water Resources Control Board website at:

http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/stormwater/constpermits.shtml

Phase I and II Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) Permits¹

The Phase I and II MS4 permits require the Permittees reduce pollutants and runoff flows from new development and redevelopment using BMPs to the maximum extent practicable (MEP). MS4 Permittees have their own development standards, also known as Low Impact Development (LID)/post-construction standards that include a hydromodification component. The MS4 permits also require specific design concepts for LID/post-construction BMPs in the early stages of a project during the entitlement and CEQA process and the development plan review process.

For more information on which Phase I MS4 Permit this project applies to, visit the Central Valley Water Board website at:

http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/centralvalley/water_issues/storm_water/municipal_permits/

¹ Municipal Permits = The Phase I Municipal Separate Storm Water System (MS4) Permit covers medium sized Municipalities (serving between 100,000 and 250,000 people) and large sized municipalities (serving over 250,000 people). The Phase II MS4 provides coverage for small municipalities, including non-traditional Small MS4s, which include military bases, public campuses, prisons and hospitals.

For more information on the Phase II MS4 permit and who it applies to, visit the State Water Resources Control Board at:
http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/stormwater/phase_ii_municipal.shtml

Industrial Storm Water General Permit

Storm water discharges associated with industrial sites must comply with the regulations contained in the Industrial Storm Water General Permit Order No. 2014-0057-DWQ.

For more information on the Industrial Storm Water General Permit, visit the Central Valley Water Board website at:
http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/centralvalley/water_issues/storm_water/industrial_general_permits/index.shtml

Clean Water Act Section 404 Permit

If the project will involve the discharge of dredged or fill material in navigable waters or wetlands, a permit pursuant to Section 404 of the Clean Water Act may be needed from the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). If a Section 404 permit is required by the USACE, the Central Valley Water Board will review the permit application to ensure that discharge will not violate water quality standards. If the project requires surface water drainage realignment, the applicant is advised to contact the Department of Fish and Game for information on Streambed Alteration Permit requirements.

If you have any questions regarding the Clean Water Act Section 404 permits, please contact the Regulatory Division of the Sacramento District of USACE at (916) 557-5250.

Clean Water Act Section 401 Permit – Water Quality Certification

If an USACE permit (e.g., Non-Reporting Nationwide Permit, Nationwide Permit, Letter of Permission, Individual Permit, Regional General Permit, Programmatic General Permit), or any other federal permit (e.g., Section 10 of the Rivers and Harbors Act or Section 9 from the United States Coast Guard), is required for this project due to the disturbance of waters of the United States (such as streams and wetlands), then a Water Quality Certification must be obtained from the Central Valley Water Board prior to initiation of project activities. There are no waivers for 401 Water Quality Certifications.

For more information on the Water Quality Certification, visit the Central Valley Water Board website at:
https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/centralvalley/water_issues/water_quality_certification/

Waste Discharge Requirements – Discharges to Waters of the State

If USACE determines that only non-jurisdictional waters of the State (i.e., “non-federal” waters of the State) are present in the proposed project area, the proposed project may require a Waste Discharge Requirement (WDR) permit to be issued by Central Valley Water Board. Under the California Porter-Cologne Water Quality Control Act, discharges to all waters of the State, including all wetlands and other waters of the State including, but not limited to, isolated wetlands, are subject to State regulation.

For more information on the Waste Discharges to Surface Water NPDES Program and WDR processes, visit the Central Valley Water Board website at:
https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/centralvalley/water_issues/waste_to_surface_water/

Dewatering Permit

If the proposed project includes construction or groundwater dewatering to be discharged to land, the proponent may apply for coverage under State Water Board General Water Quality Order (Low Risk General Order) 2003-0003 or the Central Valley Water Board's Waiver of Report of Waste Discharge and Waste Discharge Requirements (Low Risk Waiver) R5-2013-0145. Small temporary construction dewatering projects are projects that discharge groundwater to land from excavation activities or dewatering of underground utility vaults. Dischargers seeking coverage under the General Order or Waiver must file a Notice of Intent with the Central Valley Water Board prior to beginning discharge.

For more information regarding the Low Risk General Order and the application process, visit the Central Valley Water Board website at:
http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/board_decisions/adopted_orders/water_quality/2003/wqo/wqo2003-0003.pdf

For more information regarding the Low Risk Waiver and the application process, visit the Central Valley Water Board website at:
http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/centralvalley/board_decisions/adopted_orders/waivers/r5-2013-0145_res.pdf

Regulatory Compliance for Commercially Irrigated Agriculture

If the property will be used for commercial irrigated agricultural, the discharger will be required to obtain regulatory coverage under the Irrigated Lands Regulatory Program. There are two options to comply:

1. **Obtain Coverage Under a Coalition Group.** Join the local Coalition Group that supports land owners with the implementation of the Irrigated Lands Regulatory Program. The Coalition Group conducts water quality monitoring and reporting to the Central Valley Water Board on behalf of its growers. The Coalition Groups charge an annual membership fee, which varies by Coalition Group. To find the Coalition Group in your area, visit the Central Valley Water Board's website at: https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/centralvalley/water_issues/irrigated_lands/regulatory_information/for_growers/coalition_groups/ or contact water board staff at (916) 464-4611 or via email at IrrLands@waterboards.ca.gov.
2. **Obtain Coverage Under the General Waste Discharge Requirements for Individual Growers, General Order R5-2013-0100.** Dischargers not participating in a third-party group (Coalition) are regulated individually. Depending on the specific site conditions, growers may be required to monitor runoff from their property, install monitoring wells, and submit a notice of intent, farm plan, and other action plans regarding their actions to comply with their General Order. Yearly costs would include State administrative fees (for example, annual fees for farm sizes from 11-100 acres are currently \$1,277 + \$8.53/Acre); the cost to prepare annual monitoring reports; and water quality monitoring costs. To enroll as an

Individual Discharger under the Irrigated Lands Regulatory Program, call the Central Valley Water Board phone line at (916) 464-4611 or e-mail board staff at IrrLands@waterboards.ca.gov.

Limited Threat General NPDES Permit

If the proposed project includes construction dewatering and it is necessary to discharge the groundwater to waters of the United States, the proposed project will require coverage under a National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit. Dewatering discharges are typically considered a low or limited threat to water quality and may be covered under the General Order for *Limited Threat Discharges to Surface Water* (Limited Threat General Order). A complete Notice of Intent must be submitted to the Central Valley Water Board to obtain coverage under the Limited Threat General Order.

For more information regarding the Limited Threat General Order and the application process, visit the Central Valley Water Board website at:
https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/centralvalley/board_decisions/adopted_orders/general_orders/r5-2016-0076-01.pdf

NPDES Permit

If the proposed project discharges waste that could affect the quality of surface waters of the State, other than into a community sewer system, the proposed project will require coverage under a National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit. A complete Report of Waste Discharge must be submitted with the Central Valley Water Board to obtain a NPDES Permit.

For more information regarding the NPDES Permit and the application process, visit the Central Valley Water Board website at:
<https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/centralvalley/help/permit/>

If you have questions regarding these comments, please contact me at (916) 464-4812 or Jordan.Hensley@waterboards.ca.gov.


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Environmental Scientist

cc: State Clearinghouse unit, Governor's Office of Planning and Research, Sacramento

