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## Letter from the President

*By Kirk Scilacci*

Welcome to our fourth year as a water quality coalition! We've come a long way since 2004 when we issued our first membership packet. Many members complained early on that they sent their money in and then didn't hear from us again until the next year when it was time to renew membership. We have been working hard this year to improve communication. To reduce our program costs, we sought funding for our publications to keep our members informed. We also put more information onto our website ([www.cleanwaters.info](http://www.cleanwaters.info)) and emailed members regarding various land management practice sessions.

When exceedances occur, the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board (Regional Water Board) requires us to inform our members of the problem and educate on Best Management Practices (BMPs) as applicable. This spring E. coli among other pollutants, were identified in Coon Creek on Brewer and Striplin Roads. As we learn more about the source, we will continue to keep you informed.

Going forward, our biggest challenge is to maintain our membership fees at low rates even as the cost of monitoring our waters has increased each year since 2004. Nevertheless, we strongly believe that self-monitoring is less costly and more efficient than having a state agency manage discharge waivers for each and every landowner. In fact, two "agriculture-unfriendly" organizations are attempting to dismantle this program in favor of heavier regulations imposed by the state. In a way, those who choose to ignore acquiring a discharge waiver via membership in a subwatershed, unwittingly support the demise of this program. Should this happen, we will all be paying much more than our \$55 + acreage annual dues. The more who sign up, the more water testing expenses can be distributed, keeping our fees low.

Remember, if you are filing a schedule 1040F form on your federal income tax returns and use irrigation water, surface water, or well water, and have water discharge from your property, including storm season runoff, then you are required to obtain a discharge waiver.

To reduce our administrative costs, several organizations funded printing and postage for our publications. We thank Placer County's Supervisor Weygandt for funding the printing and distribution of our flyer (*June 2007 Subwatershed News... Water Monitoring Results*) regarding the E. coli exceedance and assisting in the distribution of our Summer/Fall newsletter. Additionally, we thank the South Sutter Water District, Natomas Mutual Water Company, and Placer County Water Agency for sending our newsletter to their customers, many of whom do not yet belong to the Subwatershed Group. Finally, we thank the United Auburn Indian Community for supporting our mission by funding both our first newsletter (Summer/Fall) and this newsletter.~

**Our mission** is to pay for water testing, educate members on better management practices to keep our waters clean, inform our members of troubled waters, and work with environmental and government organizations to maintain clean waters.

The PNSSNS Subwatershed Group is one of ten subwatersheds in the Sacramento Valley Water Quality Coalition authorized to provide a discharge waiver as required by the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board. Our diverse membership represents both large and small farmers, organic farmers, rural property owners, nature and hunting preserves, animal rescue groups, country clubs, water districts and some who simply support self-monitoring to keep our waters clean.

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## Questions from the Membership

**Q:** Will the cost of membership go up every year?

**A:** It is true that each year the cost for the actual water testing has increased. However, the board is attempting to keep costs as low as possible and membership dues have remained the same since the Subwatershed Group began accepting members in 2004. Currently approximately 75% of your dues goes directly towards water testing. By aggressively pursuing grants that fund administrative and printing costs, our goal is to increase the percentage that goes towards water testing and to maintain the present fee structure.

Quite simply, the more individuals who join our coalition, the more we can spread the cost across our membership, keeping our fees low.

**Q:** It is insightful to understand that municipalities (and their waste-water treatment plants) participate in protecting watershed pollutants. Home-owners in municipalities using water-treatment plants pay property taxes, as do property owners, us, excluded from the benefits of water-treatment plants. Members of the sub-watershed group, paying a thinly disguised tax via membership also pay property taxes, a portion of which subsidize water-treatment plants from which we are excluded. In effect, membership in the subwatershed group is a double tax, for which no benefit accrues. Right?

**A:** Yes, one can view membership as another tax but it is certainly not a double tax. Property taxes are paid to the county and it is spent however they see fit. Subwatershed Group membership dues go directly to water tests and fees to the Regional Water Board to monitor the Irrigated Lands Program.

**Q:** Many of my neighbors have horse property and use PCWA ditch water to keep their pastures green. Should they become members? If so, I could suggest it to a few of them (they likely will blow me off, but I doubt they know about this).

**A:** Yes, please tell your horse property neighbors about us. Currently, the Regional Water Board is sending 'ding' letters to owners in Sutter County who have yet to join a subwatershed nor applied for an individual discharge waiver. Last year, many non-members in Placer County received 'ding' letters. Known as a "California Water Code 13267 Letter," the registered letters asked owners to file a "Technical Report" so the Regional Water Board can determine if the landowner requires a discharge waiver. Fines for not returning the completed Technical Report will vary. Recently, several fine letters were distributed with a fine amount of \$3,000. The Regional Board will have a hearing in December for those that received the fine letters. It is just a matter of time before the Regional Water Board contacts all landowners to provide proof of a discharge waiver.

**Q:** If I join the Subwatershed Group, does that mean I'm stuck having to pay the annual membership dues forever?

**A:** Yes, until you no longer file a 1040F form on your federal income tax returns. If not this program, another will be put in its place, most likely with heavier regulations imposed by the state. This will result in higher costs and taxes for all of us and we will be stuck paying forever. ≈

### 2007 – 2008

#### Fee Schedule

Due before Nov. 15, 2007

Annual Dues = \$55.00

After Nov. 15 = \$80.00

#### Irrigated Acreage Fees

0 – 10 acres = \$10.00

11 – 20 acres = \$15.00

21 – 40 acres = \$20.00

41 – 80 acres = \$40.00

More than 80 acres =

50¢ per acre

**\$55 + Acreage Fee =**

**Total Membership Dues**

## Toxicity Tests Can Reveal Farm Pollutants

*This article is written with information from Watershed Coalition News BMP Special Issue 2007 published by Coalition for Urban/Rural Environmental Stewardship (CURES) and the Monitoring Program Summary Dec 2006 from the Sacramento River Watershed Program.*

Monitoring results from several SVWQC coalitions indicate farm pollutants are moving from fields into nearby waterways. Some samples show farm inputs that exceed state water quality standards and toxicity to test organisms. While the toxicity can't always be tied to a particular pesticide or fertilizer, there are instances where cause and effect are certain.

Toxicity monitoring is an intensive and complex process in which a number of factors are taken into consideration to identify potential water quality problems. The life forms used in coalition sampling programs - water fleas, fathead minnows, and algae - represent different levels of the food chain and varying vulnerability to toxic pollutants. Effects, which are measured by mortality, reduced growth and/or reproduction, are described as acute (death occurring over a period of hours to as long as four days) or chronic (four to seven days).

- Water flea (*Ceriodaphnia dubia*) toxicity is most often caused by insecticides and at high concentrations, metals such as copper or zinc. Also combinations of several constituents can cause toxicity to water flea.

- Green algae (*Selenastrum capricornutum*) toxicity could have several causes, including herbicides or copper. Ten herbicides currently are being analyzed by coalitions: atrazine, cyanazine, diuron, glyphosate, linuron, molinate, paraquat, simazine, and thiobencarb. Simazine, diuron, and other herbicides have been detected at sites where algae toxicity has occurred.

- Fathead minnow (*Pimephales promelas*) toxicity is typically attributed to high ammonia levels in water. High ammonia can originate from water treatment plants, dairy lagoon waste water or other sources.

- Sediment toxicity is measured by the test organism (*Hyalella azteca*) and is generally associated with high pyrethroid levels or metals in sediment.

Several farm inputs have been identified as sources of toxicity or exceedances of State standards. These include the following:

- Chlorpyrifos (Lorsban, Lock-On, Govern) and diazinon are insecticides used in alfalfa, walnuts, almonds and other crops. These products are soluble in water and break down slowly, and as a result can easily be transported from a treated field in either irrigation water, storm water runoff, or by spray drift from an application near water.

- Pyrethroids and metals have the characteristic of binding to soil particles washed by irrigation drainage or storm water from a treated field, and accumulate in stream sediments to cause sediment toxicity to the test organism. Pesticides or metals from urban areas can also reach waterways and contribute to sediment toxicity.

- Copper is used as a fungicide on grapes, tree crops and vegetables, is added to some irrigation canals for algae control and has other urban and industrial sources. Potential pathways to water from agricultural uses could be spray drift into waterways or storm or irrigation drainage runoff from fields treated with copper.

- High levels of ammonia and nitrate/nitrite have several potential sources originating from irrigated agriculture: runoff from irrigated pasture, irrigation or storm runoff after fertilizer applications and drainage from confined animal facilities.

- High bacteria (*E. coli*) levels in waterways can originate from manure runoff from pasture irrigated crop land, wildlife, leaking septic systems and other sources. ≈

## Recent Subwatershed Water Test Results

This year water monitoring was conducted at two test sites, Coon Creek on Brewer and Striplin Roads. Coon Creek at Striplin was only monitored for field parameters (dissolved oxygen and pH) and *E. coli*. *E. coli* standards were exceeded twice in 2007. Coon Creek at Brewer was monitored for multiple parameters and showed two exceedances of *E. coli*, one copper exceedance and one toxicity exceedance of *Selenastrum*.

Additional analysis is being conducted to identify the source of the copper exceedance. Although the source is unknown at this time, South Sutter Water District, Nevada Irrigation District, and the California Rice Commission were notified. ≈

## Contact Information

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