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## Letter from the President

*By Tom Aguilar*

**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.

Welcome to our 6<sup>th</sup> year of California state required water monitoring for the agriculture industry in Placer, Nevada, South Sutter and N. Sacramento counties. Over the years our membership has declined because some people think they should not have to pay for water testing. In fact the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board (Reg. Wtr. Bd.) believes only 53% of farmers and ranchers in Placer, No. Sacramento, So. Sutter, and Nevada counties are participating in this program. Our current membership is 631. This means there is approximately another 630 not paying their fair share for state required agricultural water testing.

Currently, we owe \$27,724 due last June. The Sacramento Valley Water Quality Coalition (SVWQC) and the Reg. Wtr. Bd. urge us to 'restructure' (raise) our fees. Your Board of Directors and I flatly refuse to do so. This is our plan:

- \* Pressure/Work with Reg. Wtr. Bd. to identify and contact those farmers and ranchers who have never joined PNSSNS but are required to do so.

- \* Pursue a 'low-risk waiver' for PNSSNS. Our waters have tested fairly clean since the beginning of this program. We want some sort of waiver that will decrease our costs substantially. For example, test our waters once every 3 to 5 years vs. testing every month.

Although sampling frequency increased in 2009, the cost is expected to lower by about 9% due to reduced testing for legacy pesticides (DDT, DDE), rice pesticides, and two year hiatus on metals, and toxicity testing. Let's face it, the PNSSNS Subwatershed Group is an organization that no one wants to belong to, no one wants to volunteer for, and no one wants to manage. Yet to protect ourselves, we must stand up to this challenge or see our costs sky-rocket from dwindling membership or by pressure from "agriculture unfriendly" groups that currently lobby for a state run program with much more stringent regulations and associated costs.

**Mark your calendars** to attend our annual member meeting on Wednesday, Feb 10, 2010 at the PCWA at 7:00 p.m. We need your input.

I extend a special thank you to Linda Watanabe for coordinating the 'field tour' of our water monitoring sites for the Reg. Wtr. Bd. (see page 3). I also thank Bonnie Ferreira and Elaine Correia for supplying the wonderful picnic lunch which we ate in the shade of 150 year old mandarin trees at Mandarin Hill Orchards in Penryn. Lastly, I must thank Jan Blake for photographing the entire adventure. See more photos on our website.

Based on data gleaned from the surveys in last year's renewal packets, we believe many of our members qualify for the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service cost-share programs (see page 2). We encourage you to consider this funding option. We also thank the Placer County Resource Conservation District for funding this newsletter.≈

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## Cost-Share Funds Available to PNSSNS Members

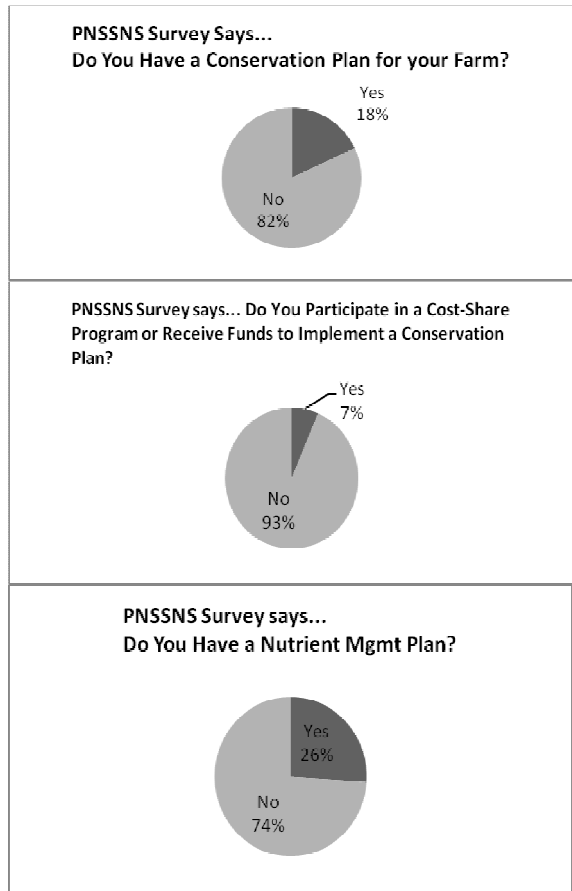
Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has a unique cost-share program, known as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program. EQIP provides financial incentives to farmers, ranchers and timberland owners that apply approved conservation practices on their properties. NRCS helps to defray the costs by 50-75%. In the past several years NRCS distributed \$2.6 million to landowners in Placer County.

In addition to the cost-share program implemented by the NRCS, in partnership with the Placer County RCD, staff assists private landowners with the application of scientifically sound conservation practices where it counts the most - 'on the ground'.

NRCS and RCD technical staff are available at no cost and can provide advice and assistance on:

- Soil Erosion & Sedimentation
- Range & Pasture Management
- Wildland Fuels Reduction
- Vegetation Treatments
- Water Quality & Ponds
- Hydrology & Watershed Issues
- Forest Health
- Irrigation Systems
- Wildlife Habitat
- Soils Survey Info

Call NRCS (530) 885-6505 x106 or Placer Co. RCD (530) 885-3046 x117. Sutter County members may call the Yuba City NRCS office 530-674-1461. Nevada County members may call the Grass Valley NRCS office 530-272-3417.



### Some Interesting Statistics:

With the goal of pursuing funding for Best Management Practices (BMP) implementations for members, PNSSNS attempted to identify potential projects by distributing a survey in the 2008-09 renewal packets. 306 or 48% of membership filled out and returned it. This survey was adapted from the "El Dorado County Farm Land Self Assessment Workbook." Certain answers flagged "RED" could be counted and formulated into a percentage. If an individual scored 50% or more "RED" questions they are strongly encouraged to get agricultural assistance.

Interestingly, when this scoring formula is applied to all 306 survey respondents, the overall score was only 31%. Additionally, 72% do not use any pesticides on their crops. Approximately a third of PNSSNS irrigated acreage is pasture/grazing where pesticides are generally not used. Over half of respondents take several steps to safeguard ground and surface water from contamination by protecting fertilizer or pesticide sites. These include controlling the drift by managing the timing of application, using weather data to plan spraying activities, and using the lowest pesticide effective rate possible.

It's no wonder that after 6 years of water monitoring, the PNSSNS Subwatershed waters continue to be regarded as relatively clean with none of the problems associated with the Central Valley. For more info on our 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter 2009 test results, see insert.

### 2009 – 2010 Fee Schedule

Annual Dues = \$55.00  
After Dec. 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**

## PNSSNS Water Test Sites Toured

On July 16<sup>th</sup>, PNSSNS conducted a field tour for new Reg. Wtr. Bd. Environmental Scientists, Susan Fregien and Paul Hann. Others attending included Bruce Houdesheldt, SVWQC; Josh Huntsinger, Placer Co. Deputy Ag. Comm.; Steve Scheer, Sutter Co. Deputy Ag. Comm.; Jeff Pylman, Nevada Co. Ag. Comm.; Lesa Osterholm and Jan Blake, Nevada Co. Resource Conservation District; PNSSNS Board Members Tom Aguilar, Ed Sills, Frank Correia and Bonnie Ferreira; Elaine Correia and Linda Watanabe. Each of the ten subwatersheds in the SVWQC were asked to present a field tour to educate the Reg. Wtr. Bd. staff on the diversity of agriculture and issues peculiar to each subwatershed. With information garnered from these visits, Susan is now writing the Coalition Specific Monitoring Reporting Program Plan to be approved and effective January 1, 2010.

Of the total 442,161 drainage acres, 73,682 are irrigated. In 2008-09, PNSSNS members accounted for 47% of irrigated acres. The group met at Frank Correia's Sutter County cattle ranch where he conducted a driving tour of his Irrigated Pasture Water Management system. Then Bruce Houdesheldt drove a full van to the first test site on Coon Creek at Striplin Road in Sutter County. Walking out onto a small bridge that crossed over the creek, the group viewed a sad place where foam floated on barely moving water. In 2005 test results indicated exceedances in chlorpyrifos, a pesticide found in Lorsban and



**Field Tour:** Frank Correia (center) explains the workings of his Irrigated Pasture Water Management system as Ed Sills, Josh Huntsinger, Bruce Houdesheldt, Bonnie Ferreira, Tom Aguilar, and Susan Freigen look on.

Dursban. This area appeared to carry mostly runoff from the surrounding rice and grain fields. It did not represent upper Coon Creek so Brewer Rd. further upstream (Placer Co.) was added as a test site in 2007. Thanks to Bonnie Ferreira or the group might still be driving around lost. Again, everyone walked onto a bridge at Brewer Rd. overlooking a much wider point in the creek. The flowing water looked refreshing, however it was over 100° in the shade and everyone was wilting in the hot sun. Quickly they made their way to the DLX location and then back into the air-conditioned van to see the walnuts, orchards and pasturelands change from flatlands to hills as they headed east towards Nevada County. Although this subwatershed terrain is diverse, each of these test sites are strategic in that they represent similar crops and agricultural practices that affect water flowing from the four counties: Placer, Nevada, S. Sutter and N. Sacramento into the Sacramento River.~

## Questions from our Members . . .

Answered by Claus Suverkropp, Larry Walker Associates (the water testing guy)

**Q:** In July, I was called regarding my opinion of Coon Creek upstream of the Brewer and DLX test sites. I replied that normally the creek is very low through the summer and is yucky, dirty water. I was asked if I saw any fish in the water. I replied that I did see some carp. What was this all about?

**A:** In June and July, PNSSNS received an exceedance report indicating a low pH of 4.08 at the DLX test site in Coon Creek. Normal healthy pH range is 6.5-8.6. Most fish cannot live in low pH water. Nevada Irrigation District (NID) sampled on June 15<sup>th</sup>, a pH of 7.19, which is a normal average pH, at Deadman's Ravine further upstream. PNSSNS coordinated a separate pH test at the DLX location which indicated a 6.8 pH. Finally, it was determined during sampling that the Larry Walker Associates' pH meter used to measure those exceedances was malfunctioning, in spite of consistently meeting all calibration requirements. As a result, the water testers were able to get the Regional Water Board to agree that all the pH results collected with that meter in June and July would be rejected. This means that pH exceedances reported for Coon Creek in June/July are deleted from the record and require no additional follow-up and will not count towards new Management Plan requirements.~

## Contact Information

### Board of Directors

**President - Tom Aguilar**

Placer County, mandarin grower

**Vice President - Ed Sills**

Sutter County, organic diversified farmer

**Treasurer - Bonnie Ferreira**

Placer County, diversified/cattle rancher

**Secretary - Jim Gates**

Nevada County, organic cattle rancher

**Director - Frank Correia**

Placer County, cattle rancher

**Director - Gerald Bushore**

Nevada County, rancher

**Director - Alan Lauppe**

Sacramento County, diversified farmer

**Sacramento Valley Water Quality Coalition**

Bruce Houdesheldt [BruceH@norcalwater.org](mailto:BruceH@norcalwater.org)

[www.svwqc.org](http://www.svwqc.org)

**Natural Resources Conservation Service**

Placer Co. 530-885-6505 [www.ca.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.ca.nrcs.usda.gov)

Sutter Co. 530-674-1461

**Placer County Resource Conservation District**

530-885-3046 [www.placercountyrccd.org](http://www.placercountyrccd.org)

**Nevada County Resource Conservation District**

530-272-3417 [www.ncrccd.org](http://www.ncrccd.org)

### Agricultural Commissioners

**Placer County -**

Christine Turner [cturner@placer.ca.gov](mailto:cturner@placer.ca.gov)

**Nevada County -**

Jeff Pylman [agdept@co.nevada.ca.us](mailto:agdept@co.nevada.ca.us)

**Sutter County -**

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**Sacramento County -**

Frank Carl [carlf@saccounty.net](mailto:carlf@saccounty.net)

**Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board**

Irrigated Lands Program 916-464-4611

[www.waterboards.ca.gov/centralvalley/water\\_issues/irrigated\\_lands/index.html](http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/centralvalley/water_issues/irrigated_lands/index.html)



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