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Message from the President

By Ed Sills

Our mission is to support our agricultural growers and producers, assisting them with compliance in the Irrigated Lands Regulatory Program through information, education and resources for technical assistance to ensure good water quality throughout the watershed.

The PNSSNS Subwatershed Group is one of thirteen subwatersheds in the northern Sacramento Valley Water Quality Coalition under the Waste Discharge Order as required by the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board. Our diverse membership represents both large and small farmers and ranchers including organic growers. The crops represented include pastures/ livestock, orchards, row crops, vines and managed wetlands. Our members continue to work diligently to protect our clean waters and keep our lands healthy.

Greetings to all and Happy New Year!

First of all, I would like to extend a welcome to our new members and thank you for your diligence in completing all the required paperwork as part of your membership. Most importantly, I want to thank all of our growers and producers for their dedication to protecting our waters through responsible farming practices and the safe use of fertilizers and pesticides.

A lot has changed under the Irrigated Lands Regulatory Program (ILRP) since 2003 when we were first required to address potential agricultural discharges. In 2014, a new Waste Discharge Order was adopted by the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board and largely went into effect in 2015. This required every member to complete a Notice of Confirmation (NOC) and a Farm Evaluation Practices (FEP) Survey form and submit to PNSSNS along with their membership dues. The results of the surveys were required to be reported to the regional water board yet only identified by the larger Township and Range location, thereby protecting individual landowner information. If you have not completed this information, PNSSNS is not allowed to process your membership so please get the forms in if you haven't done so yet.

I also want to extend a big thank you to our staff and the PNSSNS Board of Directors. Your board members volunteer and work hard to attend meetings and work on your behalf. All the new requirements have increased staff time considerably due to increased tracking and reporting, developing new databases and keeping our members in compliance. After the membership renewal time, PNSSNS is down to one almost full time employee who has increased responsibilities of tracking new regulations and providing strong advocacy for our members. PNSSNS has kept our costs to an absolute minimum but the increased regulations costs all of us more.

PNSSNS submitted a Reduced Monitoring Plan June 2015 to get some regulatory relief based on our good water quality monitoring results and good farming practices yet have not received a final response from the regional water board. We hope to achieve that status soon.

Mark your calendars! Our **Annual Membership Meeting is Wednesday, February 24th 6pm** at the Placer County Water Agency, 144 Ferguson Rd in Auburn. Come for information, great speakers and refreshments.

After four years of the worst California drought in recorded history, the recent rains have been welcome. We wish you all a prosperous and healthy year ahead!

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2014/2015 Water Quality Monitoring Results

PNSSNS has been sampling for water and sediment since 2004 and has had very few exceedances resulting in excellent water quality. Everyone should continue to implement best management practices to keep our waters clean and healthy.

Water quality compliance sampling and testing of Coon Creek waters were again conducted monthly during 2015 (February-September). The established, representative sampling site for PNSSNS' watershed drainage is at Brewer Road crossing and various monitoring at Striplin Road bridge crossing. The unprecedented fourth year of drought in California resulted in very low flows in our creeks and drainages. As a result, there was one exceedance of Dissolved Oxygen and four E. coli bacteria exceedances for the year. It has been argued those were the result of extremely low flows at the sampling sites and/or due to wildlife.

Water sampling was conducted for PNSSNS by Walter Clevenger and tested by Pacific Ecorisk and CalTest Laboratories for an array of potential contaminants and environmental chemistry. The certified labs tested for the presence of E. coli bacteria, pesticide residues (pyrethroid insecticides /EPA625m), turbidity, aquatic toxicity, heavy metals concentrations, etc. In addition to the laboratory tests, our sampling included monitoring and tracking field parameters including pH (a measure of how acidic/basic water is), Dissolved Oxygen levels (adequate dissolved oxygen is necessary to support aquatic forms), Electrical Conductivity (a good indication of the amount of soluble nutrients available for crops to absorb), Water Temperature and fluctuating Water Discharge Volumetric Flows (in Cubic Feet per Second).

As much as we love our wildlife, it has also been argued the E. coli results were most likely attributed to the huge populations of water fowl near our sampling site (see picture below).

Field sampling crews made several naturalist observations of various signs of wildlife utilizing the creek corridor as habitat. "Abundant wildlife use, throughout multiple food-web trophic levels, serves as a good indicator of overall watershed health and its ability to provide for high quality food, cover and habitat resources" says Walter, retired USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service soil scientist. Come to the Annual PNSSNS Meeting on February 24th for more detailed information.



Thousands of snow geese adjacent to water sampling site.
Larry White Photographer, Lincoln, CA

PNSSNS ANNUAL MEETING

February 24th at 6pm

Informative presentations
Refreshments provided

Placer County Water Agency
American River Room
144 Ferguson Rd, Auburn, CA

This photograph is an example of the multiple benefits provided by irrigated agriculture, yet wildlife can be contributors to bacterial contamination.

New and Costly Regulations

The Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board's new Waste Discharge Order R5-2014-030 has several requirements which bring enormous costs and additional labor for compliance. PNSSNS is in its 13th year of compliance with the Irrigated Lands Regulatory Program regardless of our excellent water quality results, low intensity of agriculture and limited pesticide use. The new regulations consist of the following elements:

- 🔧 Continued surface water quality monitoring
- 🔧 Best Management Practices reporting through Farm Evaluation Surveys
- 🔧 Nitrogen Management Plans looking at amounts applied and farm yields
- 🔧 Implementation of sediment and erosion control practices and plans
- 🔧 Groundwater monitoring

Although the members of the PNSSNS Subwatershed Group and their associated farms and ranches only make up 2.6 % of the land use in the watershed, we seem to be responsible for monitoring waters we may have very little association with or control over because of such a mixed land use. In saying that, each and everyone one of us needs to continue to do our best to protect the water quality. Farmers that use nitrogen fertilizers should manage nitrogen applications according to the plant's need. Other best management practices include managing fertilizers including organics, pesticides and how we control and apply our irrigation water. Cover crops and perennial pastures are an excellent way to preserve soil from erosion and filter nutrients. Utilizing irrigation water to crop needs helps save water as well as reduce any potential run off.

Reduced Monitoring Eligibility??

The new Waste Discharge Order allows for a Reduced Monitoring and Management Practices Verification alternative to the current regulations if certain requirements are met and approved by the regional water board's Executive Officer. In 2015, PNSSNS hired Lesa Osterholm to develop the Reduced Monitoring Plan and to request approval from the regional water board. Since then, PNSSNS Board president Ed Sills and Lesa met with the water board staff to discuss the plan and are still waiting for a response.

If **approved**, it would consist of the following for PNSSNS:

- 💧 Low Vulnerability status for surface water
- 💧 Monitor once every 5 years
- 💧 Farm Evaluation Surveys every 5 years
- 💧 Nitrogen Management Plans, annually on site
(versus submitted annually and certified by professional)
- 💧 Sediment and erosion control plans- TBD
- 💧 Education and outreach report annually
- 💧 Membership report annually
- 💧 Pay State Water Board acreage fees annually
- 💧 Annual on-site verifications for 5% acreage annually

PNSSNS is requesting the Reduced Monitoring Program and low vulnerability status to reduce the costs of annual monitoring and reporting, and also to recognize our ranchers and farmers for the good farming and conservation practices they implement.

It is long overdue and would be well deserved.

Stay tuned !!!

WHO IS REQUIRED TO JOIN PNSSNS?

If you irrigate your land, or land you lease or manage, and sell your crop or livestock commercially, then you are required to meet all the requirements yourself or join PNSSNS and comply as a group.

PNSSNS advocates on your behalf and manages the information you provide.

PNSSNS coordinates information, education and outreach to assist you with the latest technological advances and recommended best management practices.

Your cooperation is appreciated and for more information, go to www.cleanwaters.info or call us at 916-645-1774

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NITROGEN MANAGEMENT PLANS

New regulations require members that apply nitrogen fertilizers including organics to complete Nitrogen Management Plans (NMP) annually. This information remains on site with the farmer unless the regional board deems a member in a high vulnerability area. For copies of the NMPs, visit the PNSSNS website at www.cleanwaters.info and download a copy or pick one up at the Annual Meeting.

***** Big change to the nitrogen worksheet*****

Members are required to report the amount of nitrogen applied and the crop yield, but no longer are required to report “nitrogen removed”.

Irrigated Pastures and Managed Wetlands that do not apply nitrogen have been recommended to be exempt from this requirement. For more crop guidelines on fertilizer use, go to www.cdca.ca.gov/go/FREPguide or 916-900-5022



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