

East San Joaquin Water Quality Coalition

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For Immediate Release

Coalition Forms to Fulfill Farm Runoff Regulations

Modesto, CA, November 4, 2003. Ten local farm groups and county agencies have formed a water quality coalition to help local growers comply with new state farm runoff regulations. The East San Joaquin Water Quality Coalition (Coalition) is being organized to represent owners and operators of irrigated crop land in the region, an option provided to agriculture in the Conditional Waiver of Waste Discharge Requirements passed on July 11, 2003 by the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board.

Since late August, a core group of farm representatives has been meeting to set up the organization needed to comply with the new regulations, which give farmers the option of joining a coalition group or filing individual discharger reports with the Regional Water Board. The Coalition filed its first official document with the Board on November 1, naming its key contacts, listing 10 cooperating entities and committing to work with the Water Board on farm-related water quality problems in the region.

“This coalition is the only opportunity local growers have to avoid filing individual farm runoff reports with the Water Board,” says Wayne Zipser, Director of the Stanislaus County Farm Bureau. Zipser co-signed the November 1 Coalition filing along with Parry Klassen, Executive Director of the Coalition for Urban/Rural Environmental Stewardship (CURES). “Our efforts are directed solely toward fulfilling the requirements in the conditional waiver,” says Zipser. “Those requirements are significant over time and will take the support and involvement of a broad cross section of agriculture in this area. We cannot afford to fail.”

The Coalition has scheduled its next Technical Committee meeting for 1:30 pm on November 13 in Modesto at the Stanislaus County Farm Bureau office. The committee will begin dividing

up the workload for developing a monitoring plan for local rivers and drains and a watershed use report. These two reports are due to the Water Board on April 1, 2004. Once approved by the Water Board, the monitoring plan will serve as the basis for developing an operating budget for the Coalition.

“At some point, members of the Coalition will have to decide how we are going to pay for the monitoring requirements of the waiver,” says Klassen, who is also active in a coalition being formed by farm groups in the Sacramento Valley. “The California Farm Bureau estimates that if a farmer decides to file an individual permit with the Water Board, it could cost from \$5000 to \$18,000 per year. The Coalition approach will be far more economical but it will still cost us something to provide coverage for the participations in the Coalition. Our challenge is to minimize those costs while figuring out an equitable way to spread out those costs.”

The Coalition encompasses the lower Stanislaus, Tuolumne and Merced River watersheds and includes the irrigated farm land that falls into Stanislaus and Merced counties. These irrigated farmlands lie south of Stanislaus River, east of the San Joaquin River, north of Chowchilla River up to and including irrigated farmland at the base of the Sierra Nevada Mountains to the east.

Zipser and Klassen are asking that other local agricultural groups and individual farmers step forward to join the coalition. To date the Coalition’s cooperating entities include Ducks Unlimited; East Merced Resource Conservation District; East Stanislaus Resource Conservation District; Merced County Agricultural Commissioner; Merced County Farm Bureau; Natural Resources Conservation Service; Stanislaus County Agricultural Commissioner; Stanislaus County Department of Environmental Resources; Coalition for Urban/Rural Environmental Stewardship; and the Stanislaus County Farm Bureau. More than 300 individual local growers have requested to sign on to the Coalition as well.

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