



CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
REGIONAL WATER QUALITY CONTROL BOARD
CENTRAL VALLEY REGION

WATERSHED MANAGEMENT INITIATIVE CHAPTER



1 December 2002
with revisions as of October 2004

State of California

California Environmental Protection Agency

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Strategies and Current Activities

A basin-wide assessment is needed to determine if current provisions adequately protect the quality of water in the watershed. The Water Quality Control Plan for the Tulare Lake Basin specifies that groundwater monitoring should be undertaken to detect long-term trends and to identify problem areas for further study.

Selenium

Elevated levels of selenium affect more than 100 square miles of groundwater. Parts of the Kern County, Tulare Lake, and Westside basin areas have elevated selenium. The source of selenium is natural but agricultural practices compound the problems.

Shallow groundwater that is drained to allow agricultural production contains salts and selenium. This water is discharged to evaporation basins where the salt and selenium concentrate. Elevated selenium in some cases has caused avian problems.

Strategies and Current Activities

Since 1985, staff has collected samples at evaporation basins to assess trace element concentrations, including selenium. Avian studies conducted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service documented avian impacts associated with elevated selenium levels at some evaporation basins. In 1993, the Board issued waste discharge requirements that required habitat to mitigate for selenium-induced impacts to wildlife. From 1997 to 1999, four requirements were updated incorporating U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service models that determine necessary habitat to mitigate for selenium induced impacts. Three operators are proceeding to address relevant CEQA issues as required by the State Board. Some evaporation basins have closed. Closed basins pose little threat of selenium exposure to wildlife. Annual sampling inspections of seven active operator's 10 evaporation basins will be conducted in each FY. Drainage Operation Plans, quarterly self-monitoring reports, annual self-monitoring reports from each of the seven active operators will be reviewed each FY. Staff conducts an annual meeting on monitoring to solicit input from trustee agencies. In summary, staff is working with seven active evaporation basin operators and six inactive operators. Resources are adequate to conduct the regulatory program. The program consists of updating existing permits, conducting inspections, taking enforcement actions, reviewing closure and environmental reports, and follow-up activities to the San Joaquin Valley Drainage Program.

Oilfields

Most oilfield wastewaters contain salts, oil and grease, and organics that present a threat to the beneficial uses of underlying good quality groundwater. Oil field wastewaters are considered either designated or non-designated wastes. There are more than 800 oilfield waste dischargers, of which 250 are regulated under waste discharge requirements. Many of these requirements are outdated. The program includes issuing permits for existing facilities, revising existing permits, conducting inspections, taking enforcement actions,