State Water Board Approves Central Valley Plan to Address Drinking Water Pollution

Board Takes Action to Reduce Timeline for Stopping Pollution

Sacramento -- On a 3-1 vote today specific to reducing the originally proposed 45-year timeline to stop the pollution to a 35-year timeline, and a 4-0 vote on the entirety of the Amendment, the California State Water Board approved, with direction, the proposed Central Valley Basin Plan Amendment. This Amendment will guide salt and nitrate management in around 40% of the state for decades. The condition of approval, via a resolution, directs the Central Valley Regional Water Board to make significant revisions to the Amendment to better protect communities from unsafe drinking water now and into the future. One of those changes requires dischargers to eventually stop pollution from nitrates. The State Water Board is tasking the Central Valley Regional Board with setting a more aggressive deadline for stopping pollution in the Central Valley; polluting industries will now have up to 35 years to end the ongoing pollution to impacted communities’ drinking water sources.

“We appreciate the State Water Board’s direction that the Regional Board remove of some of the most troubling aspects of CV SALTS, as well as today’s change that reduced the maximum period to end nitrate pollution from 45 to 35 years,” said Michael Claiborne, Senior Attorney with Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability. “However, this time frame still fails to address the urgency of communities and households struggling with nitrate pollution. We expect
the Regional Water Board to require much faster compliance during the implementation of this plan. Central Valley communities depend on it."

“Given that each year of continued pollution means higher human, environmental, and financial costs of cleanup, we are glad that the Board approved a proposal with a reduced timeline,” said Jennifer Clary, Water Program Manager for Clean Water Action.

"We thank the State Water Board and the California Environmental Protection Agency for their leadership in helping to ensure we have a healthy and sustainable Central Valley,” said Debi Ores, senior attorney with the Community Water Center. “While we still have a long way to go to securing safe and affordable drinking water for all residents throughout the Central Valley, requiring that nitrate pollution to our drinking water sources must stop within 35 years is a significant step forward. Looking forward, we intend to both partner with and also hold the State Water Board and Central Valley Regional Board accountable to protecting public health and our groundwater. Finally, we look forward to partnering with the Central Valley Regional Water Board ensure a fair implementation process with meaningful impacted community representation that better mirrors the entirety of the Central Valley community."

Nitrates can be deadly and a regulatory framework is necessary to address this problem. The Basin Plan Amendment is supposed to do just that. The amendment has three goals: provide safe drinking water to communities impacted by nitrate contamination, reduce and ultimately end nitrate pollution, and eventually clean up groundwater basins. The resolution proposed by State Water Board staff thankfully directs removal of some of the most troubling parts of CV-SALTS, and the shortened timeline for stopping pollution is a step in the right direction.

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Leadership Counsel works alongside the most impacted communities to advocate for sound policy and eradicate injustice to secure equal access to opportunity regardless of wealth, race, income and place. We work with community leaders throughout the San Joaquin Valley and Eastern Coachella Valley on such issues as safe affordable drinking water, basic transit services, wastewater services, decent affordable housing, and the right to live free from industrial pollution with infrastructure that supports healthy lifestyles. Through co-powerment, organizing, litigation, policy advocacy, and research, we confront California’s stark inequalities manifest in too many of California's low income communities and communities of color. To reach us, website: Leadershipcounsel.org Twitter: @LCJandA Instagram: leadership_counsel, Facebook: @lcjacalifornia

Community Water Center (CWC) is a nonprofit environmental justice organization based in California’s San Joaquin Valley, with additional offices in Sacramento and Watsonville. CWC’s mission is to act as a catalyst for community-driven water solutions through organizing,
education, and advocacy. CWC’s fundamental goal is to ensure that all communities have access to safe, clean, and affordable water. CWC works in partnership with impacted communities to build strategic grassroots capacity to address water challenges in small, rural, low-income communities and communities of color. For more information, visit CWC’s website at www.communitywatercenter.org and follow us on Twitter at @CWaterC.

Clean Water Action is a national non-profit organization that relies on grassroots education and empowerment to enact policies and programs that protect and restore water quality. Website: https://www.cleanwateraction.org/states/california. Twitter: @cleanh2oca.