

CALIFORNIA REGIONAL WATER QUALITY CONTROL BOARD COLORADO RIVER BASIN REGION

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RESOLUTION R7-2021-0015



I, PAULA RASMUSSEN, Executive Officer, hereby certify that the following is a full, true, and correct copy of the resolution adopted by the California Regional Water Quality Control Board, Colorado River Basin Region, on February 9, 2021.

Original signed by _____

PAULA RASMUSSEN
Executive Officer

CALIFORNIA REGIONAL WATER QUALITY CONTROL BOARD
COLORADO RIVER BASIN REGION

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IDENTIFYING REGIONAL GROUNDWATER BASINS WHERE
SALTS AND/OR NUTRIENTS THREATEN WATER QUALITY

The California Regional Water Quality Control Board, Colorado River Basin Region (Colorado River Basin Water Board) finds that:

1. On May 14, 2009, the State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board) adopted the *Policy for Water Quality Control for Recycled Water* (Recycled Water Policy) through Resolution No. 2009-0011. The Recycled Water Policy has been subsequently amended by Resolution No. 2013-0003 and Resolution No. 2018-0057. The goal of the Recycled Water Policy is to encourage the safe use of recycled water from municipal wastewater sources in a manner that implements state and federal water quality laws and protects public health and the environment.
2. In developing the Recycled Water Policy, the State Water Board recognized that increased use of recycled water, in conjunction with other applications and discharges, may result in salt and nutrient loads to groundwater basins that could result in exceedances of groundwater quality objectives. The Recycled Water Policy requires that salts and nutrients from all sources be managed on a basin-wide or watershed-wide basis in a manner that ensures attainment of water quality objectives and protection of beneficial uses. The Recycled Water Policy recognizes that the most effective way to address salt and nutrient loading is typically through the development of regional or subregional salt and nutrient management plans (SNMPs), rather than imposing requirements solely on individual recycled water projects or other individual sources of salts and nutrients.
3. To support the development of SNMPs in basins where plans are needed and to clarify where SNMPs are not needed, the 2018 amendment to the Recycled Water Policy requires each regional water board to identify the groundwater basins where salts and/or nutrients are a threat to water quality and will need to develop a SNMP to manage salts and nutrients in the long term. The basin evaluation must be completed by April 8, 2021, as well as reviewed and updated every five years.
4. In accordance with the Recycled Water Policy, Colorado River Basin Water Board staff evaluated 52 groundwater basin/subbasins in the region without an existing or developing SNMP to identify basins where salts and/or nutrients are a threat to water quality and will need to develop a SNMP to manage salts and nutrients in the long term. Each basin was evaluated based on the factors listed

in Section 6.1.3 of the Recycled Water Policy. The results of this evaluation are summarized in the Colorado River Basin Regional Groundwater Basin Evaluation Staff Report dated January 2021, which is incorporated herein by reference.

5. Following consideration of each factor identified in the Recycled Water Policy for the 52 groundwater basins/subbasins evaluated, 43 groundwater basins/subbasins were characterized as having no or very low risk to water quality, seven were identified with minor potential risks, and two groundwater subbasins were considered to have potentially substantial risks to groundwater quality.
6. Most of the groundwater basins/subbasins in the Colorado River Basin Region have little or no inhabitants, and therefore minimal or no salt and nutrient producing sources to impact groundwater quality. As such, these basins/subbasins will not need to develop SNMPs. Due to these regional conditions, 43 groundwater basins/subbasins were determined to have no or very low potential risks to water quality.
7. Seven groundwater basins—Chuckwalla Valley, Morongo Valley, West Salton Sea, Yuma Valley, Palo Verde Valley, Palo Verde Mesa, and Needles Valley Groundwater Basins—were determined to have some potential risks to water quality. However, due to basin-specific characteristics such as low population, lack of urban centers, disadvantaged or severely disadvantaged communities, and minimal salt and nutrient producing land uses (many of which are regulated through existing Waste Discharge Requirements [WDRs]), a SNMP may not be the most feasible method to manage salts and nutrients in these basins and will not be required at this time.
8. The evaluation of two groundwater basins/subbasins—the San Gorgonio Pass Subbasin of the Coachella Valley Groundwater Basin and the Borrego Springs Subbasin of the Borrego Valley Groundwater Basin—concluded that potential threats to water quality necessitate the development of SNMPs. Factors considered in making this determination included the use of recycled water in the basin, dependence on groundwater, populated urban centers lacking centralized sewer systems, numerous salt and nutrient producing land use activities, and the presence of hydrologically vulnerable areas.
9. To achieve groundwater sustainability, promote recycled water use, and ensure water quality protection in basins with identified threats to water quality, the State Water Board encourages collaborative work among local water and wastewater entities, SNMP planning groups, the agricultural community, the regional water boards, Integrated Regional Water Management Program (IRWMP) groups, Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSAs) formed under the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA), and other stakeholders to develop these SNMPs.

10. Further, the Colorado River Basin Water Board may accept existing groundwater management plans, such as Groundwater Sustainability Plans (GSPs) developed by GSAs pursuant to SGMA, as functionally equivalent to a SNMP if the existing groundwater management plans sufficiently address the required components of SNMPS identified in Section 6.2.4 of the Recycled Water Policy.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT THE COLORADO RIVER BASIN WATER BOARD:

1. Approves the evaluation pursuant to Section 6.1.3 of the Recycled Water Policy as enumerated in the Colorado River Basin Regional Groundwater Basin Evaluation Staff Report dated January 2021. A summary of the results of the evaluation is found in Appendix A of the Staff Report.
2. Does not require SNMPS be developed for the 43 regional groundwater basins/subbasins identified in Appendix A of the Staff Report that were determined to have no or very low potential risks to water quality.
3. Does not require SNMPS to be developed at this time for the following basins: Chuckwalla Valley, Morongo Valley, West Salton Sea, Yuma Valley, Palo Verde Valley, Palo Verde Mesa, and Needles Valley Groundwater Basins. These basins were determined to have minimal potential risks to groundwater quality from salts and nutrients, and the Colorado River Basin Water Board will reevaluate the need to develop a SNMP in these basins in five years.
4. Finds a significant risk to groundwater quality from salts and nutrients in the San Gorgonio Pass Subbasin of the Coachella Valley Groundwater Basin and the Borrego Springs Subbasin of the Borrego Valley Groundwater Basin. Therefore, salt and nutrient management shall be implemented for these subbasins in the form of either a SNMP or appropriate SNMP alternative.
5. Will require relevant stakeholders to immediately begin evaluating existing San Gorgonio Pass Subbasin and Borrego Springs Subbasin groundwater management plans, such as GSPs developed by GSAs pursuant to SGMA, to determine if they are functionally equivalent to a SNMP and if the existing groundwater management plans will sufficiently address the required components of SNMPS identified in Section 6.2.4 of the Recycled Water Policy.