



EXECUTIVE OFFICER'S REPORT
January 1, 2024 – January 31, 2024

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1. Personnel Report – *Sandra Lopez*

New Hires

- Mark Allen, Engineering Geologist, Department of Defense (DOD) Unit, Victorville. This position will oversee site investigation and cleanup at DOD and private sites in the South Lahontan area. This position will also respond to spills and complaints, as necessary.

Vacancies

- Environmental Scientist, Planning & Assessment Unit. The position is advertised with placement in either the South Lake Tahoe or Victorville office. This position will assess water quality data to help develop the 303(d) Impaired Waters List, work to restore impaired waters, and work on Basin Planning priorities. The position requires work based in science, policy, and public process.
- Senior Water Resource Control Engineer, as the Supervisor overseeing the Forestry/Dredge and Fill Unit (FDF). The position is advertised with placement in the South Lake Tahoe office. This position will manage a team of two Environmental Scientists, two Engineering Geologists, a Water Resource Control Engineer, and a Scientific Aid. The FDF is responsible for implementing the Forestry Activities Program and the Dredge and Fill Program throughout the Lahontan region. The position requires work based in science, policy, and public process.
- Water Resource Control Engineering, Wastewater & Agricultural Unit, Victorville. This position will provide regulatory oversight of projects involving discharges to groundwater or surface waters and projects intended to restore and/or enhance water quality in the Waste Discharge Requirements, National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System, and Site Cleanup Programs. The individual will conduct field

inspections related to permit compliance, spills, and complaints. Informal and formal enforcement actions such as Notice of Violations, Cleanup and Abatement Orders, Cease and Desist Orders, and Administrative Civil Liability Complaints will also be prepared by the staff if the discharger is out of compliance with their permit.

Departures

- Kathleen Bindl, Environmental Scientist, Cannabis Unit, South Lake Tahoe

2. Standing Item - Grazing Status, 2024 Update – *Mo Loden*

This Executive Officer’s report is a standing item, prepared annually to present an update on projects addressing water quality impacts associated with grazing operations in the Lahontan Region. Grazing activities can adversely impact water quality and impair beneficial uses by contributing sediment, nutrients, and pathogens. Grazed lands comprise 76% of the 407,802 agricultural acres in the Lahontan Region. The following updates pertain to efforts underway in Bridgeport Valley, Eagle Lake, Bishop Creek, and West Fork Carson River. These efforts, each in a different stage of development or implementation, utilize different strategies to address grazing-related impacts, as seen in Table 2.1 below.

Grazing Community (County)	Strategy Approach
Bridgeport Valley (Mono County)	Regulatory: General Conditional Waiver of Waste Discharge Requirement R6-2023-0006
Eagle Lake (Lassen County)	Investigative: 13267 Letters for USFS and private lands adjacent to Eagle Lake
Bishop Creek (Inyo County)	Non-regulatory: Bishop Creek Vision Plan
West Fork Carson (Alpine County)	Non-regulatory: West Fork Carson River Vision Plan

Table 2.1: Region 6 Grazing Summary

Bridgeport Valley: The Bridgeport Grazing Waiver aims to track and improve water quality impacts caused by private grazing operations within Bridgeport Valley. In 2007, the Lahontan Water Board adopted the first Waiver of Waste Discharge Requirements (Waiver) for the Bridgeport Valley and has since renewed it in 2012, 2017, and 2023. The Water Board adopted the 2023 Waiver on March 1, 2023, expiring on March 1,

2028. All of the enrollees are currently in compliance with the 2023 Waiver requirements.

The monitoring plan in this Waiver was refined to remove fecal monitoring and exclusively rely on *E. coli* data. Per the 2023 Waiver, water quality data collections were required in 2023 and again in 2026 from June through September, which is the timeframe when grazing and field irrigation most likely overlap. Sampling years were planned strategically so the 2023 data would provide a baseline for bacteria levels near the beginning of the 2023 Waiver's term and the 2026 data would gauge progress toward the interim goal of 150 colony-forming units (cfu) per 100 milliliters (ml), near the end of the Waiver term.

Sampling frequency for the 2023 Waiver was increased to allow for the calculation of geomeans, which provide a more representational value for bacteria. Bacteria is a highly variable environmental parameter whose concentrations can change rapidly in time and space. Geomeans are a type of average that can help smooth data as it indicates the central tendency of a set of numbers. In 2023, all three end-of-valley compliance sites met the interim goal of 150 from June to August. Bridgeport Ranchers Organization (BRO) Site 10, Robinson Creek, remained under the interim threshold throughout the season until the last sampling date on Oct 4. Progress has been made in the Bridgeport Valley; however, all subbasins may benefit from additional attention to best management practices (BMPs) to meet and maintain the current interim goal of 150 cfu/100 ml and, eventually, meet the State Water Board's *E. coli* objective of 100 cfu/100 ml.

Site inspections were conducted in June and November 2023 at three ranches. On June 6, Water Board staff visited the Wood Family Livestock and Hunewill ranches. The Wood Family Ranch operator led Water Board staff on a tour that highlighted a variety of BMPs, such as exclusion fencing along 100% of the natural streams within the ranch boundary (does not include irrigation ditches), two off-water drinking systems with a solar-powered well, and rotational grazing implementations. The rotational grazing conversations explained how the ranch utilizes the riparian pasture located along Robinson Creek less intensely than the pastures not adjacent to streams (see Figure 2.1); however, staff noted sparse riparian vegetation within the stream corridor. The Hunewill Ranch owner showed staff a headgate that also serves as a hardened crossing. Both ranchers expressed

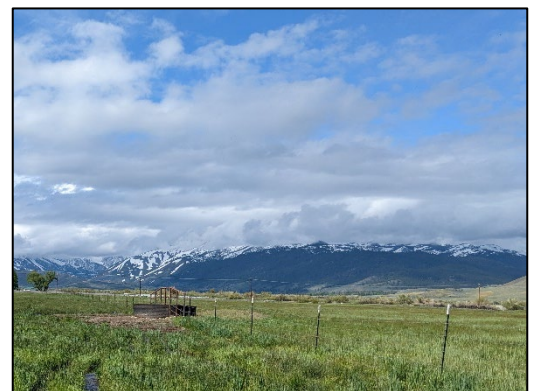


Figure 2.1: Based on Wood Family Livestock's June 2023 field conditions, the riparian pasture (on the right) appears to have more vegetation at the water tank, indicating less use.

their challenges with the aftermath of the historic 2022-23 winter and, consequently, too much water. The ranchers reported that water flows and heavy snow made for a challenging season that compromised some BMPs and required ranch repairs.

Staff toured the Lacey Livestock ranch on November 7, 2023, and observed water control structures and inadequate bank stabilization methods on the East Fork Walker River. Lacey Livestock landowner indicated they are working with Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to assess the feasibility of adding off-water drinking water systems as well as other BMPs within the East Fork Walker River basin.

Eagle Lake: In 2019, the Lahontan Water Board sent Water Code Section 13267 letters to owners of grazed lands adjacent to Eagle Lake. Since then, lakefront property managers and owners who maintain livestock on their land are required to submit annual grazing plans to the Water Board by May 15, before the start of grazing operations each year. For the fourth year, the Water Board has received adequate plans.

Federal land managers submit Annual Operation Instructions for each allotment, while private property owners submit Rangeland Water Quality Management Plans each season. The grazing management plans should demonstrate an overall reduction of animal waste to Eagle Lake's shore through management techniques. For 2023, both federal and private landowners covered under the investigative order submitted compliant plans. More information about ranch operations, water quality monitoring, and restoration efforts within the Eagle Lake watershed can be viewed in the 2024 addition of the Eagle Lake Newsletter. To receive this annual publication, subscribe to the Eagle Lake Watershed Livestock Grazing and Water Quality Issues Topic [here](#).

Vision Plans: [Vision Plans](#) are water quality restoration plans developed and implemented to resolve water quality impairments in lieu of the development and implementation of a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL), which may include regulatory actions (i.e. permits) to compel compliance with water quality objectives, Implementation of a Vision Plan does not remove the requirement to complete a TMDL unless water quality improvements support the removal of the waterbody – or waterbody segments - from the 303(d) list, in this case being either Bishop Creek or the West Fork Carson River.



Figure 2.2: Staff viewed two upland grazing water troughs that draw cattle away from the Eagle Lake shoreline at Five Dot Ranch.

Bishop Creek: In 2010, the Bishop Paiute Tribe communicated to Water Board staff that bacteria levels in Bishop Creek had been detected above thresholds set to protect human health. That notification prompted years of data collection and evaluation, watershed assessment, stakeholder engagement, and outreach that ultimately lead to development and adoption of the Bishop Creek Vision Plan (BCVP) at the September 2022 Board hearing. The BCVP was the first Vision Plan developed in the Lahontan Region.

Since adoption, the Plan has transitioned to the implementation phase, which includes four key strategies to reduce bacteria inputs associated with controllable sources from commercial cattle operations, transient/dispersed camping, small-scale hobby ranching, and residential uses (pets, residential water).

Available data shows that ruminant fecal pollution is the predominant source of fecal material in Bishop Creek, and given cattle grazing is one of the largest land uses in the project area, staff have prioritized work toward implementation efforts within this source category. Cattle grazed properties in the BCVP have been divided into Tier 1 (T1) and Tier 2 (T2). T1 properties are directly adjacent and hydrologically connected to Bishop Creek. T2 properties are not directly adjacent to Bishop Creek but share some form of hydrological connection because of irrigation practices. All Tier 1 & 2 ranchers lease grazing allotments on land owned by Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP).

Throughout 2023, for the implementation phase of the BCVP, staff interacted with T1/T2 ranchers & LADWP through a series of virtual meetings, in-person meetings, and ranch tours. Water Board staff were accompanied by representatives from the University of California Cooperative Extension, NRCS, and LADWP for the ranch tours.

Thus far, three out of five T1 ranches are on track with milestones prescribed in the BCVP in that ranchers have successfully submitted their RWQPs and their annual BMP Implementation Reports. Staff continue to work with the two delinquent ranchers.

The success of the BCVP will be determined, in part, through a robust water quality monitoring program conducted and funded by LADWP. LADWP submitted the 2023 *E. coli* data associated with the BCVP, and staff are working on water quality data analyses with an anticipated stakeholder meeting to discuss trends with ranchers, LADWP, and the Bishop Paiute Tribe in March.

West Fork Carson River: The [West Fork Carson River Vision Plan \(WFCRVP\)](#) is the second Vision Plan to be developed in the region. A resolution supporting implementation of the WFCRVP was adopted at the October 2023 Board hearing and USEPA accepted the plan in December 2023. Like the BCVP, the WFCRVP is an

advanced restoration plan that outlines present and future actions that can be taken to restore and protect water quality in the West Fork Carson River. Starting near Woodfords, several private grazing operations within the WFCRVP project area are located along the river. The WFCRVP asks ranchers in the watershed to develop and implement Ranch Water Quality Plans by the end of 2025.

In mid-October, staff attended a Carson Water Subconservancy District-led tour of two ranches within the WFCVP project area: the Woollystar Ranch and Ace Hereford Ranch. The ranch operators provided an overview of each ranch's BMPs (i.e. desired stubble height & native species, rotational grazing, and rest periods). Furthermore, Ace Hereford Ranch showcased a wetland area established to filter rangeland runoff and a corral area adjacent to the river now converted into a vegetative buffer area.

Regional Grazing Strategy

In 2015, the State Water Board discontinued its efforts toward developing a statewide grazing strategy and directed Water Board staff to work with stakeholders on a regional level for best approaches to addressing water quality impacts from grazing. Since then, Lahontan Region staff have worked to develop a more holistic approach for our region. However, as noted from the above content, current efforts are being implemented as priorities are identified. Work toward the development of the Regional Grazing Strategy has been postponed consistent with recommendations realized during work prioritization and planning efforts. Additionally, staff capacity is limited with the two approved Vision Plans which require significant staff involvement to shepherd implementation of non-regulatory approaches toward water quality improvement.

As resources allow, staff plan to make progress on developing an inventory and map of private and federal grazing operations within the region; such tools will greatly assist with the initial steps of developing a future regional strategy,

State Water Board Efforts

Grazing Guidance: The State Water Board prepared a statewide grazing guidance document that will update the [1995 California Rangeland Water Quality Management Plan](#). The guidance document is intended to promote effective grazing management practices through a non-regulatory approach focused on education and outreach. The document previously referred to as the "Statewide Grazing Guidance" has been retitled "Managing Water Quality on Grazed Lands" to more clearly communicate that it is a voluntary guidance document. Water Board staff have been actively involved in the development of the State Water Board's draft document and plan to provide a second review and comment on the draft in 2024.

Informational Item: At the July 18, 2023 Board Meeting, the State Water Board presented an [informational item](#) on the status of livestock grazing management in California since 2015, the year in which statewide grazing efforts were discontinued and regions were directed to pursue more region specific approaches (see Regional Grazing Strategy above). The presentation provided summaries on grazing in CA, the history of CA grazing regulation, recent State Water Board efforts, emerging trends in grazing regulation, and specific Regional Water Board approaches to regulating grazing and comparisons between the approaches.

Staying Current: Staff attended the following events to enhance the Region's knowledge and experiences in managing grazing impacts on water quality.

A 'Proper Functioning Condition (PFC) Assessment for Integrated Riparian Management' training was sponsored by the Central Coast Rangelands Coalition in Alturas from July 18 to 21, 2023. The event provided a combination of classroom days and in-the-field training where staff learned how to apply the PFC [Lentic](#) & [Lotic](#) assessments in real-life grazing-related circumstances.

As often as possible, Water Board staff routinely participate in the Range Management Advisory Committee (RMAC) meetings, occurring approximately every two months. The RMAC was statutorily created by Section 741 of the Public Resources Code of the State of California to advise the Board of Forestry and Fire Protection, the Resources Agency, the California Environmental Protection Agency, and the California Department of Food and Agriculture on rangeland resource issues. The RMAC advises on matters affecting the conservation, management, and use of grassland, oak woodland/savannah, brushland, and other grazed ecosystems in the State. As mandated by Section 741, Water Board staff shall notify and consult on rangeland resource issues under consideration.