



Enforcement News

Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board

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Central Valley Water Board Imposes \$297,400 Penalty for Water Quality Violations Associated with Marijuana Cultivation

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SACRAMENTO – The Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board has imposed \$297,400 in liability against property owner Christopher Cordes and contractor Eddie Axner Construction, Inc., for large-scale grading activities that resulted in actual and potential harm to surface waters in the Ono area of Shasta County.

The civil liability is the first penalty action taken by a multi-agency Cannabis Pilot Project formed specifically to address the adverse environmental impacts caused by marijuana cultivation. The project includes staff from the State and Regional Water Boards and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. Assistance in this case was also provided by the Shasta County Department of Resource Management.

The grading activities resulted in unlawful discharges of sediment to pristine surface waters that provide habitat to aquatic organisms that are an important food source for fish, amphibians, birds and other wildlife. The contractor conducted the grading operations on a portion of the property without the necessary permits and was held jointly liable for up to \$139,700 of the total penalty imposed.

Cordes purchased and developed property in the Ono area for the purpose of growing marijuana. The development involved the unpermitted grading and terracing of approximately 3.8 acres and 1.5 miles of roads that resulted in numerous discharges of highly erodible sediment and the unauthorized placement of fill into tributaries of North Fork of Cottonwood Creek in violation of the Clean Water Act and the California Porter-Cologne Water Quality Control Act.



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“The failure of Mr. Cordes and the contractor involved in this matter to obtain the necessary permits prior to developing the property for marijuana cultivation resulted in severe impacts to water quality. The land grading activities could have been completed in a manner that would have avoided violations to our water quality protection laws and regulations,” said Clint Snyder, Assistant Executive Officer for the Central Valley Water Board. “The penalty adopted by the Board reflects the egregious nature of these violations and the importance of holding all involved parties accountable.”

Due to significant and potential long-term sediment discharges at the site, both parties are also under a Clean Up and Abatement Order issued on March 20, 2015 to remediate ongoing problems with the property. The order requires the dischargers to 1) obtain all necessary permits, 2) prepare an Interim Erosion and Sediment Control Plan, 3) prepare a Restoration, Mitigation, and Monitoring Plan, and 4) conduct long term monitoring.

For more information on the activities of the Water Board’s enforcement efforts relative to cannabis cultivation, please visit the State Water Resources Control Board, Office of Enforcement resources page [here](#).

The Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board is a California state agency responsible for the preservation and enhancement of the quality of California’s water resources. For more information, visit: <http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/centralvalley/>.

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