

STATE OF CALIFORNIA  
REGIONAL WATER QUALITY CONTROL BOARD  
SAN FRANCISCO BAY REGION

STAFF SUMMARY REPORT: Nicole Fairley  
MEETING DATE: May 11, 2022

**ITEM: 5.B**

**Sonoma Resource Conservation District, Petaluma River and Sonoma Creek Levee Maintenance Program, Sonoma County - Issuance of Waste Discharge Requirements and Water Quality Certification**

**DISCUSSION**

The attached Tentative Order (Appendix A) would issue waste discharge requirements and water quality certification for the Petaluma River and Sonoma Creek Levee Maintenance Program (Program), administered by the Sonoma Resource Conservation District (SRCD) in Sonoma County. The Tentative Order includes a Notice of Intent form (Appendix B) that the SRCD will submit to enroll individual maintenance projects under this Order provided they occur in the Program's jurisdiction and comply with the requirements of the Program's Petaluma River and Sonoma Creek Levee Maintenance Manual (Appendix C) and this Order.

The Program was established by SRCD in 1980 when the first permit was issued and SRCD has re-applied for permit coverage every 5 years since then. The Program covers routine and emergency levee maintenance activities in two Sonoma County watersheds within the Water Board's jurisdiction, the Petaluma River watershed south of Lakeville Highway/Highway 116 and the Sonoma Creek watershed south of Highway 121. Both drain to San Pablo Bay. During the late 1800s, farmers constructed levees to "reclaim" tidelands bordering San Pablo Bay for agricultural use. Ongoing levee maintenance is required to prevent agricultural operations, infrastructure, and important habitat present within these lands from flooding. Landowners within the Program area cumulatively maintain up to 53 miles of levees adjacent to diked wetlands, tidal marsh, tidal sloughs, streams, and associated riparian areas, and enroll in the Program on a voluntary basis.

The Tentative Order would authorize implementation of the Program for routine and emergency levee maintenance activities proposed by participating landowners on a voluntary basis. Levee maintenance and emergency levee repair activities will be conducted pursuant to the Petaluma River and Sonoma Creek Levee Maintenance Manual (Manual). The Manual describes the methods and protocols for conducting levee maintenance and emergency repair activities, which involves sediment excavation from adjacent channels and/or wetlands for placement on the levee crown to provide adequate flood protection for local agricultural operations, infrastructure, and important habitats in the Sonoma Creek and Petaluma River tidelands, while ensuring quality conservation practices are incorporated to protect aquatic ecosystems and their associated functions.

While the Manual ensures that levee maintenance and emergency repair activities minimize potential impacts to waters of the State, some temporal loss in functions will be unavoidable. The Program implemented the Tolay Creek Restoration Project, located south of Highway 121/37 intersection in southern Sonoma County, which successfully created 71 acres of wetlands in 1998 to mitigate Program impacts. The Water Board and other involved agencies, including the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, agreed that the Tolay Creek Restoration Project will compensate for temporary impacts associated with levee maintenance activities in perpetuity. The Tentative Order will improve efficiency for permitting and implementing ongoing maintenance and emergency repair activities by reducing the number of separate permits needed.

The Tentative Order was circulated for a 30-day public comment period ending on April 15, 2022. We received no comments on the Tentative Order.

**APPENDICES:**

- A. Tentative Order
- B. Notice of Intent (NOI)

**Available on FTP Site:\*\*\***

- C. Order Att. A: Petaluma River and Sonoma Creek Levee Maintenance Manual

**\*\*\*To access this appendix on the FTP, go to: <https://ftp.waterboards.ca.gov/>  
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