



STATE OF CALIFORNIA

George Deukmejian, Governor STATE WATER RESOURCES CONTROL BOARD

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STATE OF CALIFORNIA STATE WATER RESOURCES CONTROL BOARD

In the Matter of Application 27859 BLUE MOUNTAIN VINEYARD, INC.,

Applicant.

MONTEREY COUNTY FLOOD CONTROL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT.

Protestant.

DECISION: 1614

SOURCES: Four Unnamed Streams Tributary to Stonewall Canyon thence Salinas River

COUNTY: Monterey

DECISION APPROVING APPLICATION 27859

BY THE BOARD:

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Blue Mountain Vineyard, Inc. having filed Application 27859 for a permit to appropriate water; a protest having been filed; a field investigation having been conducted on February 29, 1984 in accordance with Water Code Section 1345 et seq.; a staff analysis, dated September 25, 1984, having been prepared; a request for a hearing based upon unresolved issues having been received from the protestant; a public hearing having been held on July 11, 1985; the applicant and protestant having appeared and the evidence having been duly considered, the Board finds as follows:

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2.0 SUBSTANCE OF APPLICATION

Application 27859 was filed on September 2, 1983. The application is for a permit to appropriate 110 acre-feet per annum (afa) by storage from November 1 through May 31 from four unnamed tributaries of Stonewall Canyon, a tributary of the Salinas River. The water is sought primarily for the beneficial use of irrigation and incidentally for stockwatering. Points of diversion, as depicted on Figure 1, will be located within the: (1) SW1/4 of Section 9, T17S, R7E, MDB&M; (2) SE1/4 of SE1/4 of Section 8, T17S, R7E, MDB&M; and (3) SE1/4 of SW1/4 of Section 9, T17S, R7E, MDB&M.

3.0 PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The project, as described in Application 27859, would consist of one offstream and five onstream storage reservoirs on four unnamed tributaries of Stonewall Canyon. The reservoirs would range in size from 10 to 30 acre-feet (af) with a combined capacity of 110 af. The water would be used primarily for the drip irrigation of 190 acres of new vineyard. Water collected to storage would be supplemented with ground water. The applicant currently has two existing wells, each yielding approximately 35 to 40 gallons per minute, and plans to construct ten additional wells.

The project is located approximately two miles north and five miles east of Soledad, just west of the Pinnacles National Monument, in the upper part of the Stonewall Canyon watershed. The Stonewall Canyon watershed is situated in the Gabilan Range on the east side of the Salinas Valley.

4.0 PROTESTANT

The application was protested by the Monterey County Flood Control and Water Conservation District (District). The District was formed in 1947 for the primary purposes of flood control and water conservation. See Water Code App. Sections 52-1 et seq. The boundaries of the District include all of the lands within Monterey County. The board of directors of the district is the County Board of Supervisors.

The District protested Application 27859 on the grounds that the proposed appropriation would not best conserve the public interest and would have an adverse environmental impact. In support of the protest the District alleged that the proposed appropriation would result in the loss of recharge to the forebay area of the Salinas groundwater basin, which is currently in a state of overdraft. The District also protested the application on the basis of injury to their prior vested rights under permitted Applications 13225 and 16761 and Licensed Application 16124. The two latter rights authorize the diversion of water from San Antonio and Nacimiento Rivers for storage in San Antonio and Nacimiento Reservoirs, respectively. Water released from the reservoirs flows to the Salinas River where it percolates into the Salinas Valley groundwater basin and is available for later use by overlying property owners. The District contended that the proposed appropriation would result in a loss of natural accretions to the groundwater basin and that this loss would have to be made up by releases of stored water from San Antonio and Nacimiento Reservoirs.

5.0 FIELD INVESTIGATION / ANALYSIS / HEARING REQUEST

Application 27859 is a minor application. See id. Sections 1345 et seq. A field investigation was conducted on February 29, 1984 in accordance with procedures for minor protested applications. A staff analysis, dated September 25, 1984, was subsequently prepared. The analysis concluded that:

- Sufficient unappropriated water was available for the applicant's proposed project and that the appropriation would be for a beneficial use of water;
- Information gained as a result of the investigation did not substantiate the District's contention that applicant's project would have a deleterious effect on Salinas Valley groundwater; and
- Application 27859 should be approved and a permit issued subject to certain conditions.

After receipt of the staff analysis, the District requested a hearing, pursuant to Water Code Section 1347, to consider the following issues:

- The effect that the appropriation would have on the Salinas Valley groundwater basin and the District's vested rights; and
- The potential cumulative effect on the groundwater basin if all suitable tributary areas are developed and water is appropriated for those areas.

6.0 UNRESOLVED ISSUES

The District's request for a hearing raised the issue of the availability of unappropriated water. A hearing was, therefore, held on July 11, 1985, to consider whether unappropriated water is available in the amount and season requested under Application 27859 without adversely impacting the District's prior vested rights. At the hearing the District also presented evidence regarding the cumulative impacts of potential development of other areas on recharge of the groundwater basin.

7.0 APPLICABLE LAW

As a prerequisite to issuance of a permit, the Board must find that unappropriated water is available to supply the applicant. Id. Section 1375. Unappropriated water includes water that has not been either previously appropriated or diverted for riparian use. Id. Section 1202. The owner of land overlying a groundwater basin, which is fed by percolation from a surface watercourse, possesses rights analogous to a riparian owner. <u>Peabody</u> v. <u>Vallejo</u>, 2 Cal.2d 351, 372, 40 P.2d 486 (1935). Consequently, water is not available for appropriation from a watercourse which feeds a groundwater basin if the appropriation would materially damage the rights of the overlying landowner. See id. at 374; <u>Lodi</u> v. <u>East Bay Municipal Utility Dist</u>., 7 Cal.2d 316, 339, 60 P.2d 439 (1936).

8.0 AVAILABILITY OF UNAPPROPRIATED WATER

8.1 Watershed Description

8.1.1 Salinas River Valley

The watershed of the Salinas River Valley extends southward 120 miles from Monterey Bay to the vicinity of Santa Margarita and has a drainage area of about 5,000 square miles. The lowland area of the valley floor is about 10 miles wide at Monterey Bay decreasing to about 3 miles at San Ardo. The elevation of the valley floor ranges from sea level at Monterey Bay to 400 feet at San Ardo and to 1,200 feet at Santa Margarita. South of San Ardo the valley opens into broad, deeply dissected uplands tracts. Ridge crest elevations average 3,700 to 4,000 feet along the westerly side of the valley and 2,500 to 3,000 feet along the easterly side.

Mean annual precipitation varies from 10 inches on the valley floor to 40-50 inches along the ridge crest on the westerly side of the valley near the headwaters of the Arroyo Seco and the Nacimiento and San Antonio Rivers. On the easterly side of the valley, mean annual precipitation ranges from 10 to 20 inches along the ridge crest.

The Salinas Valley groundwater basin underlies the relatively flat lowlands along the Salinas River between Monterey Bay and San Ardo. Groundwater has been the principal source of water in the valley for agricultural production. In 1970 about 180,000 acres were under cultivation, and most of this acreage was irrigated with groundwater. Residential, commercial, and industrial usage of groundwater at that time totalled about five percent of agricultural usage.

At the present time, consumptive use of groundwater in the Salinas Valley is estimated at 385,000 afa. Standard irrigation techniques, such as sprinkler and furrow irrigation, are the principal irrigation methods used by the farmers in the Salinas Valley. The groundwater basin is in a state of overdraft. Current estimates of the amount of overdraft range from 20,000 afa to 58,100 afa. Despite the overdraft, groundwater pumping is not currently regulated by the District or any other entity.

Groundwater usage in the Salinas Valley commenced in 1900. As pumping increased, the groundwater levels declined. Seawater intrusion was first noticed in the late 1930s. Since about 1960 groundwater levels have, for the most part, stabilized due to increased recharge efforts. Groundwater levels currently range from 40 to 60 feet below the land surface. Stabilization of groundwater levels coincided with construction of Nacimiento Reservoir in 1956 and San Antonio Reservoir in 1967. These reservoirs, which have a combined capacity of 700,000 af, are operated to sustain summer flow in the Salinas River. Prior to their construction, the Salinas River usually dried up in the summer and, consequently, ceased contributing recharge.

The principal source of groundwater recharge for the Salinas Valley is infiltration from the Salinas River. As illustrated by Table 1, at the 1970 pumping rate, the Salinas River supplied about 50 percent of groundwater recharge, excluding irrigation return water, or about 156,000 afa. Tributaries of the river which drain the highlands contiguous to the groundwater basin supplied about 30 percent of

recharge, excluding irrigation return flow, or about 96,000 afa.

Approximately 84 percent of this amount was supplied by two

tributaries of the Salinas River, the Arroyo Seco (73,000 af) and San Lorenzo River (7,900 af).

TABLE 1

Estimated Water Budget For the Salinas Valley Groundwater Basin

(based on the assumption that the groundwater basin is in equilibrium with the 1970 pumping rate and the long-term average natural recharge rate)

| ITEM | RATE OF INFLOW / OUTFLOW IN AFA |
|-----------------------------|--|
| INFLOW | |
| Recharge from Salinas River | 96,000 21,000 11,000 6,000 217,000 |
| OUTFLOW | · . · · |
| Pumping | •••••••••••••••••••••••••••••••••••••• |
| Total Outf | low 507,000 |

* Seawater intrusion indicates the amount of groundwater overdraft at 1970 pumping rates.

8.1.2 Stonewall Canyon

Applicant's proposed project is located in Stonewall Canyon, one of 58 tributaries of the Salinas River between Monterey Bay and San Ardo. Elevations in the 13-square mile watershed of Stonewall Canyon range from about 350 feet at the mouth of the canyon to a maximum of about

3,000 feet at the highest ridge crests. A vineyard, the Paul Masson vineyard, is located at the mouth of the canyon, and the flow line from the canyon forms a swale through the vineyard. Applicant's proposed reservoir sites are about four and one-half miles from the mouth of the canyon.

That portion of the Stonewall Canyon watershed which is tributary to the reservoirs proposed under Application 27859 covers about one square mile in area and ranges from 1,600 to 2,800 feet in elevation. Slopes are generally 10 to 30 percent with steeper slopes of approximately 50 percent along some of the drainages.

Mean annual precipitation over the watershed averages 14 inches per year, almost all of which, or 96 percent, occurs from November through May. Within this period, the four months of December through March account for over 70 percent of the mean annual precipitation. The numerous drainages within the watershed are intermittent streams and normally run only during rainy periods.

Stonewall Canyon groundwater is essentially confined to the extent that several miles of dense granite downstream from applicant's property block any seepage from this basin to Salinas Valley groundwater. Consequently, it is likely that recharge of the Salinas Valley groundwater basin occurs only as a result of surface runoff from Stonewall Canyon and not from groundwater movement.

Further, granite underlies the last mile or two of the canyon above the mouth of the canyon bed itself. In order for surface runoff to recharge the groundwater basin, the runoff must reach this lower

portion of the canyon. While this steeply cut section of the canyon bed is badly weathered with deep soils, the District's consultants testified that geologic maps do not indicate any extensive faulting which would intercept surface flow to the alluvial fan. During extremely wet years, runoff may flow across the alluvial fan at the mouth of the canyon and reach the channel of the Salinas River.

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No streamflow records exist for the Stonewall Canyon watershed nor are there any known measurements of surface flow anywhere within the watershed. Over the last 25 years, surface flow which was extensive enough to reach the Salinas River was observed by the District on three occasions -- in 1969, 1978 and 1983. The applicant also observed the flow in 1983, which caused a washout at the Paul Masson vineyard, at the mouth of the canyon. Precipitation for water year 1983 was over 200 percent of normal, as measured at the climatological station in Pinnacles National Monument which is adjacent to the watershed. In water years 1969 and 1978, precipitation was about 150 percent and 180 percent, respectively, of normal.

8.2 District's Contentions

The District contends that the surface water runoff which the applicant proposes to store will result in a loss of flow which would otherwise recharge the Salinas Valley groundwater basin. This loss will exacerbate the overdraft condition in the Salinas Valley, which the District will have to counteract by releasing additional water from San Antonio and Nacimiento Reservoirs. The District further contends that the Blue Mountain Vineyard project, in conjunction with

other potential projects, could result in a loss of 14,500 afa of water for recharge.

The District's contentions are based on a study by the United States Geological Survey (USGS), entitled "Two-Dimensional and Three-Dimensional Digital Flow Models for the Salinas Valley Ground-Water Basin, California" (November 1978). As part of the study, a smallstream model was developed for the purpose of estimating the amount of Salinas Valley groundwater recharge attributable to the tributaries of the Salinas River. This study concluded that, on a long-term average, 416 afa is the mean runoff from the Stonewall Canyon watershed. Of this amount, 410 afa infiltrates the alluvial fan and contributes to Salinas Valley groundwater and 6 afa reaches the Salinas River as surface flow. The District estimates that the proportional amount of surface water flow which is attributable to the Blue Mountain Vineyard property and tributary area is 35 af on an average annual basis. Further, the District contends that, if the applicant is limited to a proportional share of the 6 af of excess water headed for the ocean, the resulting amount of water which is available for appropriation is less than one af. Therefore, the District maintains that unappropriated water is not available for applicant's project, if groundwater recharge is to remain at its current level.

8.3 Analysis

8.3.1 Frequency of Outflow/Recharge

The issuance of an appropriative water right is generally based on the availability of unappropriated water, during the requested diversion

season, in a normal year. It is important to distinguish between surface runoff in a normal year and the long-term average surface runoff from Stonewall Canyon as estimated by the small-stream model. While the small stream model's estimate of recharge to Salinas Valley groundwater may be indicative of what occurs over a long-term period, it does not indicate the amount of outflow/recharge from Stonewall Canyon which can be expected in a normal year.

No evidence or testimony was introduced at the hearing on Application 27859 which would indicate that there is any flow from Stonewall Canyon to its alluvial fan in a normal year. In fact, the District testified that during a normal or typical year there would be no outflow from the canyon to Salinas Valley groundwater. Similarly, the applicant testified that, under normal rainfall conditions, surface flow in Stonewall Canyon disappears within a mile downstream of his property.

Furthermore, the frequency of outflow to the alluvial fan is unknown. At the hearing a District representative speculated that the frequency might be once every five years.

The USGS small-stream model used a regionalized dimensionless flow duration curve to estimate the mean annual surface water outflow and mean annual groundwater recharge from ungaged tributary watersheds such as Stonewall Canyon. This curve indicated that there would be long periods of zero to nominal surface outflow and short periods of high to very high outflow. To illustrate, 50 percent of the time surface outflow from Stonewall Canyon would be less than eight percent

of the long-term mean, and 90 percent of the time it would be less than the long-term mean. On the other hand, five percent of the time outflow would be about three times greater than the long-term mean, and one percent of the time it would be about 60 to 100 times greater.

In reality, there may be flow from Stonewall Canyon to Salinas Valley groundwater in a normal year but only from precipitation over the impervious underlying granite in the relatively steep last mile or two of canyon bed where the gradient averages about 10 percent. Surface runoff from the upper canyon watersheds, where channel gradients are much lower, would probably occur only during very intense rainfall events or abnormally wet years.

8.3.2 Amount of Outflow/Recharge

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The small-stream model estimated the overall long-term mean runoff from Stonewall Canyon to be 0.6 inches per year, or less than 5 percent of the mean annual precipitation of 14 inches. This amount, converted to afa, yields a long-term average of 35 afa attributable to applicant's watershed for recharge of the Salinas Valley groundwater basin.

While applicant's watershed may provide a long-term average of 35 afa to Salinas Valley groundwater, 35 afa does not represent all the runoff available from this watershed in a normal or average year. Furthermore, the mean runoff of 0.6 inch per year represents the smallstream model's estimate of outflow from Stonewall Canyon but not necessarily the amount of runoff that may be available at various locations within the basin such as the applicant's watershed. We

conclude that the applicant should be able to collect significantly more than 35 af in a normal year, provided that applicant's reservoirs are properly sized and located.

As noted previously in Section 8.1.2, 96 percent of the average annual precipitation of 14 inches occurs during the applicant's proposed collection season of November 1 through May 31. Therefore, in a normal year, the applicant's watershed would receive about 800 af of precipitation during this season. Assuming an overall runoff rate of 15 percent, or 2.1 inches; surface runoff from the Watershed would amount to 120 af in a normal year. This estimated rate is relatively conservative, given the available information on the topography, geology and vegetative cover of the watershed. As indicated previously in Section 8.1.2 of this decision, the project site is a hilly area with slopes ranging from 10 to 30 percent, and steeper slopes of 50 percent along some of the drainages. Most of the project area has been cultivated in dry oat hay intermixed with annual weeds, which do not require much water. In addition, the area contains large amounts of granite. These factors, as well as the fact that, on the average, over 70 percent of the annual precipitation is concentrated into a four-month period, would indicate that a higher runoff rate for the project site would be appropriate. A runoff rate of 15 percent is relatively low and, therefore, appears to be reasonable.

Applicant has requested 110 afa for diversion to storage. We have estimated that surface runoff from applicant's watershed would be 120 af in a normal year. Consequently, 10 af would be excess surface runoff in a normal year. As indicated previously, the District estimates, based on the USGS small-stream model, that the Blue

Mountain Vineyard site contributes a long-term average of 35 afa to the Salinas Valley groundwater basin. If the study's regionalized flow duration curve is applied to this figure, the frequency with which groundwater recharge from applicant's watershed would occur can be estimated. This curve indicates, for example, that groundwater recharge from the vineyard site would be less than approximately 10 afa, 75 percent of the time.

Thus, in a normal year, water would be available for appropriation in the amount requested, which would otherwise be lost to evapotranspiration and seepage to canyon groundwater between the applicant's watershed and the impervious granite of the last mile or so of the canyon bed. To require that the losses to canyon groundwater of substantial quantities of water be maintained only to provide the recharge to Salinas basin groundwater of no more than 10 acre-feet of water is clearly a less beneficial use of water than that proposed by the applicant. In any event, the Board is unable to conclude, based solely on the USGS study, that the proposed appropriation of water by Blue Mountain Vineyard will adversely affect recharge of the Salinas Valley groundwater basin. If evidence of such adverse effect upon recharge of the Salinas Valley groundwater basin were available to the Board, the Board would have some basis for denying or conditioning the permit to prevent or minimize such adverse impact. No such evidence has been received.

8.3.3 Predictive Accuracy of Small-Stream Model

The purpose of the USGS small-stream model was to estimate the potential for recharge of the Salinas Valley groundwater basin from the 58 tributary watersheds to the Salinas River. The study estimated

the outflow/recharge from the Stonewall Canyon tributary. The District prorated this estimate to the Blue Mountain Vineyard subwatershed and concluded that no unappropriated water was available. The USGS study acknowledged, however, that the limited field data available for calibration of the small-stream model precluded a quantitative assessment of the predictive accuracy of the model. This fact is critical when the study's conclusions are used as the basis for an argument that unappropriated water is unavailable.

The use of an analytical study to determine the availability of unappropriated water should, at a minimum, be site specific. We conclude that it is inappropriate to deny an appropriation solely on the basis of an area wide analytical study of unknown predictive accuracy with no field verification of surface flow, or lack thereof, within the specific watershed.

9.0 COMPLIANCE WITH THE CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT (CEQA) The Board is the lead agency for applicant's proposed project under CEQA, Public Resources Code Sections 21000 et seq. The Resources Agency guidelines implementing CEQA require the lead agency to prepare an environmental impact report (EIR) whenever the lead agency finds that a project has possible environmental affects that are individually limited but cumulatively considerable. 14 Cal.Adm.Code §15065(c). The effects of a project are "cumulatively considerable" when the incremental effect of an individual project are considerable when viewed in connection with the effects of past projects, the effects of current projects, and the effects of probable future projects. Id.

The District introduced evidence at the hearing on Application 27859 on the potential impact of future projects, similar to applicant's project, on groundwater recharge. The District identified other potential developable areas in the mountains around the Salinas Valley where surface water could be impounded, and concluded that if all these areas were developed with appropriated water there would be an adverse effect on recharge of the Salinas Valley groundwater basin.

The Board finds that applicant's project will not have a significant cumulative impact on groundwater recharge, either alone or in combination with other projects. The Board has previously found that water is available for applicant's project in a normal year. The Board is unable to conclude, on the basis of the USGS study, that applicant's appropriation will adversely affect recharge of the Salinas Valley groundwater basin. Even if it is assumed, for the sake of argument, that applicant's project would adversely impact groundwater recharge, no evidence was introduced at the hearing on Application 27859 that the effect of applicant's project, in conjunction with past, current, or probable future projects, would be other than de minimus. In this regard, the District testified that the actual development potential of future projects which the District had identified was speculative.

The Board, therefore, concludes that an EIR is not required for applicant's project. The Board finds that applicant's project constitutes only a minor modification to land, water and vegetation

and, on that basis, is exempt from the provisions of CEQA. See id. Section 15304.

10.0 CULTURAL RESOURCES

A cultural resources survey was conducted by staff on May 21, 1984. Four previously unrecorded cultural resource sites were located during the reconnaissance. These sites are discussed in detail in the Cultural Resource Survey Report, dated June 29, 1984. On July 26, 1984, the applicant agreed to inclusion of a permit condition requiring that the sites identified in the report not be impacted by any of the developments proposed under this application.

11.0 CHANGES IN THE PROJECT

At the hearing on Application 27859 the applicant testified that the offstream storage reservoir would probably be deleted from the project and two of the other reservoirs increased in size. The combined capacity of the reservoirs would still be 110 af. In addition, the applicant testified that total plant out of the vineyard would be 240 acres, although his application indicated that the water would be used for the drip irrigation of 190 acres.

Due to the uncertainty regarding construction of the offstream reservoir and the additional place of use, the Board will issue a permit which reflects the project as proposed in the application. When applicant's plans are finalized, the applicant should file a petition for redistribution of storage and a petition for change in the place of use, if appropriate, so that the permit accurately reflects the project.

12.0 CONCLUSIONS

The Board finds that sufficient unappropriated water is available in the amount and season requested by the applicant. The Board further finds that the District has failed to establish that the proposed appropriation will have any adverse impact on recharge of the Salinas Valley groundwater basin or will otherwise adversely impact the District's prior vested rights.

ORDER

IT IS HEREBY ORDERED that Application 27859 is approved. The permit shall contain mandatory standard permit terms 6 and 9 through 13 in addition to the following special terms:

 The water appropriated shall be limited to the quantity which can be beneficially used and shall not exceed a total of 110 acre-feet per annum to be collected from November 1 of each year through May 31 of the succeeding year as follows:

10 acre-feet per annum in Reservoir No. 1
20 acre-feet per annum in Reservoir No. 2
10 acre-feet per annum in Reservoir No. 3
20 acre-feet per annum in Reservoir No. 4
30 acre-feet per annum in Reservoir No. 5
20 acre-feet per annum in Reservoir No. 6

- This permit does not authorize collection of water to storage outside of the specified season to offset evaporation and seepage losses or for any other purpose.
- 3. Construction work shall be completed by December 1, 1991.
- 4. Permittee shall, when required by the State Water Resources Control Board, install and maintain an outlet pipe of adequate capacity in each dam as near as practicable to the bottom of the natural stream channel, or provide other means satisfactory to the State Water Resources Control Board, in order that water entering the reservoirs which is not authorized for appropriation under this permit may be released. Permittee shall submit plans and specifications of the outlet pipes or alternative facilities to the date upon which the Board issues notice that outlet pipes are required. Permittee shall furnish evidence which substantiates that the outlet pipes or alternative facilities that the outlet pipes or alternative facilities have been installed. Evidence shall include photographs showing completed works or certification by a registered Civil or Agricultural Engineer.
- 5. In order to prevent degradation of the quality of water during and after construction of the project, prior to commencement of construction permittee shall file a report pursuant to Water Code Section 13260 and shall comply with all waste discharge requirements imposed by the California Regional Water Quality Control Board, Central Coast Region, or by the State Water Resources Control Board.

6. The archeological sites identified as Blue Mountain Vineyard #1, #2, #3, and #4 in the Cultural Resource survey report for Application 27859 shall not be impacted by any of the developments authorized by this permit. No subsurface or surface disturbance of these sites shall occur from either the construction of the proposed reservoirs, the installation of the proposed water distribution system, or the installation and maintenance of the proposed vineyard.

CERTIFICATION

The undersigned, Administrative Assistant to the Board, does hereby certify that the foregoing is a full, true, and correct copy of a decision duly and regularly adopted at a meeting of the State Water Resources Control Board held on January 22, 1987.

AYE: W. Don Maughan E.M. Samaniego D.E. Ruiz E.H. Finster D. Walsh

NO:

None

ABSENT: None

ABSTAIN: None

Administrative Assistant to the Board