

**STATE OF CALIFORNIA  
CALIFORNIA REGIONAL WATER QUALITY CONTROL BOARD  
CENTRAL COAST REGION  
895 Aerovista Place, Suite 101  
San Luis Obispo, CA 93401-7906**

**ADMINISTRATIVE CIVIL LIABILITY  
COMPLAINT NO. R3-2004-0110**

Issued on July 16, 2004

**Issued to**

**DAVID PIERSON  
Creston,  
San Luis Obispo County**

**You Are Hereby Given Notice:** David Pierson (hereafter Discharger) is alleged to have violated provisions of law and Prohibition's of the California Regional Water Quality Control Board, Central Coast Region (Regional Board), for which the Regional Board may impose civil liability pursuant to California Water Code Section 13350.

Unless waived, a hearing on this matter will be held before the Regional Board within 90 days of receipt of this administrative civil liability complaint (Complaint). The Discharger and/or the Discharger's representative(s) will have the opportunity to be heard, and to contest the allegations in the Complaint and the imposition of civil liability by the Regional Board. A hearing is tentatively scheduled for September 10, 2004 in San Luis Obispo, San Luis Obispo County, California.

An agenda will be mailed to you separately, not less than ten days before the hearing date. At the hearing, the Regional Board will consider whether to affirm, reject, increase or decrease the proposed administrative civil liability, or whether to refer the matter to the State Attorney General for recovery of judicial civil liability.

**ALLEGATIONS**

1. The Discharger is the owner of 635 acres of land in the Creston area of San Luis Obispo County. The specific location is Section 36, Township 28 South, Range 14 East, Mount Diablo Base, and Meridian (35° 27' - Latitude, 120° 25' - Longitude). The property has on occasion been referred to as Goldie Lane Properties, and Huero Huero Ranch. During the summer of 2002, the Discharger altered approximately 39 of the 635 acres by removing most all of the vegetation, constructing a 1330-foot dirt road, and reestablishing an existing dirt road. The altered 39-acre area will hereafter be referred to as the Site.
2. The Site drains to an unnamed "blue line" stream that is tributary to Huerhuero Creek, both of which are waters of the state. Huerhuero Creek is tributary to the

Salinas River. The Water Quality Control Plan, Central Coast Basin-Region 3 (Basin Plan) designates protection of both recreation and aquatic life as a beneficial use of the blue line stream, among other uses and the beneficial uses of Huerhuero Creek to include municipal and domestic water supply, agricultural supply, ground water recharge, water contact recreation, non-contact water recreation, wildlife habitat, warm freshwater habitat, rare, threatened, or endangered species, and commercial and sport fishing.

3. The Discharger disturbed soils on the Site by removing vegetation without completing soil-disturbing activities by establishing or implementing any recognizable Best Management Practices (BMPs) to prevent soil erosion and the discharge of sediments to waters of the state. The Discharger failed to stabilize soils for a period of at least 185 days, from September 1, 2002, when removal of vegetation was completed, until at least March 4, 2003, when Regional Board staff documented that the soils were partially stabilized. It is unknown at what precise time the soils became extensively stable because after March 4, 2003, when soils were still eroding and being discharged to state waters, the next inspection wasn't until September 19, 2003, and at that time the soils were considered extensively stable.
4. On November 8, 2002, Regional Board staff first witnessed and documented eroded soil sediments being discharged from the Site to waters of the state.
5. The Basin Plan contains several Land Disturbance Prohibitions in Chapter 4., Implementation Plan, page IV-70. The Discharger violated two of these prohibitions.

### **First Prohibition Violated**

#### VIII.E.1. LAND DISTURBANCE PROHIBITIONS

Soil disturbance activities not exempted pursuant to Regional Board Management Principles contained in Chapter Five are prohibited:

3. On soils rated a severe erosion hazard by soil specialists (as recognized by the Executive Officer) where water quality may be adversely impacted;

Unless,

- a. In the case of agriculture, operations comply with a Farm Conservation or Farm Management Plan approved by a Resource Conservation District or the USDA Soil Conservation Service;
- b. In the case of construction and land development, an erosion and sediment control plan or its equivalent (e.g., EIR, local ordinance) prescribes best management practices to minimize erosion during the activity, and the

plan is certified or approved, and will be enforced by a local unit of government through persons trained in erosion control techniques; or,

- c. There is no threat to downstream beneficial uses of water, as certified by the Executive Officer of the Regional Board.
6. The Discharger violated this Prohibition because he disturbed soils rated a severe erosion hazard by soil specialists recognized by the Executive Officer where water quality may be adversely impacted and failed to complete soil disturbing activities by implementing BMPs. The Executive Officer recognizes the Resource Conservation District (RCD) and the United States Department of Agriculture, Soil Conservation Service, presently known as United States Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) as being entities that specialize in evaluating soils and determining if soils are a severe erosion hazard. This recognition is supported by the specific reference to both agencies in the Land Use Disturbance portion in the Basin Plan, Chapter 4. Implementation Plan.

The NRCS co-produced the “Soil Survey of San Luis Obispo County, California – Paso Robles Area” (Soil Survey). In summary the Soil Survey describes the area of the Site as hilly with steep to very steep slopes of 30 – 75 %, and having coarse sandy loam soils of 6 – 12 inches overlying weathered granite rock. Surface runoff is very rapid, and the hazard of erosion is very high. The Soil Survey also references the soil as being “fragile and any disturbance can cause severe erosion”. Additionally, in August 2001 the RCD performed a study that included the Site (RCD Report). The RCD report not only identified the severe soil erosion hazard at the Site but also noted that runoff of eroded soils from the Site could adversely affect water quality. Regional Board staff visiting the Site also determined there was a severe erosion hazard that could adversely affect water quality. Sediment discharges adversely affect water quality and unreasonably affect beneficial uses by causing excess turbidity, burying riparian vegetation, impairing flow and by covering creek bottoms. Increased turbidity, vegetation destruction and sedimentation can deplete food and habitat availability to zooplankton, insects, freshwater mollusks, and fish.

7. The three exemption criteria (a., b., and c. in allegation 5.) associated with the prohibition are not applicable because (a.) the discharger never filed a farm plan with or received approval from the RCD or the NRCS, (b.) the land disturbance was not related to construction or land development and was not subject to an erosion control plan that was enforced by a local government, and (c.) no certification regarding threat to beneficial uses was applied for or issued by the Executive Officer.
8. Regional Board Management Principles in Chapter Five of the Basin Plan contain exemptions that are referenced in the Land Disturbance Prohibitions. The exemptions are as follows:
  - Emergency projects undertaken or approved by a public agency and necessary to prevent or mitigate loss of, or damage to, life, health,

property, or essential public services from an unexpected occurrence involving a clear and imminent danger are exempt from this chapter providing such exemption is in the public interest.

- Regulation of sediment discharges from routine annual agricultural operations, such as tilling, grazing, and land grading and from construction of agricultural buildings is waived except where such activity is causing severe erosion and causing, or threatening to cause, a pollution or nuisance.
- Regulation of discharges from State and federal lands managed by agencies operating in accordance with approved management agency agreements is waived except where such activity is causing, or threatening to cause, a pollution or nuisance.

The Dischargers soil disturbance activities were not an emergency project, do not qualify as a part of a routine agricultural activity, and did not involve State or Federal lands. Therefore the referenced exemptions are not applicable.

9. The Discharger disturbed severe erosion hazard soils in violation of a Regional Board issued prohibition. The soils remained disturbed for at least 185 days (September 1, 2002 – March 4, 2003) during which time there were occasions when eroded soil sediments from the Site were discharged to waters of the state. Therefore the Discharger is liable for civil monetary remedies pursuant to California Water Code Section 13350(a)(2).

### **Second Prohibition Violated**

#### **VIII.E.1. LAND DISTURBANCE PROHIBITIONS**

The discharge or threatened discharge of soil, silt, bark, slash, sawdust, or other organic and earthen materials into any stream in the basin in violation of best management practices for timber harvesting construction, and other soil disturbance activities and in quantities deleterious to fish, wildlife, and other beneficial uses is prohibited.

10. The Discharger discharged and threatened discharge of soil, silt, and other organic and earthen materials into the blue line stream and Huerhuero Creek in violation of best management practices for soil disturbance activities and in quantities deleterious to fish, wildlife, and other beneficial uses. The Discharger violated this prohibition by removing most all vegetation from the Site that has a severe erosion hazard without implementing BMPs to eliminate or minimize erosion and sediment discharges.

## **PROPOSED CIVIL LIABILITY**

Pursuant to California Water Code Sections 13350(e)(1), the Regional Board may impose civil liability up to \$5,000 per day for each day each violation occurs. The Discharger violated two Basin Plan prohibitions for a total of at least 185 days each. The maximum liability that may be imposed is \$925,000 (nine hundred twenty-five thousand dollars) per violated prohibition. The total Maximum Liability that can be imposed for violating both prohibitions is \$1,850,000 (one million eight hundred fifty thousand dollars)

In determining the amount of civil liability the California Water Code requires the Regional Board consider the following factors as specified in Section 13327:

### **Nature, circumstances, extent, and gravity of the violation or violations**

In early 2001, the Discharger applied for a subdivision of 653 acres of land, including the Site. As part of project review RCD prepared a report covering the 653 acres, including the Site. RCD determined the soil was a severe erosion hazard stating, "Surface runoff is very rapid and hazard of water erosion is very high" and describing the soil as being "fragile and any disturbance can cause severe erosion". The report included best management practices to be included in soil disturbance activities to address the erosion hazards associated with removing vegetation, and the potential for sediments impacting Huerhuero Creek. The RCD report was included in the draft mitigated negative declaration for the subdivision project that was issued by the County of San Luis Obispo. The Discharger also signed a developer's statement agreeing to implement the best management practices described in the mitigated negative declaration. Despite the RCD determination that the Site was an area of severe erosion hazard the Discharger removed most all vegetation at the Site during the summer of 2002, without implementing any best management practices to prevent or minimize erosion from occurring and sediments from entering waters of the state. The subdivision was never approved and so the grubbing was not a part of that project, but the Discharger knew or should have known that the Site was a severe erosion hazard and that best management practices needed to be implemented.

On September 20, 2002 Regional Board staff inspected the Site and followed up with a letter dated October 10, 2002 addressing best management practices as follows, "applying seed alone is not a sufficient erosion control measure. Established vegetation is a means of erosion control; thus, the seed must be nurtured into vegetation before runoff occurs to be effective erosion control."

Continuing into the fall of 2003 staff of the Regional Board repeatedly urged the Discharger to provide effective erosion and sedimentation controls for the Site. Although the Discharger made some efforts to prevent erosion and the discharge of sediments, the Discharger failed to comply with the best management practices prescribed by the RCD and by Regional Board staff .

Sediment discharges occurred periodically throughout the entire rainy season of 2002-2003, and receiving water beneficial uses were adversely impacted.

Because the Discharger removed most all vegetation from the 39 acre Site there was a major threat of larger discharges that would have more severely impaired beneficial uses. Larger discharges were likely to occur if storms had been more forceful or more frequent.

Because the blue line stream is tributary to Huerhuero Creek and no sediments discharged to the blue line stream were recovered, most all sediments discharged to the blue line stream migrated to Huerhuero Creek. Soil sediments are known to be deleterious to fish, wildlife and other beneficial uses of the blue line stream and Huerhuero Creek.

After describing past damage done to Huerhuero Creek by erosion and other landowners, the RCD Report states,

“Consequently it is critical, at this time, that proper erosion and sediment control be exercised throughout the water sheds draining into Huerhuero Creek to preclude further damage to or elimination of remaining vegetation in the creek. This would include all work done on the applicant’s property. Similar measures should be underwritten for other development being proposed in this region of the county.”

The sediment discharges adversely affected beneficial uses and threatened discharges were in amounts deleterious to fish, wildlife and other beneficial uses, These violations occurred for the entire rainy season of 2002-2003. Also, because such a large area of erosion hazard was grubbed, there was high threat of large discharges and therefore, a significant amount of liability is justified. However, maximum liability is not justified because the violations were not the most harmful or most extensive violations within the scope of violations covered by Water Code section 13350.

Consideration of this factor justifies assessment of civil liability that is **less than maximum**.

#### **Whether the discharge is susceptible to cleanup or abatement**

Although it is possible that at least some of the discharged sediments could have been cleaned up, it was probably not prudent to do so because doing so can often times be more damaging than if the sediments are left in place. Because the discharge is not susceptible to cleanup a significant liability amount is justified. But because the discharges were not the most harmful or most extensive violations within the scope of violations covered by Water Code Section 13350 the liability should be less than maximum.

Consideration of this factor justifies assessment of civil liability that is **less than maximum**.

**The degree of toxicity of the discharge**

There is no reason to believe that the discharged sediments were toxic.

Consideration of this factor justifies assessment of civil liability that is **less than maximum**.

**With respect to the violator, the ability to pay, the effect on ability to continue in business**

The Regional Board has no evidence regarding the Discharger's financial resources or ability to stay in business.

Consideration of this factor **does not affect the amount of liability** assessed.

**Any voluntary cleanup efforts undertaken**

The discharger never proposed or initiated any efforts to remove the discharged sediments from waters of the state. However, Regional Board staff would probably have discouraged such efforts as being impractical because efforts to remove the sediments in this case could have been more damaging than if they were left in place.

Consideration of this factor justifies assessment of civil liability that is **less than maximum**.

**Any prior history of violations**

The Regional Board has no evidence of any prior violations of environmental laws by the Discharger.

Consideration of this factor justifies assessment of civil liability that is **less than maximum**.

**The degree of culpability**

The Discharger knew or should have known, from the RCD Report and Draft Negative Declaration, that the Site was a severe erosion hazard and that all discharges of eroded material would adversely affect beneficial uses if the watershed of Huerhuero Creek. Because the Discharger removed most all vegetation of 39 acres in an area of severe erosion risk, the Discharger knew or should have known these land disturbance activities, that did not include implementing best management practices, threatened to discharge quantities of soil and silt in amounts deleterious to fish, wildlife and beneficial uses of the blue line stream and Huerhuero Creek. The Discharger signed an agreement to implement beneficial uses required in the Mitigated Negative Declaration but, nonetheless removed the vegetation from the Site without implementing any best management practices. After

Regional Board staff instructed Discharger that to be an effective BMP, seeding must include **nurturing seed into vegetation** as a means of erosion control, the Discharger failed to implement this best management practice throughout most of the Site for the entire rainy season of 2002-2003. Discharger failed to implement effective best management practices despite repeated visits, discussions and warnings from Regional Board staff. The Site stabilized and was in compliance after the end of the 2002-2003 rainy season.

The Discharger's failure to comply over an entire rainy season despite knowledge of the environmental consequences and opportunities to come into compliance indicates a high level of culpability. Consideration of this factor **justifies assessment of maximum liability**.

#### **Economic benefit or savings, if any, resulting from the violation**

Regional Board staff does not have specific information that would allow staff to determine with any accuracy the actual amount of the savings.

Consideration of this factor justifies assessment of civil liability that is **less than maximum**.

#### **Other matters that justice may require**

The actions and inactions of the Discharger are by themselves deserving of strong, decisive enforcement, but enforcement is also necessary so as to deter others from doing as the Discharger has done.

During the past two years Regional Board staff have spent an extensive amount of time addressing water quality concerns on the Discharger's property. Using conservative estimates staff has spent 340 hours on the matter at a cost \$25, 500 (twenty-five thousand five hundred fifty dollars) (Hourly Rate = \$75).

Consideration of this factor justifies assessment of civil liability that is not less than **\$25, 500 (Twenty Five Thousand Five Hundred Fifty Dollars)**.

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

Upon consideration of factors as required by California Water Code Section 13327, the Executive Officer recommends civil liability be assessed in the amount of **\$25,500 (Twenty-Five Thousand Five Hundred Fifty Dollars)** for the Discharger's violations of two Basin Plan Prohibitions from September 1, 2002 through March 3, 2003.

Maximum Liability – Pursuant to California Water Code Section 13350(e)(1), the Regional Board can impose civil liability up to \$5,000 (Five Thousand Dollars) per day of violation of each prohibition. The Discharger was in violation of both prohibitions for at least One Hundred Eighty-five Days. The maximum liability that may be imposed for each of the violated prohibitions is \$925,000 (Nine Hundred Twenty-five Thousand Dollars) per prohibition. The total maximum liability that can be imposed for violating both prohibitions is **\$1,850,000 (One Million Eight Hundred Fifty Thousand Dollars)**.



Minimum Liability – California Water Code Section 13350(e)(1) has no minimum liability provision that is applicable in this matter.

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Roger W. Briggs, Executive Officer

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Date

cc: Pierson IPL

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**WAIVER OF HEARING**

You may waive your right to a hearing. If you wish to waive the hearing, an authorized person must check and sign the waiver and return it to the Regional Water Quality Control Board, Central Coast Region, 895 Aerovista Place, Suite 101, San Luis Obispo, California 93401-7906.

If you choose to waive the right to a hearing, the Executive Officer will present an Order for the amount of liability proposed in the Complaint to the Regional Board at the September 10, 2004 Regional Board meeting. The Regional Board may adopt or reject the Order. If the proposed Order is adopted, payment will be due and payable by October 12, 2004 (Check payable to State Water Resources Control Board). If the Order is rejected, the Regional Board may direct the Executive Officer to issue a new complaint and schedule another hearing.

If you do not waive your right to a hearing, the Board will be asked to accept the amount proposed by the Executive Officer. The Regional Board may proceed with the scheduled hearing and consider testimony received from interested persons during the hearing and decide whether to accept the amount proposed by the Executive Officer or increase or decrease the liability. Liability may be increased up to the amount of maximum potential liability stated in this Complaint. The Board may also decide to continue the matter to a future hearing or refer it to the State Attorney General.

If you have questions regarding this matter, please direct them to **Bruce Paine at (805) 542-4782**, or Regional Board Counsel, Jennifer Soloway, at (916) 341-5176.

**The Board wants to hear this. Attach the waiver form you had before, the one we use for liability over \$50,000.**

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Signature

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Printed Name

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Title/Position

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Date