

STATE OF CALIFORNIA
CALIFORNIA REGIONAL WATER QUALITY CONTROL BOARD
CENTRAL COAST REGION

STAFF REPORT FOR REGULAR MEETING OF OCTOBER 21, 2005

Prepared on September 16, 2005

ITEM : 6

SUBJECT: **Guadalupe Settlement Fund: Status of Cooperative Monitoring Program's Phase I Contract and Student Staff Support for the Agricultural Regulatory Program in 2006**

SUMMARY

This item provides a budget update on the Cooperative Monitoring Program contract held by Central Coast Water Quality Preservation, Inc. (CCWQP). Through this contract, CCWQP conducts surface water monitoring in agricultural watersheds. Central Coast Water Board staff use the data generated by this contract and work with agriculturalists to remedy water quality impacts.

Our budget evaluation of the contract indicates that some tasks are overspent, as communicated at the September 9, 2005 Regional Board meeting. However, flexibility authorized by the Regional Board allows us to move dollars from under-spent portions of the contract to compensate. We will continue to monitor expenditures and evaluate the contract's status and to provide updates to the Board at future meetings.

This agenda item also contains a \$30,000 funding proposal for renewing student support to the Agricultural Regulatory Program for the 2006 calendar year. During 2005, these contract students provided vital services to the program staff, including database and file management, outreach and general program tasks, and enrollment support for farmers and land owners.

DISCUSSION

Cooperative Monitoring Program

At the December 3, 2004 meeting of the Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board, the Board approved the use of \$648,643 of Guadalupe settlement funds to assist in setting up the Cooperative Monitoring Program established by

the newly adopted Order R3-2004-0117 (Conditional Waiver of Waste Discharge Requirements for Discharges from Irrigated Lands or Conditional Waiver for Irrigated Lands). Funds allocated to CCWQP, a designated agricultural nonprofit foundation, assist the agricultural industry in performing tasks necessary to establish the Cooperative Monitoring Program.

The Cooperative Monitoring Program began monitoring in January 2005. The program provides information on in-stream water quality and detects trends over time. The monitoring parameters focus on currently used agricultural constituents and toxicity, with provision for follow-up monitoring when problems are identified.

Funds have been used to:

- Establish an organizational infrastructure to conduct the monitoring program
- Perform the first nine months of monitoring at ten sites in the Santa Maria watershed.

The Regional Board approved additional funding from the PG&E Settlement Monitoring Fund to conduct monitoring at fifteen additional sites in the lower Salinas River watershed area.

Progress Toward Implementing the Cooperative Monitoring Program

The agricultural industry in the Central Coast Region has undertaken the extremely challenging task of establishing the Cooperative Monitoring Program. Under the tasks and timetable established by the Conditional Waiver of Waste

for Irrigated Lands, the agricultural industry established an Agricultural Committee by September 1, 2004, as required. They also have accomplished numerous other required tasks:

- Established the nonprofit organization, CCWQP, to manage the monitoring program;
- Began monitoring in January 2005, as required by the Conditional Waiver Order, and has continued monthly;
- Submitted data electronically on June 30 and September 30, as required by the Phase I contract;
- Established the Cost Allocation committee to develop a fair and equitable way to distribute monitoring program costs among a large and diverse group of farmers;
- Made a cost allocation recommendation, adopted by CCWQP in August, well ahead of the January 1, 2006 deadline.

Additionally, CCWQP has applied for and received grant funds to leverage Guadalupe and PG&E settlement funds and management practice implementation efforts by farmers. These grants will help defray some of the costs of monitoring for the next three years. Grower dues and management practice implementation will provide required matching funds.

Budget Issues

In December 2004, staff and the agricultural industry tried to project the costs of the Cooperative Monitoring Program as closely as possible. However, costs in some tasks may exceed the amount allocated before the end of the year. The Regional Board authorized staff to move up to \$40,000 between budget items. Staff will likely move \$40,000 between tasks to allow work to continue on the contract.

Establishing a committee of grower representatives from across the region, setting up a non-profit foundation with a Board of Directors, reaching agreement on a cost allocation structure and communicating with growers across the region has taken significantly more time and effort than was originally estimated. In particular, reaching agreement on a cost allocation formula was both difficult and time consuming for CCWQP staff and committee members. We are currently reviewing expenditures and working

with CCWQP to review projected costs for the remainder of 2005.

Before the end of the year, we will move funds between over- and under-spent tasks and evaluate whether a shortfall will occur. If we determine additional funding is necessary, we will provide the Board with a supplemental sheet showing the possible budget shortfall and making a recommendation to the Board for additional funding necessary to complete the Phase I contract successfully.

We feel that CCWQP and the agricultural industry have made excellent progress on what has been a very challenging timeline and they are to be congratulated for what they have accomplished thus far.

Student Assistant Funding

Regional Board staff propose allocating \$30,000 from the Guadalupe Settlement Fund for part-time student assistants. This funding will pay for students during the 2006 calendar year in the Agricultural Regulatory Program. These students provide vital non-technical administration of the Agricultural Regulatory program currently consisting of 1,600 applicants, 2,500 owners and/or operators representing 450,000 irrigated acres within the Central Coast Region.

History

At the December 3, 2004 meeting of the Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board, the Board approved funding in the amount of \$20,000 to hire students to assist staff with the initial enrollment process of the Agricultural Regulatory program. During the first year of funding, students:

- Reviewed and categorized 1,600 multiple paged applications
- Entered database information on 2,500 owners and/or operators
- Facilitated multiple outreach events, including the mailing of and reply to 2,500 requests for additional information
- Helped field up to 200 calls per week plus voluminous emails and faxes
- Initiated development of a hardcopy filing system
- Organized vast amounts of information.

Scope of Work for 2006

As the Agricultural Regulatory program continues to grow and develop, students will cover a growing number of administrative tasks:

- Database Management
 - Verify individual ranch acreages to facilitate fee collection;
 - Identify growers in compliance with the waiver;
 - Maintain and update the database for multiple tracking purposes;
 - Assist in data generation to determine enrollment and compliance rates, and enforcement decisions based on non-enrollment;
 - Establish ranch inspection schedule.
- Filing and Record Retention
 - Continue to plan, develop, organize, and collate applications into folders and files for the hard-copy filing system;
 - Scan select application pages for the creation of an electronic, document-imaged filing system.
- Outreach and General Program Support
 - Identify, collect, analyze and verify information needed to determine non-filers of the Ag waiver program;
 - Search for land-use information provided by outside agencies and organizations;
 - Identify the estimated 25% of irrigated agricultural land not yet enrolled;
 - Conduct several large outreach mailings;
 - Organize logistics of, and assist with meetings and presentations;
 - Assist with other general program support duties and regulatory actions as necessary.

Budget for 2006

We increased the student budget for 2006 to \$30,000 from the \$20,000 approved last year. Two reasons drive this increase:

1. We increased the budgeted number of hours students can work per week from approximately 15 to 20 during the school year. We also budgeted 40 hours per week when school is not in session.
2. We calculated in five percent raises for students when they reach one year of service.

Starting salaries will be \$12.00 per hour. We anticipate losing at least one student to graduation. To compensate, the budget also allows for a small amount of overlap to provide for training of a new student.

The start-up effort for this program has been enormous in volume and continues to be a tremendous undertaking, requiring many hours dedicated to the development and maintenance of a large support infrastructure. Unfortunately, there have been large gaps of time between the initial enrollment deadline, the population of the database and follow-up mailings needed to complete enrollment. The students are needed and willing to work more hours to improve response time but their time is limited by the current budget. Our students have been a great help and some of the best money we have spent in this program. We look forward to expanding their scope in the coming year.

RECOMMENDATION

- Approve \$30,000 for funding student assistants tasked with Agricultural Regulatory program support.

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