

**STATE WATER RESOURCES CONTROL BOARD
BOARD MEETING SESSION – DIVISION OF WATER QUALITY
SEPTEMBER 16, 2015**

ITEM 4

SUBJECT

CONSIDERATION OF A PROPOSED RESOLUTION TO DISCONTINUE DISCUSSIONS REGARDING A STATEWIDE GRAZING APPROACH AND DIRECT REGIONAL WATER QUALITY CONTROL BOARDS TO DEVELOP REGIONAL APPROACHES

DISCUSSION

Currently, the nine Regional Water Boards regulate the potential impacts to water quality from grazing operations, on a region-by-region basis. In 2013, the staff from the State Water Board and all nine Regional Water Boards, led by the Lahontan Regional Water Board, were directed to assess whether there could be improvements in efficiency and statewide consistency of their regulatory programs, while still accounting for regional differences, if the State Water Board developed a statewide approach for grazing. The intent of the Grazing Regulatory Action Project was to consider a wide range of alternatives with a thoughtful consideration for the costs to the grazing community. Five Focused Listening Sessions were held across the state to solicit comments from stakeholder groups. These meetings yielded valuable feedback. Principal among the feedback was that regional differences in rangeland type, grazing practices and water quality factors supported a regional approach to grazing rather than a statewide approach.

The proposed resolution would direct staff to discontinue discussions regarding a statewide grazing approach. The resolution would also direct Regional Water Boards to assess their current regulatory and/or non-regulatory strategies, and to consider adapting these strategies to include implementation of best management practices (BMPs) that are supported by current science. These strategies would consider regional differences in hydrology, topography, climate, and land use, and include watershed-wide or regional monitoring programs to assess the effectiveness of the BMPs implemented under regulatory or non-regulatory actions.

POLICY ISSUE

Should the State Water Board discontinue discussions regarding a statewide grazing approach and direct Regional Water Boards to develop regionally specific approaches?

FISCAL IMPACT

The work to develop regionally specific approaches would be completed with existing fiscal resources.

REGIONAL BOARD IMPACT

The work to develop regionally specific approaches would be completed with existing staff resources.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

The State Water Board should discontinue the efforts to adopt a statewide policy and direct Regional Water Boards to consider regionally specific approaches.

State Water Board action on this item will assist the Water Boards in reaching Goal 6 of the Strategic Plan Update: 2008-2012 to Enhance consistency across the Water Boards, on an ongoing basis, to ensure our processes are effective, efficient, and predictable.

DRAFT

STATE WATER RESOURCES CONTROL BOARD RESOLUTION NO. 2015-

DISCONTINUATION OF DISCUSSIONS REGARDING A STATEWIDE GRAZING APPROACH AND DIRECT REGIONAL WATER QUALITY CONTROL BOARDS TO DEVELOP REGIONAL APPROACHES

WHEREAS:

1. California contains more than 40 million acres of rangeland covering approximately 38 percent of the state's surface area, with approximately half in public, and half in private ownership.
2. Well-managed livestock grazing operations can provide benefits to the economy, California consumers, and the environment. Conversely, poorly-managed livestock grazing operations can cause water pollution and nuisance and impair the beneficial uses of water.
3. The nine Regional Water Quality Control Boards have different regulatory requirements to minimize the water quality impacts from livestock grazing, based on the unique hydrology, topography, climate, and land use in each region.
4. In 2014, the State and Regional Water Boards held public meetings to assess whether there could be improvements in efficiency and consistency by developing statewide standards for livestock grazing management, while recognizing regional differences. A wide range of valuable comments were submitted by stakeholders.
5. Existing non-regulatory efforts for implementation of best management practices (BMPs) were recognized as benefiting water quality, but were also acknowledged to need updating based on current information and evaluation for effectiveness with the assistance of all stakeholders, and the Regional Water Boards.
6. As part of this process, many commenters suggested that any livestock grazing management or regulatory strategy should take into consideration the regional differences in hydrology, topography, climate, and land use.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT:

The State Water Board therefore directs the following:

1. Discussions regarding a statewide approach to addressing the water quality impacts from livestock grazing are discontinued.
2. The Regional Water Boards should work collaboratively with individual property owners, livestock grazing operators, and other interested stakeholders to determine which actions, including regulatory actions and effective non-regulatory efforts for BMP implementation, are best suited to protect water quality and the beneficial uses of waters from pollution.

D R A F T

3. The Regional Water Boards should consider prioritizing actions to address livestock grazing operations that cause impairment, or have the likelihood to do so based on unique hydrology, topography, climate, and land use of that specific region.
4. After consideration of the unique hydrology, water quality impacts and cost of compliance, BMPs should be considered for use, where appropriate.
5. The Regional Water Boards should consider establishing monitoring requirements, including watershed-wide or regional monitoring programs, to assess the effectiveness of BMPs implemented under regulatory or non-regulatory actions.
6. The Regional Water Boards should take actions they determine to be necessary to protect water quality and the beneficial uses of waters from pollution consistent with state and federal laws. Actions may be regulatory or based on non-regulatory efforts for BMP implementation, or a combination of the two.

CERTIFICATION

The undersigned Clerk to the Board does hereby certify that the foregoing is a full, true, and correct copy of a resolution duly and regularly adopted at a meeting of the State Water Resources Control Board held on September 16, 2015.

Jeanine Townsend
Clerk to the Board