

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

STAFF REPORT FOR PUBLIC WORKSHOP MARCH 6, 2014

Prepared on February 11, 2014

ITEM NUMBER: 3

**SUBJECT: PUBLIC WORKSHOP TO RECEIVE INPUT ON SALINAS RIVER
MANAGEMENT**

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KEY INFORMATION

Location: Salinas River and Watershed

Type of Discharge: Dredge and fill of river channel related to reducing flood risk

THIS ACTION: Informational

WORKSHOP PURPOSE AND AGENDA

Various parties are interested in implementing management activities such as sediment and vegetation removal within the Salinas River, primarily for the purpose of reducing flood risk. A map of the Salinas River where management activities have been proposed is included as Attachment 1 of this staff report.

This workshop is an opportunity for regulatory agencies, landowners, other stakeholders, and the public to discuss challenges and opportunities with the Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board (Central Coast Water Board) regarding short and long term strategies for Salinas River management that allow for flood risk reduction activities while protecting the habitat and other functions of the river. A desired outcome of the workshop is identification of potential next steps for management of the Salinas River.

The agenda for the workshop is included in Attachment 2 to this staff report. The agenda was developed based on interested parties' responses to staff solicitations to multiple parties to encourage their participation and provide an opportunity for all parties and the Central Coast Water Board to learn about various activities and perspectives on Salinas River management strategies.

To solicit participation in this workshop from interested and involved regulatory agencies, landowners, other stakeholders, and the general public, Central Coast Water Board staff distributed a letter of invitation to several interested parties (Attachment 3). Staff developed the interested parties list by culling names of commenters on former project proposals and

contacting regulatory agency representatives. Staff distributed a public notice and posted it on our website (Attachment 4).

STAKEHOLDERS

Management activities within the Salinas River may require permits and/or consultation with the following entities:

Federal Entities

- United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). USACE issues Clean Water Act Section 404 permits for discharges of dredged or fill material in waters of the United States.
- United States EPA (USEPA). USEPA may enforce violations of Clean Water Act Section 404 and may veto a USACE Section 404 permit.
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). USACE must consult with NMFS prior to issuing a Section 404 permit if the activity may affect federally-listed species.
- United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). USACE must consult with USFWS prior to issuing a Section 404 permit if the activity may affect federally-listed species.

State Entities

- Central Coast Water Board. The Central Coast Water Board issues Water Quality Certification under Clean Water Act Section 401, or Waste Discharge Requirements under California Water Code Section 13260. By issuing a Water Quality Certification, the Central Coast Water Board certifies that proposed discharges of dredged or fill material will comply with water quality standards. USACE Section 404 permits are not valid without the accompanying Water Quality Certification.
- California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW). CDFW issues California Fish and Game Code Section 1600 streambed alteration agreements for activities that will alter a river, stream, or lake.
- California State Lands Commission. The State Lands Commission reviews permit applications submitted to the USACE and issues leases for lands under their jurisdiction.

Other known interested stakeholders in Salinas River management activities include:

- Monterey County Water Resources Agency
- Landowners and Growers on the Salinas River
- Salinas River Channel Coalition
- Salinas Valley Water Coalition
- Monterey County Farm Bureau
- Grower-Shipper Association of Central California
- Salinas Valley Chamber of Commerce
- Monterey County Agricultural Commissioner
- Caltrans

- Monterey Coastkeeper and Otter Project
- The Nature Conservancy
- Audubon Society
- Central Coast Wetlands Group
- Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary
- Surfrider Foundation
- Sierra Club of California
- California Native Plant Society
- Cities of Salinas, King City, Greenfield, Soledad, Gonzales, and Monterey County
- Monterey Regional Water Pollution Control Agency

CHANNEL MANAGEMENT HISTORY 2003 TO 2009

Salinas River Management Activities 2003-2008

In 2003, Monterey County Water Resources Agency and landowners/growers obtained permits to perform maintenance activities within a 92-mile length of the Salinas River. The work area ranged between the Highway 1 Bridge southward to a location four miles south of San Ardo. See the map in Attachment 1. Monterey County Water Resources Agency coordinated voluntary maintenance activities implemented by individual property owners, growers, and municipalities. Maintenance activities were comprised of sandbar and vegetation removal within the river channel. The objective of the sandbar and vegetation removal was to create an unrestricted flow path that maximized the river channel capacity to convey high volume storm flows. Heavy equipment, including bulldozers, moving equipment, and dicing equipment was authorized to be used to manage vegetation and/or contour the riverbed outside the low flow channel and outside a ten-foot buffer zone surrounding the low flow channel. The permits expired at the end of 2008.

Emergency Permit Request in 2008

In December 2008, Monterey County Water Resources Agency submitted a USACE permit application to perform preemptive emergency clearing of the main river channels in the Salinas and Arroyo Seco Rivers to maximize debris/sediment transport along the mainstem of the Salinas River because of burn damage to the Upper Arroyo Seco Watershed from the Basin Complex and Indians Fire during the summer of 2008.

Regulatory agencies commented that the project as proposed did not adequately manage impacts to aquatic resources.

Permitting Efforts in 2009

In 2009, Monterey County Water Resources Agency submitted permit applications to perform maintenance activities within the Salinas River. The activities, area, and methods proposed were similar to the work performed from 2003 to 2008. To comply with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) requirements for the proposed activities, Monterey County Water Resources Agency developed an Initial Study with Proposed Mitigated Negative

Declaration (IS/MND). Regulatory agencies and other stakeholders provided comments on the proposed IS/MND, stating it needed revision in order to conform to CEQA standards.

No new permits were ever issued for the emergency work proposed in 2008 nor for the project proposed in 2009.

KNOWN CURRENT CHANNEL MANAGEMENT PROPOSALS

Monterey County Water Resources Agency Proposed Maintenance Program

In September 2013, Monterey County Water Resources Agency issued a Final Environmental Impact Report for a proposed Salinas River Stream Maintenance Program. The Stream Maintenance Program would perform maintenance activities on the Salinas River mainstem from the Highway 1 Bridge southward to a location four miles south of San Ardo, including portions of three tributaries (Gonzales Slough, Byrant Canyon Channel, and San Lorenzo Creek), for a total of approximately 94 linear miles. The Stream Maintenance Program would be implemented on a voluntary basis by individual property owners, growers, and municipalities. The primary objective of the proposed Stream Maintenance Program is to increase flow capacities and reduce the inundation of land along the identified reach of the Salinas River and select tributaries, by permitting work related to vegetation and sediment management. To date, permit applications have not been submitted for the proposed Stream Maintenance Program.

Salinas Watershed Invasive Non-native Plant Control and Restoration Program

The Resource Conservation District of Monterey County (RCD) has developed an invasive, non-native plant control and riparian restoration program for the Salinas River Watershed. The project proposes restoration of riparian habitat in the Salinas River Watershed through the control of invasive non-native plants (mainly *Arundo donax*) and the planting of native species. The RCD has obtained some of the necessary regulatory approvals to perform this work.

Demonstration Project Near Gonzales and Chualar

The Nature Conservancy has been working with landowners/growers, technical consultants, Monterey County Water Resources Agency, and regulatory entities to develop a demonstration project for two segments of the Salinas River. The demonstration project objectives are to build a successful model for river management that addresses multiple watershed benefits including flood risk reduction, groundwater recharge, water quality improvement, and maintaining ecological conditions for fish and wildlife. The Nature Conservancy plans to submit permit applications for the demonstration project by the end of April.

Other Potential Maintenance Programs

The Salinas River Channel Coalition represents landowners, growers, municipalities and other interested parties on issues surrounding the Salinas River and its tributaries with a focus on

Salinas River maintenance activities for flood capacity, recharge, and reservoir releases. The Salinas River Channel Coalition has been discussing with Monterey County Water Resources Agency, regulatory entities, and others the possibility of performing needed maintenance activities, including invasive species, trash removal, and other site selected river maintenance activities.

Central Coast Water Board staff has been proactively meeting with and providing project input to a variety of stakeholders including Monterey County Water Resources Agency, Salinas River Channel Coalition, Resource Conservation District of Monterey County, and The Nature Conservancy.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Salinas River Map
2. Agenda - March 6, 2014 Salinas River Management Workshop (to be provided as a Supplemental Sheet)
3. Invitation - March 6, 2014 Salinas River Management Workshop
4. Public Notice - March 6, 2014 Salinas River Management Workshop