

Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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LOS ANGELES COUNTY SANITATION DISTRICTS IN LANCASTER AND PALMDALE PAY \$4.75 MILLION IN WATER QUALITY SETTLEMENT AGREEMENT

Agreement settles multi-year dispute over nitrate pollution of groundwater in Palmdale and discharges to Rosamond Dry Lake

LANCASTER – The Los Angeles County Sanitation Districts have agreed to pay \$4.75 million as part of their settlement with the State of California stemming from a water pollution case. This is the largest settlement ever reached as a result of a Water Board enforcement action.

Last May, the Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board rejected a proposed settlement of \$4 million, saying it was too small to make up for the damage caused over the years. It sent the Board's Prosecution Team and the Sanitation Districts back to the bargaining table to negotiate a more substantial settlement amount.

"We're pleased that we've been able to reach an agreement," said Amy Horne, Chair of the Lahontan Water Board. "We're glad to put behind us years of disagreement and look forward to working more cooperatively with the Sanitation Districts."

Under the terms of the settlement, the Districts will pay \$200,000 to the State Water Board's Waste Discharge Permit Fund. The remaining \$4,550,000 will fund a major recycled water project for the Antelope Valley.

Because the settlement will help fund the "Antelope Valley Recycled Water Project" it opens a new chapter for water resources in Antelope Valley. It will fund the construction of infrastructure needed to convey recycled water to public and private facilities throughout the Valley. Ultimately, the project will link wastewater treatment plants serving Lancaster, Palmdale and Rosamond and then provide treated water for reuse to six water districts in the Valley.

In 2002, the Lahontan Water Board ordered District No. 14 – Lancaster to stop the threatened nuisance caused when treated wastewater overflowed Piute Ponds onto Rosamond Dry Lake, an area on Edwards Air Force Base. Edwards AFB had complained that the discharges affected its ability to use the lakebed for landing military aircraft in emergencies. District No. 14 since initiated a multi-phase project to reduce and eventually

eliminate these overflows, but despite these efforts, overflows will not cease until planned upgrades are completed.

In District No. 20 – Palmdale effluent disposal caused or contributed to nitrate pollution of the groundwater. These disposal practices violated several Lahontan Board orders including Waste Discharge Requirements, a Cleanup and Abatement Order and a Cease and Desist Order. In recent years, the District has reduced how much nitrate percolates to groundwater by using wastewater to irrigate crops, but it still is discharging more nitrogen than the crops can use. In 2004, District 20 initiated a new master plan to reduce and eliminate the discharges causing groundwater to be polluted with nitrogen, but the pollution won't cease until the District completes its upgrade. The District is also required to clean up the polluted groundwater under separate actions of the Water Board.

The Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board is one of nine regional boards in the state. Its principal duty is to protect and restore California's water quality east of the Cascade and Sierra Nevada crests from the Oregon border through the Mojave Desert. To do so, it sets water quality standards and waste discharge requirements; enforces federal and state water quality statutes, regulates cleanup of sites that threaten water quality, and educates the public about water quality issues. The Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board consists of up to nine individuals, each appointed by the Governor, and a small professional staff comprised mostly of scientists, engineers and geologists. For more information, go to <http://waterboards.ca.gov/lahontan/>.