



North Coast Regional Water Board

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New Regulations for Vineyards to Protect Water Quality

Information about the Draft Vineyard Order

The North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board (Regional Water Board) is developing new rules that address the impact vineyards may have on water quality. These rules, called the Draft Vineyard Order, were released for public comment in June 2023.

Below are some frequently asked questions about the Draft Vineyard Order:

What is the Regional Water Board?

The Regional Water Board is part of the California Environmental Protection Agency and protects the quality of our region's waters (rivers, streams, lakes, wetlands, groundwater, and the ocean) for present and future generations. We work with communities and organizations around the region to protect the right to clean water for all needs – such as drinking, bathing, boating, swimming, farming, manufacturing, and environmental uses. We take enforcement actions against those who violate federal and state environmental regulations. We restore and protect watersheds, rivers and streams that are essential to California fisheries, recreation, wildlife preservation, and the economy. The Regional Water Board covers the coastal region of California from the Oregon border to Marin County. For more information on the Regional Water Board, please visit <https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/northcoast/>.

Why are vineyards being regulated?

There are around 65,000 acres of vineyards in the North Coast Region. Over 95% of North Coast vineyards are located within the Navarro River and Russian River watersheds which provide important fish habitat and are impacted by excess sediment and high temperature. During storms, bare soil in vineyards can erode and contribute excess sediment to local rivers, which harms fish. In the absence of on-farm practices, pesticides and fertilizer applied on vineyards can also end up in local waterways and groundwater. The Draft Vineyard Order requires farmers to address stormwater runoff from their vineyards to control sediment and pollutants that can reach streams. The Draft Vineyard Order also includes statewide rules that protect drinking water through domestic well testing and fertilizer management.

How would vineyard operators comply with the Order?

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In response to the new rules, vineyard operators may have to change some farming practices, prevent and minimize sediment discharges from their vineyard, or do water quality testing. The five main elements required of a vineyard operator in the Vineyard Order are:



Vineyard operators would enroll in the Order and identify conditions in their vineyards. Under the Order, operators would be required to establish or maintain practices during the winter to prevent erosion in the vineyard and on agricultural roads, repair erosion when it occurs, and maintain existing vegetation around creeks. In some cases, vegetated buffers between creeks and the vineyard would need to be established. Operators would confirm that practices are protecting water quality through farm plans or water quality monitoring. If the practices are not effective, operators would be required to improve their farming practices to prevent pollutants from reaching streams.

Operators would be allowed to form coalitions to assist in monitoring and reporting requirements in the Order. These coalitions would assist operators in enrolling, fee collection, and reporting to the Regional Water Board. Operators not in a coalition would be responsible for completing all monitoring and reporting requirements individually.

How would water quality be monitored under these new regulations?

Operators would be required to measure sediment in stormwater runoff from on-farm drainage pipes and man-made drainage structures. The Vineyard Order also requires that drinking water wells on vineyards be sampled for nitrates, which can leach to groundwater from fertilizer. Operators would be required to notify any drinking water well users if a well is unsafe for drinking due to nitrates.

Groups of operators may form a coalition for regional water quality monitoring. Groundwater would be monitored on a regional basis by coalitions who work with Regional Water Board staff to identify monitoring wells that represent the agricultural area. Operators not in a coalition would monitor the groundwater using wells on-farm. Creeks in the watersheds would be monitored in a similar fashion, with coalitions measuring streambed conditions to identify if practices implemented in vineyards are improving fish habitat. Operators not in a coalition would measure their sediment discharge directly from their properties.

What information would be reported to the Regional Water Board?

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Operators would report on-farm practices, fertilizer application, and results of water quality monitoring to the Regional Board. Coalitions may summarize and report this information on behalf of their enrolled members. This information would be used by the Regional Board to confirm whether operators are complying with the Order.

Would vineyards certified through sustainability programs be required to enroll?

In the North Coast Region, there is widespread enrollment in voluntary sustainability programs such as Fish Friendly Farming, California Certified Sustainable (CCSW), LODI RULES, and Sustainability in Practice (SIP) in which vineyard operators implement on-farm practices to prevent or control erosion. These vineyards would be required to enroll in the Vineyard Order but may use existing certification in a voluntary program for some areas of sediment and erosion control compliance.

What would this program cost vineyard operators?

The State Water Resources Control Board sets fees for water quality regulations for agriculture. The State fees in 2024 were \$1.42 per acre of vineyard for operators who participate in a coalition and \$17.73-\$35.45 for operators not in a coalition. In addition to State fees, there would be costs associated with maintaining and implementing on-farm practices, conducting water quality monitoring, and developing technical material. Staff estimated the cost for water quality monitoring and reporting to be between \$5 to \$6 per acre for operators participating in a coalition.

When would these rules go into effect?

The Regional Water Board plans to consider these regulations for adoption in late 2024. This means that these regulations could go into effect as early as spring 2025. The Draft Vineyard Order proposes a deadline for vineyard operators to enroll by July 2026.

How can I get more information?

- Visit us online at the Regional Water Board's Vineyards Page: [Vineyards | California Northcoast Regional Water Quality Control Board](https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/northcoast/water_issues/programs/agricultural_lands/Vineyards/)
(https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/northcoast/water_issues/programs/agricultural_lands/Vineyards/)
- You can receive notifications, updates and other correspondence by email by subscribing on-line to our electronic mailing list by selecting the "Agricultural Lands Discharge Program" option:
(https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/CAWRCB/subscriber/new?qsp=north_coast)

Contact Us: If you want to provide feedback or are interested in learning more about the Draft Vineyard Order, please contact Brenna Sullivan at brenna.sullivan@waterboards.ca.gov.

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