

MEETING SUMMARY

CV-SALTS REGIONAL BOARD WORKSHOP – MARCH 9, 2017

PREPARED FOR: Kern River Watershed Coalition Authority (KRWCA)

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INTRODUCTION

Central Valley Salinity Alternatives for Long-Term Sustainability (CV-SALTS) is a collaborative stakeholder driven and managed program to develop sustainable salinity and nitrate management planning for the Central Valley. The goals of CV-SALTS are as follows:

- Sustain the Valley's lifestyle
- Support regional economic growth
- Retain a world-class agricultural economy
- Maintain a reliable, high-quality urban water supply
- Protect and enhance the environment

CV-SALTS includes four working groups:

- Technical
- Public Education and Outreach
- Economic Social Cost
- Other (CEQA, policy development, etc.)

ACRONYMS

AID – Alta Irrigation District Archetype
ACP – Alternative Compliance Program
BP – Basin Plan
BPTC – Best Practicable Treatment and Control
GSA – Groundwater Sustainability Agency
IAZ – Initial Analysis Zone
ICM – Initial Conceptual Model
ILRP – Irrigated Lands Regulatory Program
LSJR – Lower San Joaquin River
NIMS – Nitrate Implementation Measures Study
SGMA – Sustainable Groundwater Management Act
SNMP – Salt and Nitrate Management Plan
SSALTS – Strategic Salt Accumulation Land and Transport Study

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this hearing was to provide summarized descriptions of the Salt and Nitrate Management Plan (SNMP), developed over the last 10 years by the CV-SALTS process, to the Central Valley Regional Board (Board). The Board was updated on progress of the SNMP at a workshop in June, 2016. Since that workshop, there have been revisions to policies that were already drafted, and new policies and technical work that have been completed.

SUMMARY

Findings from CV-SALTS technical efforts were summarized, including the groundwater assessment (ICM, high resolution modeling); the salt study (SSALTS); the nitrate study (NIMS); and the aggressive restoration study.

Findings showed:

- We know where the nitrate and salt are concentrated in the valley, if they are in balance or increasing or depleting, and which areas should be prioritized.
- 85% of the salt entering the Central Valley is unmanaged; the only solution to achieving balance is to remove salt from the valley through a regulated brine line
- Mitigation of basins degraded by nitrate would occur at very high expense and would take at least 70 years (long, if considering whole valley); therefore, providing safe drinking water is an urgent priority.
- Aggressive restoration efforts on a large scale (for the whole valley) are not feasible; even if all agriculture was stopped, the basins would get worse before they got better and this would still not decrease restoration times.

A SNMP alternatives panel, largely made up of EJ community representatives, presented revisions to the resolution to move forward with the SNMP that called for restricting management zones and requiring restoration for all basins in the Central Valley. This panel also called for more outreach to disadvantaged communities.

An additional panel of stakeholders representing agriculture, industry, municipalities, and urban water agencies commented on the following aspects of the SNMP:

- Salt is an issue outside of the Central Valley and other participants should be added to the CV-SALTS process
- Alignment (or lack thereof) of SNMP with SGMA
- Agricultural thresholds for industrial wastewater beneficial reuse
- Compliance costs and funding
- More studies are needed

The Regional Board's main feedback was concerning management zones. They wanted to see more concrete and clear guidelines on how management zones would be established and permitted. They also noted the EJ community's concern for outreach to disadvantaged communities. The Regional Board will revise the proposed resolution to move forward with the SNMP and this resolution will be posted the week of March 20, 2017.

PRESENTATIONS

- Summaries of technical findings were presented, including those of the Nitrate Implementation Measures Study (NIMS) and the Strategic Salt Accumulation Land and Transport Study (SSALTS) that were both completed before the June 2016 workshop.
- Technical studies completed since June 2016 that were summarized included the Aggressive Restoration Modeling Study study to evaluate the effect of mitigation strategies (pump, treat, server; pump, treat, inject), the Surveillance and Monitoring Program Study, Environmental Review (CEQA) and the economic analysis.
- The key findings from the technical studies are as follows:
 - NIMS – The time required to achieve aquifer restoration or mass balance is at least 70 years. The Cost for treating groundwater that exceeds the water quality objective (WQO) could range from \$36 to \$81 billion. Because of this time and cost, safe drinking water needs to be addressed early in SNMP implementation.
 - SSALTS – The only option to manage/dispose of salt sustainably is a regulated brine line that exports salt brine to the ocean. Capital cost is estimated at \$11 billion, with operating and maintenance costs estimated at \$1.2 billion. The value of beneficial product water is also estimated at \$1.2 billion. This project would take ~30 years and would be divided into phases. This information informed the development of a Prioritization and Optimization Study, which is part of the salt management strategy.
 - Aggressive Restoration Modeling Study – Pump, treat and serve is a good way to provide drinking water but is not useful for restoration. Pump, treat and reinject on large regional areas is not practical because of complicating hydrogeological factors. Restoration is likely not feasible for the whole Central Valley. Localized efforts for targeted restoration would likely work better.
- The nitrate management strategy and salt management strategy were summarized. These strategies are very different; the nitrate management strategy focuses on ensuring safe drinking water first and foremost; whereas the salt management strategy is a longer term effort with further study.
- The nitrate management strategy calls for the establishment of management zones to manage groundwater on a scale that is larger than one discharger's zone of influence, though traditional permitting approaches are still allowed. The nitrate permitting policy also calls for five categories of discharge, which include different permitting requirements.
- The salt management strategy focuses on a longer-term effort to assess and characterize salt in the valley and ultimately construct a regulated brine line to remove salt from the valley. The interim permitting strategy, which would endure for the first 15 years after the Basin Plan is adopted, would include a study to determine where the specific treatment and/or mitigation options would be the most successful. This approach is informed by SSALTS, which showed that a valley-wide approach to total restoration would be extremely expensive and would take over 100 years at a minimum.

STAKEHOLDER PANELS

- An SNMP Alternatives panel made up of representatives from the Environmental Justice community presented their concerns with the SNMP and how they would like to see it revised, including recommendations to refine criteria for management zones, changes to how assimilative capacity is calculated, changes to nitrate permitting discharge categories, changes to offset and exception requirements, and committing every basin to eventual restoration. The EJ community also commented that they would like to see more outreach to disadvantaged communities.
- Other stakeholders commented as follows:

Debbie Webster (CVCWA)

- Overall pleased with the process for developing the SNMP.
- Satisfied with the recommendations on SMCLs and permitting of POTW.
- Believe that salinity issues expand beyond just the Central Valley and there is a need for more to be involved in the process.

Melissa Thorme (Downey Brand/Oil & Gas)

- Generally supportive of the SNMP and see it as both reasonable and flexible.
- For oil & gas, boron and salt are their two biggest concerns and want to see the same flexibility on managing other constituents of concern (boron, arsenic, etc.) in management zones.
- Would like to see the SNMP take into account the regulatory requirements of SGMA.
- When amending the MCL section, would like “prospective incorporation by reference” language removed.
- Believe AGR thresholds need to be assigned so that their waste water can be utilized.

Elaine Archibald (CUWA)

- Summarized points from Alternatives Panel.

Tim Johnson (CRC)

- For the most part pleased with process but echoed JP’s comments regarding the regulatory requirements facing farmers.
- Concerns with compliance costs.
- Asked more studies be done.

Laurel Firestone (Community Water Center)

- Appreciated the process by which the SNMP was developed and does not believe the EJ community would have agreed to as much as they have without that process. Echoed Alternatives Panel concerns.

FEEDBACK FROM THE REGIONAL BOARD

The regional board had two main concerns as a result of the hearing:

Management Zones – The Board needs clarification on how management zones would be established and what restrictions they would have. They noted the EJ community’s concerns with management zones and that the Basin Plan language needs to be more concrete and have some solid requirements for management zones.

Outreach – Feedback from the June 2016 Regional Board hearing included direction from the Board to increase outreach in general. At this hearing, they acknowledged and appreciated the technical materials that have been developed so far, but also noted the EJ community’s concerns that more direct outreach needs to occur to targeted DACs.