

## Close to Home: At Last, Scrutiny for Pot Growers

The Press Democrat

By Carre Brown and Rex Bohn  
May 31, 2015, 12:05 AM

CARRE BROWN IS A MEMBER OF THE MENDOCINO COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS. REX BOHN IS A SUPERVISOR IN HUMBOLDT COUNTY.

On behalf of the 34 rural counties represented by the Rural County Representatives of California, we applaud the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board for its proposed regulatory efforts addressing marijuana cultivation and for the outreach it has conducted throughout the process.

This is a very important first step in addressing the effects marijuana cultivation has on California's water quality, and we are pleased to see that efforts on the North Coast are setting the tone for the rest of the state.

The past decade has seen a dramatic proliferation of marijuana cultivation and a continual expansion of the scale and volume of individual growing sites — both legal and illegal. Local governments have scrambled to enact cultivation ordinances to address issues surrounding medical marijuana growing operations, including the size, scale and conditions whereby they can occur. The courts have upheld counties' authority to enact these restrictions — although enforcing these restrictions as well as current state environmental laws has been a challenge.

California's rural counties take their enforcement role for local water quality objectives very seriously, but counties cannot tackle the myriad of enforcement issues alone. Key state agencies, such as the state Water Resources Control Board and the regional water quality control boards, must join in the efforts counties have undertaken if we want to minimize the environmental impacts of unbridled marijuana growing.

The North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board's proposed regulatory package, formally known as a waiver of waste discharge requirements, addresses water quality concerns by creating a process whereby growers will need to come into compliance with the state's water quality laws. The package also recognizes local government's role in environmental enforcement — something that is key, as there is great need for tackling these issues through all levels of government.

More important, the package contains a financing mechanism to help fund enforcement and cleanup activities related to marijuana cultivation sites.

While the North Coast's efforts are welcome, it is time for the state to finish the job and enact a comprehensive statewide licensing scheme for medical marijuana activities. For

far too long, California's rural counties have been left to fend for themselves on issues surrounding cultivation.

In recent months, the Rural County Representatives of California adopted a set of policy principles to support a state regulatory scheme for medical marijuana, consistent with maintaining a county's land use authority. These principles provide the organization with the ability to work with members of the state Legislature, municipal organizations, marijuana advocates and other stakeholders to address the very complex issues and broader policy considerations associated with medical marijuana cultivation and the impact to local county government.

Both Mendocino and Humboldt counties have expressed enthusiasm about the work the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board has done on cultivation-related enforcement. We hope other parts of the state will take note of these regulatory proposals and consider them for their respective areas. If we can couple that with the enactment of a statewide licensing framework, the state will meet its goals of complying with voter-approved Proposition 215 while at the same time protecting our state's environment.

Carre Brown is a member of the Mendocino County Board of Supervisors. Rex Bohn is a supervisor in Humboldt County.

<http://www.pressdemocrat.com/opinion/closetohome/3998742-181/close-to-home-at-last>