

# Bob Williams: New water rules hold marijuana growers accountable

**POSTED:** 6:00 PM, Sep 1, 2015

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I applaud the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board for its recently proposed Waste Discharge Requirements for cannabis cultivation and associated activities. The immediate threat to water quality posed by marijuana cultivation has increased dramatically in recent years as our rural counties have seen a continual expansion of the scale and volume of individual grow sites.

I serve as second vice chair of the Rural County Representatives of California, or RCRC, a statewide organization dedicated to championing policies on behalf of California's rural counties. Twenty three of RCRC's 34 counties are included in the purview of the Central Valley water board, and our member counties take their enforcement role of local water quality objectives very seriously.

The Central Valley Water Board's proposed requirements reinforce the need to address the effects of marijuana cultivation on our state's water quality, and help set the tone for the rest of the state in addressing water quality concerns. They work in concert with the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board's requirements, which are already approved.

In particular, RCRC appreciates two specific aspects of the Central Valley Water Board's proposed requirements. First is the recognition of, and requirements to comply with, county regulations and ordinances before approving any Notices of Intent. Maintaining county control over land use and other issues related to marijuana cultivation is of utmost importance to California's rural counties. Second, we support the eventual imposition of an annual fee to support enforcement of the requirements. It would be unfair for established dischargers to subsidize enforcement and cleanup activities for marijuana cultivation sites.

With the momentum behind both the North Coast and Central Valley Water Boards' requirements, now is time for the State to finish the job and enact a comprehensive statewide licensing scheme for medical marijuana activities. Our organization supports a statewide regulatory scheme for medical marijuana consistent with maintaining a county's land use authority and addressing the environmental impacts of cultivation. The principles that RCRC recently adopted provide the organization with the ability to work with members of the Legislature, other 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. As such, we remain at the table working with the authors of current proposals addressing this issue, and have stressed the need to construct provisions that address various aspects of cultivation. One of the tenants currently being addressed is the need to have the state agencies charged with environmental enforcement activities, including regional water boards, coordinate their efforts among other state agencies, and include local governments.

We are encouraged by the work put forth by the North Coast and Central Valley Water Boards on cultivation-related enforcement, and as stewards of much of the State's water supply, our members are extremely engaged in this issue, and willing to assist in any way possible.

Bob Williams is Second Vice Chair of the Rural County Representatives of California, and a Tehama County supervisor.

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