

John Pedrozo: Dealing With Threats From ‘Weed’ Farms Now

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By John Pedrozo

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Threats to water quality from marijuana cultivation in the San Joaquin Valley have increased dramatically. With the increased amount of cultivation come a host of water and water – quality problems.

The consequences of growing marijuana are dangerous and real – stream diversion, habitat destruction for many threatened species, illegal pesticide use with toxic levels of run-off, and illegal and inappropriate land conversions, just to name a few.

Until recently, state regulators have been unable to tackle these problems, leaving local law enforcement agencies with the task of enforcing our state’s water quality laws. This is why I join other supervisors from rural California counties in applauding the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board for its proposed waste discharge requirements for cannabis cultivation.

The board’s proposed requirements, modeled after efforts on the North Coast, will help set the tone for the remaining parts of the state in addressing water-quality concerns from marijuana grows. The regulations work in concert with county rules associated with marijuana cultivation.

Leaders of rural counties appreciate requirements that growers must comply with county regulations and ordinances before the regional water board approves any “notice of intent” to allow water use or discharge. Maintaining county control over land use and other marijuana cultivation issues is of utmost importance. The eventual imposition of an annual fee to support enforcement of board rules avoids established dischargers from subsidized enforcement and clean-up for marijuana growers.

In addition to the efforts at the state’s regulatory level, a three-bill package to construct a regulatory framework for the medical marijuana industry currently sits on Governor Jerry Brown’s desk. I urge Gov. Brown to sign each of these bills so that a comprehensive, statewide licensing scheme for the medical marijuana industry can be put in place. This three-bill package will work in concert with the water board’s current regulatory proposal.

My colleagues on the Rural County Representatives of California Board of Directors support a statutory framework along with statewide regulations for medical marijuana cultivation that maintain a county’s land-use authority while addressing the environmental impacts of marijuana grows. All state agencies should coordinate efforts with local governments in developing enforcement roles. I encourage all San Joaquin Valley county supervisors to join in the efforts at both the legislative level and at the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board.

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