
Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board

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SUBJECT: STATUS OF WATER QUALITY OBJECTIVES FOR SALINITY IN THE
LOWER SAN JOAQUIN RIVER

In June 2017, the Central Valley Water Board adopted an amendment to the Water Quality Control Plan for the Sacramento and San Joaquin River Basins (Basin Plan) to establish water quality objectives for salinity in the Lower San Joaquin River between the mouth of the Merced River and Vernalis, CA (R5-2017-0062). This amendment was later approved by the United States Environmental Protection Agency in December 2018. This Basin Plan amendment established numeric water quality objectives for electrical conductivity (at 25°C) of 1550 $\mu\text{S}/\text{cm}$, expressed as a 30-day running average, except during Extended Dry Periods. During Extended Dry Periods, electrical conductivity (at 25°C) levels shall not exceed 2470 $\mu\text{S}/\text{cm}$ (as a 30-day running average) and 2200 $\mu\text{S}/\text{cm}$ (as an annual average calculated using samples collected during the previous four quarters at minimum). The most recent Extended Dry Period in the lower San Joaquin River ended on 30 September 2023. On 1 October 2023 the lower San Joaquin River returned to the standard water quality objective of 1550 $\mu\text{S}/\text{cm}$, expressed as a 30-day running average. Based on hydrologic conditions during the water years 2024- 2026, the standard water quality objective for salinity is expected to continue to apply in the lower San Joaquin River through at least 30 September 2027.

The Basin Plan definition of an Extended Dry Period is based, in part, upon the San Joaquin Valley Water Year Hydrologic Classification published by the California Department of Water Resources in Bulletin 120. The Basin Plan assigns the following indicator values to the published water year classifications:

- Wet – 5
- Above Normal – 4
- Below Normal – 3

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- Dry – 2
- Critically Dry – 1

An Extended Dry Period shall begin when the sum of the current year's indicator value and the previous two year's indicator values total six (6) or less. An Extended Dry Period shall be deemed to exist for one water year (12 months) following a period with an indicator value total of six (6) or less.

The San Joaquin Valley Hydrologic Water Year Classification for water year 2024 is Above Normal, with an indicator value of four (4). The San Joaquin Valley Hydrologic Water Year Classification for water year 2025 is Below Normal, with an indicator value of three (3). Forecasts indicate that water year 2026 will be classified as Critically Dry, with an indicator value of one (1). A Critically Dry classification for water year 2026 would bring the three-year sum of indicator values to eight (8) and mean that the lower San Joaquin River will not enter into an Extended Dry Period in water year 2027. The standard water quality objective of 1550 $\mu\text{S}/\text{cm}$, expressed as a 30-day running average, would continue to apply for the Lower San Joaquin River between the mouth of the Merced River and Vernalis through at least 30 September 2027.

Further updates regarding the water year classification in the San Joaquin Basin and applicability of water quality objectives for salinity will be distributed as new information becomes available.