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SAN FRANCISCO REGIONAL WATER QUALITY CONTROL BOARD ISSUES PERMIT REQUIRING NUTRIENT REDUCTIONS TO BAY AREA WASTEWATER AGENCIES

Infrastructure improvements to cost \$11B+ regionally

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CONTACT:

Lorien Fono

Executive Director, BACWA

lfono@bacwa.org

(510) 684-2993

San Francisco Bay Area, CA - Last Wednesday, the San Francisco Regional Water Quality Control Board voted to approve a [Nutrient Watershed Permit](#) for 40 Bay Area wastewater facilities that requires steep reductions for nutrient levels in treated wastewater discharged to the San Francisco Bay over the next ten years. Nutrients, such as nitrogen and phosphorus, are products from human waste, detergents and other community water uses. These nutrients travel with other sewage to Bay Area wastewater agencies. Along with impacts related to climate change, the San Francisco Bay has been studied to determine if nutrient reduction will prevent future mortality of fish. Specifically, the Regional Board's new permit requires dischargers to reduce dry season total inorganic nitrogen loads to San Francisco Bay by 40 percent regionwide compared to 2022 loads.

Facility upgrades required to meet the Regional Board's new nutrient load reduction requirements will represent the most significant simultaneous investment of public money in wastewater treatment infrastructure across the Bay Area region since the inception of the Clean Water Act in the 1970s. The necessary upgrades are estimated to cost Bay Area residents and businesses more than \$11 billion dollars. This could translate to a yearly cost increase of several hundred dollars per Bay Area household. As of yet, there are no federal or state funds set aside to defray these costs for Bay Area residents and businesses.

"The Regional Board's action today will trigger 40 facilities to construct billions of dollars in infrastructure upgrades within 10 years," said Lorien Fono, Executive Director of the Bay Area Clean Water Agencies. Fono further states it will cost Bay Area wastewater ratepayers substantially to meet this narrow window of compliance, "While the public wastewater agencies who discharge to the San Francisco Bay are deeply committed to protecting the San Francisco

Bay, we believe for a price tag this large for Bay Area residents, the best approach is for the Regional Board to extend the compliance schedule to allow agencies to build multi-benefit recycled water projects that add to the region's water supply while simultaneously reducing nutrient loads."

"Whenever possible, Bay Area clean water agencies want to pursue strategic no-regrets upgrades and multi-benefit projects that use innovative technologies to lower costs, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, or enhance shoreline resilience or water supply," says Jackie Zipkin, Chair of BACWA and General Manager of the East Bay Dischargers Authority, a joint powers authority managing wastewater for over 1 million East Bay residents.

Nutrient reduction projects are very costly and require careful planning because wastewater treatment plants must operate 24 hours a day, and those operations must continue throughout construction. To date, 14 of the 40 regional wastewater facilities have already enhanced nutrient removal, and several more are implementing upgrades to reduce nutrients further. The 10-year compliance schedule required by the new permit will make implementing large and complex projects, including multi-benefit water recycling options, difficult. The Water Board adopted a resolution concurrent with the permit adoption directing their staff to explore avenues to extend the Compliance Schedule.

"The current compliance timeline will disincentivize innovative projects in favor of traditional gray infrastructure and projects that can be completed quickly, even if they are not the best for the community," says Fono. "The Regional Board has pledged to work with the State Water Resources Control Board to allow for longer compliance timelines so that we can create a coordinated regional plan that maximizes benefits to people and the environment while managing rate increases."

About BACWA

BACWA is a joint powers agency, formed under the California Government Code by the five largest wastewater treatment agencies in the San Francisco Bay Area. BACWA represents more than 50 clean water agencies who collect more than 400 million gallons of wastewater daily and provide sanitary sewer services to more than 7.1 million people.

BACWA is dedicated to working with our members, state and federal regulatory agencies, and non-governmental organizations to improve and enhance the San Francisco Bay environment. We provide technical expertise, financial support, and a public utility perspective to ensure that regulations affecting our members are well-informed, thoughtful, and effective.

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