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Water board raises water reporting requirements

By TIM HEARDEN Capital Press

SACRAMENTO — Citing an emergency because of the drought, the state's water board has ramped up reporting requirements for California's roughly 12,000 landowners and users who have rights to divert water from nearby streams.

The regulations require annual reporting of water diversions rather than reporting once every three years, as previous law required of senior right holders. Those who divert more than 10 acre-feet of water per year must also measure their diversions.

The new rules adopted by the State Water Resources Control Board cover all surface water diversions, including those under pre-1914 and riparian water rights. State officials say the aim of the new rules is to provide more accurate and timely information on water use in California.

"Knowing when, where and how much water is being used is essential to managing the system fairly for all," board chairwoman Felicia Marcus said in prepared remarks. "We've historically not had a complete picture, and these past two years have made it even more essential to take this common-sense move.'

The regulations provide for phasing in requirements for installing measurement devices and a tiered approach to accuracy and recording frequency standards, all based on the size of the diversion, a board news release explained.

For instance, large divert-

ers with a claimed right to take 1,000 acre-feet of water or more per year must have a measuring device in place by Jan. 1, 2017, while those with rights for 100 acre-feet or more have until July 1, 2017, to install the devices. Those with rights to divert 10 acre-feet must comply by Jan. 1, 2018.

The California Cattlemen's Association had sought relief for some ranchers in remote areas and requested that watermaster reports be deemed to fulfill the monitoring and reporting requirements.

However, the board decided that landowners served by a watermaster must nonetheless meet reporting and measuring requirements individually.

The board did away with an exemption for landowners who deemed previous measuring requirements "not locally cost-effective" - which about 70 percent of diverters claimed, according to state officials. Failure to comply with the new regulations could bring fines of up to \$500 per day, according to the board.

The emergency regulations — which take effect immediately were required by Senate Bill 88, which was passed as trailer language in the 2015-16 state budget. The bill, authored by the Senate Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review, passed in June on mostly party-line votes — 52-28 in the Assembly and 24-14 in the Senate.

The rules were adopted Jan. 19 after minor revisions were made following a Dec. 17 workshop with affected parties, including representatives from

The rules come as state water officials have said stop-diversion orders for water right holders could be more targeted to specific watersheds this year because regulators have learned so much about water needs in the past two years.

The board has yet to send out letters warning right holders of potential shutoffs — a move that had been done by this point last vear — because recent storms have raised hopes that large-scale curtailment orders won't be necessary.

In other water-related devel-

 The state Department of Water Resources has identified 21 groundwater basins and sub-basins that are in "significant overdraft" because of pumping, meaning they'll have to meet the earliest deadline Jan. 31, 2020 — for having sustainability plans in place under a package of groundwater bills

passed in 2014. Overdraft impacts can include saltwater intrusion and land subsidence in addition to chronically lowered groundwater levels, the agency explained

in a news release. Recent storms have been a boon to Lake Oroville, the State Water Project's main reservoir. As of Jan. 21, the lake was more than 47 feet higher than its low point of elevation - 649.5 feet above sea level on Dec. 9, according to the

The rapidly rising water will enable officials to open concrete boat ramps they extended to maintain access to the lake during the drought.

Researchers test nonlethal tools to protect livestock from predators

By TIM HEARDEN Capital Press

HOPLAND, Calif. — Researchers are testing nonlethal ways to ward off the coyotes, mountain lions, bears and other wildlife that prey on newborn lambs during the winter.

The University of California's Hopland Research and Extension Center maintains a flock of about 500 sheep for shearing workshops and research projects, and winter is lambing season. In some years, the center has lost as many as 15 percent of its lambs to predators.

The center is now enduring its first winter under a new policy of minimizing the killing of coyotes and other wildlife, opting instead to use such tools as guard dogs, fencing, pasture rotation and motion-sensor lights to deter carnivores.

The practices seemed to work last spring and summer, as the center saw decreases in both the number of sheep killed by predators and the



Courtesy of UC Regents

A sheep lounges in the grass at the University of California's Hopland Research and Extension Center in Hopland, Calif. The center is testing nonlethal ways to prevent predators from attacking

number of coyotes taken, director Kimberly Rodrigues said. But this winter is the big test, she said.

"It's a really important time for the university to do this kind of research and to say what's economically reasonable and feasible," said Rodrigues, a forest resources and land-use expert who took over at the center two years ago. "First and foremost, I have to make sure the team here has a viable flock of sheep."

The center — a one-time sheep ranch that the UC purchased in the early 1950s will serve as a laboratory in the next few years for UC-Berkeley wildlife ecology professor Justin Brashares and others to study how the wildlife population interacts with livestock.

The researchers will use GPS collars on prey and predator species to gather detailed information, and the center will also test the fencing that sheep producers have installed to protect their flocks, Rodrigues explained.

Gaining knowledge of how to ward off predators could be crucial as ranchers in California worry about the arrival of gray wolves, which have state and federal endangered-species protections and cannot legally be killed. The state is taking comments on a wolf management plan that includes a protocol for livestock producers that recommends many of the same measures that Hopland is taking against other predators.

Rodrigues will lead an allday workshop for ranchers Feb. 3 in McArthur, Calif., to discuss nonlethal tools for dealing with wolves and other large predators. The 8:15 a.m. workshop will be at the Inter-Mountain Fair and Event Center, 44218

Rodrigues cautions that wolves "are a whole other animal" than other predators and "strategies are going to have to be a lot more aggressive."

California wildfires cause \$1 billion in insured losses

By JANIE HAR Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — Damage from two destructive Northern California wildfires that killed six and sent thousands fleeing their homes topped \$1 billion in insured losses, according to a preliminary estimate by the state's insurance department.

The two fires started days apart in September, burning more than 200 square miles of remote, mountainous territory north and northeast of San Francisco.

The preliminary figure announced Monday includes \$700 million from a fire centered largely in Lake County that killed four and destroyed nearly 2,000 structures, including some 1,300 homes. The so-called Valley Fire is the third most destructive wildfire in state history, based on the number of structures lost, and the fifth-costliest

Another fire in Amador and Calaveras counties caused an estimated \$300 million in insured losses. That fire killed two people and destroyed more than 800 buildings, making it the seventh-most destructive wildfire to hit the state.

"A year-round fire season is California's new reality," said Insurance Commissioner Dave Jones in a statement. "Residents and communities, especially those in high-risk fire areas, must take precautions now before the next devastating wildfire strikes."

This is the first damage estimate from the California Department of Insurance for the fires, compiled from insurance claims filed through December. A final figure is months away.

Insurers report they have received 5,600 claims for commercial and residential properties, vehicles and other items. Lake County residents have filed the bulk of claims.

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