

Calif. water officials to go after illegal pot grows

By Matt Weiser, Sacramento Bee

California water quality regulators will soon begin inspecting illegal marijuana growing operations in the Central Valley and Sierra Nevada, reversing an earlier ban intended to protect employees.

At a meeting Friday in Rancho Cordova, the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board directed staff to begin cooperating with other agencies to inspect marijuana grows, which have emerged as a major source of environmental damage in many rural counties.

The board and its staff are charged with protecting streams and groundwater in the state's vast interior, a region encompassing 37 counties and 40 percent of California's land area. It also includes the western flank of the Sierra Nevada, a sparsely populated and rugged region favored by marijuana growers.

"The environmental impacts are significant," said Pamela Creedon, the water board's executive officer. "If we don't get some kind of control over this, we're going to have some serious damage being done."

Marijuana growers encompass a spectrum of individuals, from gravely ill cancer patients growing their own small supply of medicinal marijuana under the legal authority of California's Proposition 215 to undocumented immigrants working on behalf of violent multinational drug cartels.

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