

## Conservation, environmental justice groups sue state over ag runoff regulations.



Steve Shimek of The Otter Project leads the coalition of groups trying to improve water quality

Water pollution seems to last longer than consensus on the Central Coast.

It took years of debate and appeals until the state issued the final rule in September.

Now, a coalition of organizations is joining Antonia Manzo, who lives in unincorporated Monterey County's Camp 21 near Gonzales where she can't drink the water due to nitrate contamination, in suing the state.

Santa Barbara Channelkeeper, The Otter Project, Environmental Justice Coalition for Water, Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's

Associations and California Sportfishing Protection Alliance filed a lawsuit Nov. 27 in Sacramento County Superior Court against the State Water Resources Control Board and Ocean Mist Farms.

After the Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board approved the five-year regulations, known as the "ag waiver," environmental groups and agricultural groups promptly appealed to the state, claiming the new rules weren't tough enough or were too tough, respectively.

In the lawsuit, the plaintiffs object to the state board's modified version of the ag waiver, arguing it fails to do what it's supposed to: protect water quality.

The ag waiver "does not require that a [grower] actually comply with water quality uses," the lawsuit states. "Rather, the [ag waiver] provides only that a covered discharger implement unspecified 'management practices,' and that if such 'management practices' are not effective, the discharger implement different, unspecified 'management practices.'"

In approving the final version, the plaintiffs claim the state board selectively disregarded scientific data, and ultimately produced a set of water quality rules that are illegal based on California water code.