

California Assemblymember Jim Wood Introduces Legislation to Provide Consistency for Medical Marijuana Farms and Protect Vital Watersheds

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February 5, 2015 - Assemblyman Jim Wood (District 2) has introduced the Marijuana Watershed Protection Act (AB 243). The legislation would address the environmental impacts of medical marijuana cultivation, and would seek to mitigate the impact of the crop on California's water quality and supply.



Last year the Governor approved funding for a pilot program tasking the Department of Fish and Wildlife, and the State, and Regional Water Boards with educating, permitting, and enforcing regulations as they pertain to medical marijuana cultivation. The program implemented by the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board established parameters that can guide statewide standards. AB 243 would build on that program's momentum and create regulations to address environmental protections and water use on medical marijuana farms statewide.

"The Marijuana Watershed Protection Act is about trying to provide regulation around something that has never been regulated before. The voters legalized the cultivation and use of medical marijuana under Proposition 215 almost twenty years ago, and we desperately need an environmental regulatory structure," Assemblyman Wood said.

The program allows the agencies to address the impacts of the crop as they would any other product, explicitly looking past the ambiguity surrounding the cultivation of medical marijuana on the state and federal level.

"This is not an attempt to eradicate medical marijuana farms, it is about establishing a reasonable permitting and regulatory process, as well as educating growers on best practices" said Wood.

It is important to note that this legislation is not addressing a process to authorize, permit or approve the cultivating of medical marijuana. AB 243 exclusively affects environmental regulations, the use of water, and water discharges in medical marijuana farms.

Wood says, "AB 243 does not change the enforcement or the laws around medical marijuana. We are asking the legal growers in the community to engage with us and help us solve our water problems. While this bill may address a narrow aspect of a very complex issue, I believe this is a critical step toward protecting some

of California's greatest treasures - the natural beauty and diversity of our environment."

Lee Adams, Chair of Rural Counties Representatives of California (RCRC) and Sierra County Supervisor said, "The effects of marijuana cultivation upon California's rural counties are growing at a rapid pace, and if not managed appropriately, the environmental impacts can be devastating. A statewide regulatory scheme including specific local control principles needs to be implemented, and we applaud Assemblymember Wood for advancing the discussion on this challenging issue."

Watersheds across the state are going dry for the first time in recorded history and habitats for endangered fish are evaporating. As California continues to endure an unprecedented drought, the Marijuana Watershed Protection Act will provide guidance and consistency to an industry that has historically been forced to operate without either.