



RESTORETHEDELTA.ORG | (209) 475- 9550 | 925 N YOSEMITE ST, UNIT #3, STOCKTON, CA 95203

August 5, 2019

Ms. Monica Nino
San Joaquin County Administrator
44 N San Joaquin Street, #650
Stockton, CA 95202

Re: Toxic Algal Bloom Stockton Waterfront

Dear Ms. Nino:

Restore the Delta works in the areas of public education and outreach so that all Californians recognize the Sacramento-San Joaquin Bay Delta as part of California's natural heritage, deserving of restoration.

We fight for a Delta with waters that are fishable, swimmable, drinkable, and farmable, able to support the health of the estuary, San Francisco Bay, and the ocean beyond. A coalition of California residents, business leaders, civic organizations, community groups, faith-based communities, union locals, farmers, fishermen, and environmentalists, Restore the Delta envisions the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta as a place where a vibrant local economy, tourism, recreation, farming, wildlife, and fisheries thrive as a result of resident efforts to protect our waterway commons.

To that end, I am writing to express my concern over the response by San Joaquin County's Departments of Public Health and Environmental Health in regard to the expanding toxic algal bloom along Stockton's waterfront.

In case you are not aware, *The Record* [reported on the presence of green algae](#) water starting at McLeod Lake on July 25, 2019. On Monday, July 29, 2019, Restore the Delta notified the Central Valley Regional Water Resources Control Board about the algal bloom because we saw no further outreach or warnings to the public from the San Joaquin County Department of Public Health or the Department of Environmental Health. The CVRWCB informed us that tests had shown cyanobacteria present in Stockton waterways, and asked us what we wanted to see happen. We indicated public postings were needed and that the Stockton Police Department should be notified so as to share information about the danger of toxic algal blooms with homeless residents.

[Restore the Delta has studied and written extensively about the proliferation and danger of toxic algal blooms forming in the Delta](#) because they [threaten public health, fish and wildlife and drinking water supplies](#). Cyanobacteria can cause liver failure in dogs and small children, and in high enough concentrations in adults as well. Other bacteria related to harmful algal blooms (HABs) can become airborne and cause respiratory illness in humans. The presence and spread of algal blooms are a threat to health and human safety.

Conditions that cause HABs include warm still water, exposed to bright light, not properly circulated, and polluted with bacteria. Consequently, Stockton's waterfront is one of many hotspots throughout the 1100 miles of Delta waterways that is ripe for the development of algal blooms. In addition, conditions exist with climate change for even greater proliferation of HABs in San Joaquin County due to increased air and water temperatures, and reduced cold freshwater runoff into the watershed.

On Friday, August 2, 2019, we identified the spread of the algal bloom into Mormon Slough where a number of homeless residents are camped just feet away from the water. I followed through with the CVRWQB where I learned that the County did not have resources to begin outreach to the homeless encampments, and that plans to let marinas know about the presence of cyanobacteria and the Stockton algal bloom were just getting started.

At that time, I called the Department of Public Health to find out when notification would begin with the homeless encampments. A polite employee let me know that no plans were underway because state "protocols" had not been enacted, and the County had no funding for outreach. State protocols, as a term of art, have not been used in any explanations to Restore the Delta by the CVWRQB. We understand that the CVWRQB does not have funding for on the ground outreach and notifications, and leaves those duties to the County.

While I surmise that a certain level of bacterial toxicity must be present to kickstart some type of emergency protocol system, I feel that the County's lack of public health notification can be described as too slow and methodical. First, as the story in *The Record* indicates, it will take weeks for the bubbler system to be repaired at McLeod Lake to help with water circulation. Second, we anticipate a number of extremely warm days over the next few weeks. Third, we have had E.coli outbreaks in San Joaquin waterways over the last two months; chances are high that discharge from encampments along Mormon Slough has contributed to the E.coli outbreak problem contributing bacteria, in turn, to the algal bloom outbreak. In other words, the algal bloom problem along Stockton's waterfront is likely to worsen before it gets better, meaning public health risks could likely increase. The story in *The Record* broke on July 25th. Eleven days later the County is now just thinking through how to protect homeless encampments from toxic algal bloom exposure.

Moreover, the length of time to prepare and execute a proper response leaves Restore the Delta staff with many questions including:

- 1) What are the County's protocols for reaching out to homeless populations along our waterways in case of any emergency, including flood threat?
- 2) What are the County's protocols for reaching out to homeless populations regarding public health emergencies?
- 3) What are the County's protocols for timely outreach to the general public regarding emergency water quality problems? What are the communication protocols for these challenges with the Stockton Police Department
- 4) Why isn't this type of outreach regularly funded? Reaching marinas and businesses is fairly easy to accomplish through social media, phone trees, and dropping off fliers to help get the word out. Radio public service announcements, and earned media stories are also low cost ways to get the word about algal bloom dangers to the public.

In addition, Restore the Delta is very concerned that outreach to the homeless seemed like an afterthought or second tier of concern by County staff. Residents who own boats, who frequent marinas, and who have the means to recreate near water are more likely to utilize social media, read newspapers, follow Restore the Delta announcements, or posts and blogs put forth by the California Water Boards. Many homeless residents who have economic, health, emotional, cognitive, and social challenges are less likely to be plugged into traditional and social media sources. Yet, because they are using our waterways for basic sanitation purposes, they are much more likely to be the first people to be in contact with the water. We believe that addressing sanitation needs for those camping along Mormon Slough should become an immediate priority for San Joaquin County to protect the homeless from this algal bloom and to reduce E.coli contamination into the degraded waters of the Stockton waterfront.

We also believe that there is a moral imperative to protect the homeless, some of our region's most vulnerable people from contaminated waterways. Cyanobacteria can cause extreme illness and death. Allowing the homeless to be harmed by cyanobacteria will lessen their ability to ever recover from the causes of their homeless condition and to become healed and engaged members of our community.

In conclusion, I recognize that the issues that I am raising in this letter can be asked of all California counties, cities, and state water agencies. How are we organizing a timely and effective response to the presence of HABs throughout the state before people are harmed? How are we organizing that response in order to protect homeless populations from cyanobacteria? And how are we handling sanitation for homeless encampments along our waterways to protect our state's water supply from E.coli and other contamination resulting from untreated human waste?

San Joaquin County, however, is ground zero for these challenges. I am sharing my concern because we want to see all residents, including the homeless, protected from exposure to cyanobacteria, and the creation of a management plan for what we believe will become a regular challenge along our waterways. Understanding the seriousness of the issue is essential for the creation of a timely and effective response that will involve the cooperation and coordination of state, county, and city government agencies.

Letter to Monica Nino, August 5, 2019: HABs

Responding to the threat of HABs is just one of many new climate change conditions in the Delta for which Delta counties and Delta cities will have to mitigate.

Thank you for considering my comments and questions. If Restore the Delta can be of any help with outreach efforts or in discussion with the County regarding these issues as they relate to the work of the Task Force on Homelessness, please let me know. We stand ready to help with solutions.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Barbara Barrigan-Parrilla". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being the most prominent.

Barbara Barrigan-Parrilla
Executive Director
Restore the Delta

Cc: Laurie Montes, Office of the City Manager, Stockton
Mayor Michael Tubbs, City of Stockton
Chair, San Joaquin County Board of Supervisors, Miguel Villapudua
San Joaquin County Supervisor Kathy Miller
San Joaquin County Supervisor Chuck Winn
San Joaquin County Supervisor Bob Elliott
San Joaquin County Supervisor Tom Patti
Stockton Councilmember Dan Wright
Stockton Councilmember Susan Lenz
Stockton Councilmember Christina Fugazi
Stockton Councilmember Jesus Andrade
Stockton Councilmember Sol Jobrack
Stockton Councilmember Paul Canepa
Joaquin Esquivel, Chair, State Water Resources Control Board
Karl E. Longley, Chair, Central Valley Regional Resources Control Board