



Court approves \$1.75 million settlement for cannabis cultivator's environmental violations

Cultivator must remove unauthorized reservoirs, restore environment

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SACRAMENTO – A Humboldt County Superior Court judge approved a settlement that requires a cannabis cultivator to pay \$1.75 million for building and diverting water from illegal onstream reservoirs without first obtaining permits required by the California Water Boards and California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW).

The settlement, which was reached after a lengthy investigation, resolves violations by Joshua Sweet and his companies, The Hills LLC and Shadow Light Ranch LLC, that include: the owner's destruction of wetland habitat and stream channels; conversion of oak woodland to grow cannabis; and failure to work with the State Water Resources Control Board, North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board and CDFW to satisfy permitting requirements.

If Sweet completes restoration of the damaged property by 2026, \$1 million of the penalty will be suspended. This work includes the removal of three unauthorized reservoirs and the rehabilitation of stream channels and damaged wetlands.

"It is critical for all cannabis cultivators to be environmentally responsible and protect California's water supply and water quality," said Taro Murano, program manager for the State Water Board's Division of Water Rights cannabis enforcement section. "Sweet chose to operate his business while ignoring regulations designed to protect the environment. He must now remediate the environmental damage he caused and pay a significant penalty. No one should get a business advantage by ignoring the law and harming the environment."

"This case represents years of hard work by dedicated staff to remediate damage to streambed channels, wetland habitat and oak woodlands," said Nathaniel Arnold, acting

chief of law enforcement for CDFW. “The settlement also speaks volumes to the egregious nature of this case and should send a strong message to those working outside of state regulations to cultivate cannabis. Our natural resources deserve to be respected.”

According to the settlement, Sweet must pay \$500,000 to the Division of Water Rights, \$175,000 to the North Coast Water Board, and \$75,000 to CDFW over five years. Additionally, he is required to obtain all the necessary permits, cease unauthorized water diversions and use of water, restrict future property development and comply with all applicable regulations.

More information on cannabis enforcement is available on the [State Water Board](#) and [CDFW](#) websites.

The State Water Board’s mission is to preserve, enhance and restore the quality of California’s water resources and drinking water for the protection of the environment, public health and all beneficial uses, and to ensure proper water allocation for present and future generations.

CDFW’s mission is to manage California’s diverse fish, wildlife, and plant resources, and the habitats upon which they depend, for their ecological values and their use and enjoyment by the public.

The North Coast region stretches from the Oregon border to Marin County and is characterized by remote wilderness and towering redwoods. The area accounts for 12% of the state’s land area and 35% of its freshwater runoff. Timber harvesting, agriculture, recreation and tourism are mainstays of the local economy.