

California Agency Watershed Management Strategic Plan Draft 18 Month Action Plan

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3/21/05

Purpose and Background

The Resources Agency and California Environmental Protection Agency recently updated a memorandum of understanding (MOU), required by the Watershed, Clean Beaches and Water Quality Act of 2002, to coordinate and provide stakeholder input to watershed programs and investments. The MOU establishes a forum of deputy directors to accomplish these objectives by implementing the state's strategic watershed management plan and by aligning it with existing and new resource conservation and protection programs that have watershed elements or objectives, such as CalFed and the Ocean Action Plan.

The original California Agency Watershed Management Strategic Plan was developed in 2003 in response to recommendations from a legislatively required task force (AB 2117, Wayne, Statutes of 2000). In February of this year, the Resources Agency and CalEPA convened eleven departments, boards, conservancies and offices to serve as a steering committee and to update this plan by prioritizing policy and program needs and developing an action plan for the next 18 months. The committee reviewed accomplishments of the last two years and considered recommendations for additional action by the former California Watershed Council (CWC), which served as a stakeholder forum in 2003 and 2004.

Accomplishments and Priorities

Significant progress has been made in achieving plan goals to improve agency coordination and collaboration, demonstrate watershed health, encourage collective investments, and provide for local involvement. With respect to funding programs, administrative changes have been implemented that respond to public concerns, and additional interagency coordination is occurring in Sacramento, in regional venues, and in the field at the project level. Progress is being made in permit coordination to expedite on-the-ground restoration, and agencies are considering the contributions of other agencies' regulatory and non-regulatory activities in the development of watershed, water quality, and species recovery efforts.

Agencies have developed websites, such as the Resources Agency's Watershed Portal, interagency databases, and data cataloguing policies to share data, make it available to the public, and even incorporate locally generated information. The draft Action Plan has identified steps for continued progress in this area.

The steering committee recognizes that additional progress must be made in demonstrating improvements to watershed health. We will be working together to examine common performance measures and opportunities for joint or coordinated monitoring. We also recognize the importance of technical assistance for landowners, local agencies, watershed groups and other stakeholders, and will continue to look for cost-effective approaches that support local stewardship.

Action Plan Summary

The Action Plan is organized according to five elements that reflect Strategic Plan goals, major activities and CWC concerns. The following list summarizes the 3 to 5 major actions in each element of the action plan.

Governance and Management

- Oversee the implementation and review of the watershed MOU and strategic plan
- Identify strategic opportunities for cooperative efforts among agencies and programs that will result in more effective, efficient watershed protection
- Work with Ocean Protection Council to identify state priorities for coastal watershed protection, opportunities for agency coordination, and ways to promote stewardship
- Establish performance measures for assessing strategic plan success, including the demonstration of watershed health improvements

Information to Support Watershed Activities and Demonstrate Watershed Health

- Coordinate monitoring and analysis activities related to watershed health
- Ensure that data and information are available to agencies and the public
- Ensure use of common GIS framework data
- Implement CWC survey of local watershed data needs and survey of agency data

Regulatory Coordination

- Coordinate regulatory and non-regulatory programs where appropriate
- Develop programmatic approaches to restoration programs and permits
- Use watershed approaches for meeting regulatory needs where possible

Funding, Collective Investment and Economics

- Coordinate funding programs to improve agency efficiencies and to facilitate public access to information
- Establish Integrated Watershed Management Program with input by all interested agencies and public
- Continue to support Southern California Wetlands Recovery Project efforts to restore watersheds critical to wetland recovery
- Work with key federal watershed programs upfront to improve effectiveness

Project Level Coordination, Local Involvement and Stewardship

- Identify opportunities to cooperate in Arundo control in southern California
- Provide guidance to public for watershed assessment and planning
- Continue to evaluate local capacity and support technical assistance needs

Once finalized, the Action Plan will be posted on the Watershed Portal. The steering committee will meet annually with the secretaries, the public, and federal and local agencies to discuss plan implementation progress.