

ITEM: 11

SUBJECT: Development of a Watershed-Based Plan for the Battle Creek Watershed

BOARD ACTION: *Informational Item Only*

BACKGROUND: The California Regional Water Quality Control Board, Central Valley Region (Central Valley Water Board) has been working in the Battle Creek Watershed to address concerns related to in-stream sediment delivered from multiple upslope sources. The impact of this sediment delivery is significant and is currently threatening a multi-million dollar fisheries Restoration Project that has been underway for decades.

In August 2012, a large wildfire known as the Ponderosa Fire scorched over 27,000 acres of the Battle Creek watershed. Since the fire, sediment-related water quality issues have increased dramatically. The combination of post-fire erosion, salvage logging operations, forestry regeneration herbicide applications, and the chronic failure of legacy road features has created water quality issues that threaten to destroy the ideal spawning habitat the Restoration Project aims to restore. The Central Valley Water Board has significant concerns about the impact that post-fire sediment impacts are having on water quality and associated beneficial uses in Battle Creek; and proposes the use of a Watershed-Based Plan (WBP) to address both near-term and long-term sediment related issues.

The framework and the “Nine Elements” that are included in a WBP have been developed by the United States Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA) and are required for Clean Water Act (CWA) Section 319 funding. This type of watershed plan provides an analytical framework for managing efforts to both restore water quality in degraded (impaired) areas and to protect overall watershed health in threatened waters. Both the Battle Creek Watershed Conservancy and the Battle Creek Working Group (a multi-agency technical advisory group associated with the Restoration Project) have expressed an interest in supporting the development of a WBP for Battle Creek.

The development of a WBP for the Battle Creek Watershed is a unique opportunity to qualify for 319(h) funding that would otherwise not be available to non-listed waters. Additionally, there are efforts being made at the State Water Resources Control Board and U.S. EPA to encourage the use of WBP and the nine elements within other state (e.g., California Department of Fish and Wildlife, Department of Water Resources, Department of Conservation) and federal agencies for separate watershed planning efforts (e.g., Integrated Regional Watershed Planning (IRWM)) and associated funding sources (i.e., Prop. 84, Prop. 1).

ISSUES: Existing permits, programs, and enforcement authority may not be sufficient or be the most effective set of tools to address a multi-faceted, sediment-related water quality issue in Battle Creek. Successful development and implementation of a WBP in Battle Creek could not only help to address water quality issues in Battle Creek, but could also serve as a transferable model for protection of other “high quality” and threatened waterbodies within the Central Valley Region.

RECOMMENDATION:

Verbal support by Board for staff and management to pursue the development of a Watershed-Based Plan for the Battle Creek Watershed.

Mgmt. Review_____

Legal Review__ASD_____

1, 2 October 2015
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