



Biological Objectives Policy Advisory Groups

What is it?

Since 2005, SWAMP has been a key player in the effort to improve assessments of aquatic ecosystem health in California by supporting the development of bioassessment tools throughout the State. Bioassessment is a method of assessing the biological health of our water resources by conducting direct measurements of the resident animals and plants (i.e. fish, insects and algae). (See related PSA Achievement Report [link].) The state of the science relating to bioassessment in California's perennial, wadeable streams (shallow streams that flow year-round) is now advanced to the point that the State Board is currently developing a Statewide Policy for Biological Objectives in Perennial Wadeable Streams (Biological Objectives Policy). The Policy will set numeric thresholds for biological condition statewide. Biological thresholds are desired environmental conditions established to protect aquatic life beneficial uses that can be utilized to identify and protect healthy streams as well as in impairment determinations, discharge permit limits and other regulatory activities.

The State Board is following the established and legally mandated process for developing new water quality objectives which includes scientific peer review and stakeholder oversight as well as public outreach and participation. Three advisory groups will provide input during the development of the Biological Objectives Policy: the Stakeholder Advisory Group, Scientific Advisory Group, and Regulatory Advisory Group. The Stakeholder and Scientific Advisory Groups were formed in 2010. The Regulatory Advisory Group will be formed by summer 2011.

The Stakeholder Advisory Group represents a wide range of groups from all over the state with an interest in biological objectives. They communicate the Biological Objectives Policy goals to other stakeholders and carry overall stakeholder comments back to the Scientific and Regulatory Advisory Groups. The goal here is to ensure that stakeholder input is incorporated into the technical and policy elements throughout this process.

Biological Objectives Policy Advisory Groups - continued

The Scientific Advisory Group consists of an external expert panel of scientists who provide review of the technical aspects of the Biological Objectives Policy. This group is made up of leading scientists with extensive experience developing, implementing and evaluating bioassessment programs.

Staff is currently in the process of assembling the Regulatory Advisory Group, which will be comprised of representatives from the nine Regional Water Boards and State Water Board program managers. The Regulatory Advisory Group will coordinate with staff in other State Water Board programs and at all Regional Water Boards. This group will ensure the project delivers the tools that regulators and managers need to implement the policy.

Why is it important to the State?

Many State and Regional Board regulatory activities rely on water quality objectives that are based on chemical, physical or toxicological thresholds. The Biological Objectives Policy will result in objectives based on biological thresholds that can be used in conjunction with other water quality objectives to enhance the State's ability to effectively assess and protect the health of our water resources. The formation of the three advisory groups ensures that the biological objectives are developed to the highest scientific and technological standards and that stakeholders and the public are given ample opportunity to stay informed, participate and provide input into the process.

Why is it important to me?

The value of bioassessment is that it is a direct measure of biological health. Using bioassessment in combination with chemical, physical and toxicological measurements makes water quality assessments more comprehensive and increases the State and Regional Board's ability to detect problems and monitor compliance with regulatory requirements. This contributes to more effective management of our water resources for the benefit of all Californians.

How will this information be used?

The three advisory groups will provide input at every phase of policy development, and the comments and suggestions from each group will be shared with and considered by the other two groups. This information will be coordinated and integrated by State Board staff into the final Biological Objectives Policy.