State of California

The California Water Boards

2010 Update to Strategic Plan 2008-2012

June 2010

Our Vision

A sustainable California made possible by clean water and water availability for both human uses and environmental resource protection.

Our Mission

To preserve, enhance, and restore the quality of California's water resources, and ensure their proper allocation and efficient use, for the benefit of present and future generations.

Our Goals

Goal 1. Implement strategies to fully support the beneficial uses for all 2006-listed water bodies by 2030.

Goal 2. Improve and protect groundwater quality in high-use basins by 2030.

Goal 3. Increase sustainable local water supplies available for meeting existing and future beneficial uses by 1,725,000 acre-feet per year, in excess of 2002 levels, by 2015, and ensure adequate flows for fish and wildlife habitat.

Goal. 4. Comprehensively address water quality protection and restoration, and the relationship between water supply and water quality, and describe the connections between water quality, water quantity, and climate change, throughout California's water planning processes.

Goal 5. Improve transparency and accountability by ensuring that Water Board goals and actions are clear and accessible, by demonstrating and explaining results achieved with respect to the goals and resources available, by enhancing and improving accessibility of data and information, and by encouraging the creation of organizations or cooperative agreements that advance this goal, such as establishment of a statewide water data institute.

Goal 6. Enhance consistency across the Water Boards, on an ongoing basis, to ensure our processes are effective, efficient, and predictable, and to promote fair and equitable application of laws, regulations, policies, and procedures.

Goal 7. Ensure that the Water Boards have access to information and expertise, including employees with appropriate knowledge and skills, needed to effectively and efficiently carry out the Water Boards' mission.

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Introduction

The Water Boards' ***Strategic Plan Update 2008-2012***, adopted September 2, 2008, identifies priorities that focus on key actions for protecting the quality of the State's surface waters and groundwaters, and promoting sustainable water supplies. While much has been accomplished at this midpoint in implementation, the Water Boards have been compelled, as have most State agencies, to evaluate and update the plan based on various factors affecting the amount and nature of our work. These factors include worsening State budget issues, mandatory furloughs, new legislation, and shifts in priorities, such as addressing State infrastructure needs under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. Consequently, completion of work on some of the actions identified in the Strategic Plan has been delayed beyond the timeframes specified in the plan, and shifts in priorities have been identified.

This ***2010 Strategic Plan Update Report*** identifies the Strategic Plan actions that (a) have been accomplished to date, (b) are in progress, and (c) are on hold until such time that the Water Boards can revisit them. Most importantly, based on a consideration of the various intervening factors that affect Water Board work, we have identified a set of updated strategic priority actions that must see significant progress over the next 18 months.

Our Accomplishments to Date – Completed Actions

The Water Boards have successfully completed many Strategic Plan actions since the plan's adoption. These accomplishments have furthered our efforts in the areas of data and performance management, enforcement, groundwater protection, and stormwater regulation.

Through the California Water Quality Monitoring Council, the Water Board released water quality monitoring data and assessment information based on theme areas via "web portal" releases. Currently, three out of four of these "web portals" have been released and include the safety of swimming in our waters, the safety of eating fish and shellfish from our waters, and the health of our aquatic ecosystems. The Water Boards also released its first web-based Annual Performance Report in September 2009, which addresses what the Water Boards are doing to protect water quality. This report displays information on program performance that very few state agencies, either in California or nationally, have thus far been able to provide.

Major upgrades of our core databases to enhance access to data and information were pivotal to the Water Boards' success in reducing the backlog of facilities subject to mandatory minimum penalties (MMPs) by 50 percent. As of March 2009, over 12,000 backlogged MMP violations had been addressed within the regions. The State Water Board continues to actively work with the Regional Water Boards to eliminate any remaining MMP backlog. Progress can be tracked through standard reporting mechanisms, such as the Water Code section 13385(o) report and the web-based Annual Performance Report. Another milestone for enforcement was the adoption of the statewide Supplemental Environmental Project Policy in February 2009, and the updated statewide Water Quality Enforcement Policy in November 2009.

To promote public access to our data, the Water Boards upgraded and developed online public reports and query tools. Groundwater quality and associated data, as well as information about contaminant sources that could affect groundwater, are accessible via the GeoTracker Groundwater Ambient Monitoring and Assessment (GAMA) data system on the State Water Board's website.

Contributing to a more locally available, sustainable water supply, the State Water Board adopted incentives and requirements into its general stormwater construction permit to promote

low impact development, green infrastructure, and stormwater reuse. The Water Boards also adopted a stormwater reuse target in the Recycled Water Policy, approved by the Office of Administrative Law in May 2009, to "Increase the use of stormwater over use in 2007 by at least 500,000 acre feet per year (AFY) by 2020 and by at least one million AFY by 2030".

To see the entire list of completed actions, please refer to Appendix 2. Water Board accomplishments in general are also described in the Annual Accomplishments Report.

Our Focus Through 2011 – Strategic Priority Actions

In response to significant budgetary, personnel, and programmatic impacts resulting from the State's continuing fiscal struggles and new priorities established by the Governor and the Legislature, the Water Boards have identified the priority actions that we plan to complete over the next 18 months. Some of these priorities are related to actions already identified in the Strategic Plan, while others are new. Despite current and future restrictions in our budgeted resources, the Water Boards are committed to substantially completing, by the end of 2011, the strategic priority actions identified in this update report.

These priority actions relate to several key areas of Water Board responsibility: controlling nonpoint source pollution, supporting sustainable systems, promoting statewide efficiency and consistency, and improving our performance through evaluation. The entire list of the Water Boards' updated strategic priority actions is in Appendix 1, while some priority actions are highlighted below. The priorities of each Regional Water Board to address concerns specific to their region can be found in the fact sheets contained in the Annual Accomplishments Report.

CONTROLLING NON-POINT SOURCE POLLUTION

Many of the most serious water quality problems in California are associated with non-point source (NPS) pollution. Non-point source pollution deposits a variety of pollutants into our surface and groundwater bodies, causing violations of water quality standards. The Water Boards have a renewed focus on the implementation of Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs) where the major pollutant loadings are derived from NPS pollution. To improve the State's ability to effectively manage NPS pollution, the State Water Board has made it a priority to streamline the TMDL development process beginning with the development of a statewide policy for trash, building on the experience of the Regional Water Boards that have already adopted trash TMDLs. Trash is a severe problem; it clogs our waterways and poses a threat to the beneficial uses of our water bodies. The development of TMDLs to address such impairments is highly resource intensive. The Water Boards are identifying opportunities to address pollutants of concern statewide, such as trash, through the adoption of statewide policies, eliminating the need to develop individual regional TMDLs. The Water Boards will also conduct a comprehensive review of the statewide program in light of lessons learned over the years with the goal of accelerating the rate of TMDL adoption and implementation.

Although not as widespread as pollution resulting from trash, activities on National Forest System (NFS) lands, including timber harvest, grazing, and fire suppression, also contribute to NPS pollution of our water bodies. Through a collaborative process with the U.S. Forest Service, the State Water Board will develop a statewide approach to address these activities by updating best management practices to control NPS pollution on these lands, and then developing a statewide mechanism to regulate these discharges.

Complementing these statewide approaches, the Regional Water Boards have prioritized areas for TMDL development and implementation such as the Klamath River in the North Coast Region, the Delta in the Central Valley Region, and Lake Tahoe in the Lahontan Region.

SUPPORTING SUSTAINABLE SYSTEMS

As California experiences continued population growth, increasing land development, and the effects of climate change, the State is compelled to find innovative ways to meet our current needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs. This call to focus on sustainability and sustainable system development also applies to water resources management. Traditional water infrastructure, such as wastewater collection and treatment systems, must be considered along with natural watershed systems. Creating and maintaining sustainable systems requires collaboration among key stakeholders and local, State, and federal regulators to ensure that sound investments in our water, wastewater, and ecosystem infrastructures are made.

Wastewater Infrastructure

Wastewater treatment plants and sewer lines help to ensure the protection of public health and the environment, yet much of the U.S. wastewater infrastructure is degrading or inadequate for current populations and is contributing to surface and ground water pollution. In 2008, the U.S. EPA estimated the cost to address California's wastewater infrastructure to be $18.2 billion. The need for updated and new infrastructure is particularly critical for small communities with very limited resources. The State Water Board will emphasize a renewed focus on small community wastewater projects and make it a priority to help ensure that small and/or disadvantaged communities have the resources needed to protect water quality and public health related to wastewater. The State Water Board will also address impacts to water quality from failed onsite wastewater treatment (septic) systems by developing statewide regulations and a statewide conditional waiver of waste discharge requirements. The regulations will deal specifically with any septic system that is subject to major repair, that pools or discharges to the surface, or that discharges waste that threatens to impair surface or ground water quality.

Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta System

The Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta (Delta), which is formed by the confluence of the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers, lies at the heart of California's complex water system and supports a variety of beneficial uses. As land subsidence has rendered the Delta's system of levees unstable, salty water from the San Francisco Bay system moves inland, increasing salinity in the southern Delta. This saltwater intrusion, combined with water diversions that remove nearly half of the freshwater flows into the Delta, has a profound effect on the ecology of the Delta. To address some of these issues, the State Water Board is reviewing its southern Delta salinity and San Joaquin River flow objectives and implementation program. This review is gathering scientific information on which to consider and base potential amendments to protect southern Delta agricultural beneficial uses and lower San Joaquin River fish and wildlife beneficial uses. Furthermore, as part of the 2009 Delta legislation established by Senate Bill X7 1, the State Water Board is taking steps to determine instream flow needs and criteria to protect valuable Delta public trust resources, as well as enhance water rights enforcement for the Delta.

In other efforts to provide for sustainable ecosystems, the State Water Board is developing regulations for the Russian River watershed to control the diversion and use of water for crop frost protection. The Regional Water Boards are prioritizing more local efforts to improve existing wastewater infrastructure and increase low impact development requirements for new development and redevelopment. In addition, a priority for the Central Valley Regional Water Board is the adoption of a methyl mercury TMDL for the Delta.

PROMOTING STATEWIDE EFFICIENCY AND CONSISTENCY

In concert with California's water pollution control laws, the Water Boards' policies and plans form the cornerstone for regulating discharges of pollutants that could impair the beneficial uses of the State's surface and ground waters. The nine Regional Water Boards, which are organized by hydrologic areas to appropriately address conditions specific to their watersheds, set water quality standards and implementation provisions in policies and plans, and issue waste discharge requirements (permits) in accordance with all applicable laws, regulations, policies, and plans. The State Water Board develops statewide policies, plans, regulations, and permits for water quality control where the issues are relevant to all or multiple Regional Water Boards. The Regional Water Boards then provide local implementation of statewide policies and permits. While the statewide approach promotes efficiency and consistency, it will become increasingly important to identify where it also promotes effectiveness as budgetary resources become more limited.

One example of promoting statewide efficiency and consistency is the State Water Board's Policy for Implementation of Toxics Standards for Inland Surface Waters, Enclosed Bays, and Estuaries of California (State Implementation Policy, or SIP). Originally adopted in 2000 and revised in 2005, the State Water Board is now looking at revised toxicity control provisions to complement U.S. EPA's recently-released draft statistical methods for toxicity tests. The State Water Board also is developing monitoring and desalination provisions for the California Ocean Plan, which the coastal Regional Water Boards are responsible for implementing. These provisions are intended to address monitoring to answer water quality-related questions and to reduce the impacts of desalination plant intakes.

Because the polluting effects of storm water are a concern across the State, the State Water Board has adopted statewide stormwater permits for municipalities, industry, construction activities, and the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans). The State Water Board is committed to developing a new general permit for small municipal separate storm sewer systems, a new general permit for industrial facilities, and a new statewide permit for Caltrans. These statewide permits not only address a leading cause of water pollution, they also result in more efficient use of resources by the Water Boards and the regulated community.

IMPROVING PERFORMANCE THROUGH EVALUATION AND COLLABORATION

The continued reduction of State services and the significant loss of funding and staff are driving our efforts to look at different ways to perform our work, improve our services, and deliver our program outputs. We have implemented reviews of several of our programs, initiated several enforcement projects to protect water quality, and continue to increase public access to our data.

The State Water Board recently launched programmatic reviews, starting with the Non-15 Waste Discharge Requirements (WDR) Program, the Underground Storage Tank Cleanup Fund (USTCF) Program, and the UST Site Cleanup Program. The goal of these reviews is to identify problems, understand the declines in performance, and to strengthen these programs through improvements. The WDR Program controls many pollutants that, if left unregulated, may migrate to underlying groundwater, destroying or impairing their beneficial uses. This program has experienced a statewide decline in inspections and enforcement. In fiscal year 2008-2009, with over 2,500 active facilities, just over 500 inspections were performed statewide. The evaluation will identify opportunities to reverse this decline, improve the oversight of discharges that may impact groundwater quality including as yet, unregulated discharges, and ensure that groundwater is protected, notably in communities that rely on it as their primary source of

drinking water. The Water Boards' long-term goal is to regulate potential sources of groundwater contamination more effectively and to bring timely and targeted enforcement actions against entities that do not comply with groundwater protection standards.

The USTCF Program faces reduced funding, depleted cash reserves, and inadequate financial management. Efforts are currently underway to reduce the backlog and delays in payment, and recent improvements in communication and efficiency of claims handling has been producing positive results in turn-around time. The Water Boards will be implementing an enforcement project specifically to address potential fraud, waste, and abuse associated with the distribution of USTCF money. For the UST Site Cleanup Program, the evaluation is focusing on the rate of site closure and impediments that may contribute to an inefficient cleanup and closure process.

Enhancing and integrating monitoring data across departments and agencies will increase public accessibility to our monitoring data and assessment information. The Water Boards, through the Water Quality Monitoring Council, will continue to focus on the accessibility and transparency of monitoring and assessment information as we move towards the future release of additional web portals describing the safety of our drinking water and the health of stream and rocky intertidal ecosystems. Currently, three web portals on the swimming safety of our waters, the safety of eating fish and shellfish from our waters, and the health of our aquatic ecosystems are featured.

Many Regional Water Boards are increasing their reliance on collaborative processes with their stakeholder communities to improve their standards and permit development processes as a way to improve outcomes, reduce implementation costs, and use resources more efficiently. Priorities for 2010 relying on collaborative approaches include the development of Klamath River watershed TMDLs, a Groundwater Protection Strategy for the Central Valley, and efforts to restore the Tijuana River Valley.

Closing

With the many competing demands on our water resources, the Water Boards must continue to be forward thinking and innovative when meeting our seven Strategic Plan goals. Today's continually evolving work environment is influenced by factors that demand further prioritization of our work and the use of our resources.

As a result, this informal update describes a more narrowly defined set of strategic priority actions that we plan to accomplish by the end of 2011. We remain strongly committed to open, collaborative, public processes as the cornerstone of our public participation program and the key to success in developing solutions to these complex issues.

To be held accountable for what we have achieved in implementing these new priorities, we intend to publicly report our progress on these strategic priority actions every six months. The Water Boards also will continue to focus our efforts on many of the Strategic Plan actions that are currently in progress. We welcome your participation as we continue to implement our Strategic Plan.

Useful Web Links

Water Boards' Annual Performance Report

Water Boards' Annual Accomplishments Report

Water Boards' Enforcement Report

Enforcement Performance Measures (see page 2 of Enforcement Report)

Water Quality Monitoring Council's "My Water Quality" Web Portals

Principles and Values

- Protection
- Sustainability
- Integrity
- Professionalism
- Leadership
- Collaboration
- Service
- Education/Outreach