

**STATE WATER RESOURCES CONTROL BOARD  
BOARD MEETING SESSION – DIVISION OF WATER QUALITY  
OCTOBER 6, 2009**

**ITEM 6**

**SUBJECT**

INFORMATION ITEM ON THE TECHNICAL ADVISORY TEAM'S WETLAND DEFINITION

**DISCUSSION**

In April 2008, the State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board) adopted [Resolution No. 2008-0026](#). The resolution gave the Wetland Policy Development Team (staff from the State Water Board and the North Coast and San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Boards), specific directions on the process to follow as they developed a statewide policy to protect wetland and riparian areas (Policy). The Resolution includes a requirement for staff to provide periodic progress reports to the State Water Board. Today's progress report is focused on a wetland definition recently presented to the Wetland Policy Development Team. When incorporated into Phase I of the Policy, this definition would fulfill the Resolution's direction to develop "a wetland definition that would reliably define the diverse array of California wetlands based on the United States Army Corps of Engineers' (Corps) wetland delineation methods to the extent feasible." A wetland definition and Phase I of the Policy, to protect wetlands from dredge and fill activities, will be released to the public for comment after the Policy has been drafted and after undergoing scientific peer review.

This wetland definition, found on page five of the document dated June 25, 2009, "[Technical Memorandum No. 2: Wetland Definition](#)," was developed by an independent Technical Advisory Team (TAT) consisting of distinguished wetlands scientists. Extensive research was done on existing national and international wetland definitions. After considering these, the Team decided that it would be best to develop a definition specific to California conditions.

The Wetland Policy Development Team worked with the TAT and is in agreement with the definition. The members of the Steering Committee (North Coast, San Francisco Bay, Los Angeles, and Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Boards' Executive Officers) have also reviewed the TAT's wetland definition and approved its release. The Policy Interagency Coordinating Committee (ICC), made up of executive-level managers of Federal and State agencies, was also briefed on the TAT's wetland definition on August 27, 2009. ICC members generally agreed that this definition was scientifically sound, clearly written, and consistent with the Corps wetland delineation methods. There were questions regarding how the TAT's wetland definition would be implemented in the Policy. Committee members generally supported eventual Water Board use of the TAT's wetland definition.

Largely driven by differences in climate, topography, and geology, California's wetlands and other aquatic areas show a greater degree of regional and seasonal variation than is typically found in other areas of the U.S. The TAT's wetland definition adequately defines California wetlands by including a broader range of wetland conditions and also can be reconciled with the Corps' wetland field identification practices. Over the years, the Corps has adapted the standard identification practices to regional differences by issuing supplemental field guidance documents. The addition of these guidance documents has resulted in better wetland delineations, but also a lack of consistency between its single-sentence definition and the actual

practice. The TAT's wetlands definition is a single-sentence definition that would largely reconcile with the Corps' actual practice of delineation including the supplements. The document, "Technical Memorandum No. 2: Wetland Definition," provides further information and presents the TAT's wetland definition (see page five).

State Water Board and North Coast and San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board staff continue to meet regularly to develop a policy document that includes the Phase I elements of a wetland definition; a wetland regulatory program based on the 404(b)(1) Guidelines, and a wetland assessment and monitoring plan for Water Board programs. The San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board continues to develop its proposed Basin Plan amendment for peer review prior to a San Francisco Bay Water Board hearing in the spring of 2010.

**POLICY ISSUE**

This is an Information Item

**FISCAL IMPACT**

None (Information Item only).

**REGIONAL BOARD IMPACT**

None (Information Item only).

**STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

None (Information Item only).

State Water Board action on the proposed Wetland and Riparian Area Protection Policy will assist the Water Boards in reaching Goals 1, 3, and 5 of the Strategic Plan Update: 2008-2012. Goal 1 is to implement strategies to fully support the beneficial uses for all 2006-listed water bodies by 2030; Goal 3 is to promote sustainable local water supplies; and Goal 5 is to improve transparency and accountability.