

**CALIFORNIA REGIONAL WATER QUALITY CONTROL BOARD
LAHONTAN REGION**

**MEETING OF MARCH 1, 2023
SOUTH LAKE TAHOE, CA**

ITEM 7

SENATE BILL 1215 (SB 1215) UPDATE

CHRONOLOGY

September 2018	Governor Brown signed Senate Bill 1215 (SB 1215) into law allocating funding and the regulatory framework for a statewide Wastewater Consolidation Program to facilitate the consolidation of inadequate onsite sewage treatment systems and septic tanks with existing or new sewer systems.
July 2020	Funding allocated for hiring staff in the Lahontan Region
April 2021	Full-time staff hired to start program in Lahontan Region

BACKGROUND

SB 1215 modifies the Porter-Cologne Water Quality Control Act (California Water Code, Chapter 4.3, Section 13288) to authorize Regional Water Boards to encourage, and if necessary, mandate the provision of sewer service to disadvantaged communities with inadequate onsite wastewater treatment systems (OWTS). This will be executed either through collaboration with local sewer providers (voluntary), or through enforcement orders to establish a timeline for connection to local sewer systems (mandatory). Statewide goals are to encourage voluntary consolidation by providing guidance on funding processes through outreach and meetings.

State Water Resources Control Board's (State Water Board's) Division of Financial Assistance (DFA) is responsible for administering the funding for wastewater consolidation projects under this program. The sources of funding for this program are provided in the form of grants and small-interest loans. Funding can be used to cover the costs of wastewater facility upgrades, septic to sewer connection, wastewater systems consolidation, and wastewater plant construction.

The purpose of this item is to provide the Board with an introduction and update to the SB1215 program.

ISSUES

How can staff maximize and prioritize communities in need of sewage treatment systems to reduce impacts to surface waters and groundwater?

Should the priority of limited program funding be focused on:

- Obtaining a centralized treatment system for communities with pre-existing sewer system?
- Extending sewer system to unsewered areas with an existing wastewater treatment system?
- Helping communities without an existing wastewater treatment system that discharge raw sewage to unlined ponds to construct a wastewater treatment facility?

DISCUSSION

The SB 1215 Program provides a mechanism to decrease the number of onsite sewage treatment systems, which are key sources of bacteria, total dissolved solids, and nitrate pollution to surface waters and groundwater. The program provides funding for sewer connections, wastewater treatment plant improvements, and consolidation of localized individual small treatment systems in disadvantaged communities through grants.

Program Eligibility

The program applies to all disadvantaged communities that are served by one or more inadequate onsite sewage treatment systems. The Clean Water State Revolving Fund (CWSRF), which is the source of funding for the program, defines a disadvantaged community (DAC) as a community with less than 20,000 people and a median household income (MHI) less than 80 percent of the statewide MHI. Examples of eligible applicants include existing housing relying on septic systems, privately-owned communities (e.g., mobile home parks), communities and cities without an existing wastewater treatment system, migrant housing centers, and California Native American Tribal communities.

Program Progress

Lahontan Water Board staff have implemented SB 1215 program by discussing the availability of the program with communities, cities, counties, and local agencies. The initial approach included identifying a preliminary list of potential DACs that could fit into the SB 1215 funding qualification criteria. Staff has compiled a list of eligible projects, and the list is growing as we move forward.

Water Board staff have made efforts to bring awareness of the program and its associated opportunities to these specific communities through outreach and meetings, during wastewater plant inspections, and through our public website. Multiple communities have expressed interest, with a handful in the progress of completing funding applications with the State Water Board's DFA.

DISCUSSION

Program Challenges

Because the SB 1215 program is fairly new, State Water Board has not published clear direction and instruction on how best to manage SB 1215 funding. There is not an official framework for the implementation of the SB1215 program from the State Water Board, so implementation has been led by individual Regional Water Board staff. As such, there are many internal and external challenges, including:

- Resistance from either community members or sewer service providers to work collaboratively on sewer connections,
- The large number of disadvantaged communities and potential projects,
- Funding allocation and how that funding is prioritized within DFA, and
- Regional prioritization of projects with limited staff time to assist communities.

SUSTAINABLE GROUNDWATER MANAGEMENT ACT BASINS

The main focus of this program is to address wastewater issues regionwide. Therefore, the focus is not on any specific part of the region or groundwater basin.

CLIMATE CHANGE RESPONSE

The efforts of the SB 1215 Program are consistent with [Resolution R6T-2019-0277](#), the Water Board's Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation Strategy regarding protection of groundwater quality and supply. In particular, the efforts are mainly concentrated to eliminate high density septic system areas by sewer service connection. These efforts help to protect sensitive habitats and groundwater quality and supply, which are two of the key resource areas identified in the Resolution.

PRESENTERS

Molina Hauv, Lahontan Water Board, Engineering Geologist

RECOMMENDATION

This is an informational item only. No Water Board action is required for this item; however, the Water Board may provide direction to staff.