

SECTION 1

INTRODUCTION

SECTION 1.1 BACKGROUND

The Lahontan Region (Figures 1-1 and 1- 2) is larger than the State of Maine, and geographically and ecologically diverse. It includes 42 recognized major watersheds or "hydrologic units", and water bodies of statewide, nationwide, and international importance (e.g., Lake Tahoe and Mono Lake). The southern part of the Region includes some of the fastest growing cities in California, and many of the "rural" areas of the Region are affected by heavy recreational use, resource management, or military activities. With such a large number of water bodies in such a big geographic area, Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB) staff must address a wide variety of water quality problems with very limited funds.

The past approach used in addressing water quality problems was oriented towards programs based on type of problem, with little regard to the interrelationships of the problems within a geographic context. Both external and internal reviews of the State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) and the nine RWQCBs recommended a watershed-based perspective to resource planning and budgeting. Thus, the *Strategic Plan for the State Water Resources Control Board and the Regional Water Resources Control Boards* (updated 2001) lays out the foundation for changing to a new approach to water quality through the Watershed Management Initiative (WMI). The overall purposes of the WMI are to direct resources towards the highest priority water quality issues throughout the state, and to aim towards achieving water quality goals in all of California's watersheds by supporting the development of local solutions to local problems with full participation of all affected parties.

Implementation of the WMI requires an integrated planning process to more effectively and efficiently direct the limited state and federal water quality funds to highest priority activities. The SWRCB and the nine RWQCBs, in partnership with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA), have agreed to develop and implement this integrated planning process. The Lahontan Region was one of three pilot regions selected by the USEPA and the SWRCB to develop a process to integrate program priorities with watershed considerations. Based upon the processes developed by the three pilot regions, and the WMI Workgroup [composed of representatives from the SWRCB's Divisions of Water Quality (DWQ) and Administrative Services, RWQCBs, and USEPA] integrated watershed planning documents are being developed by the SWRCB, RWQCBs and the USEPA. These individual planning documents from each RWQCB, DWQ, and USEPA will each become a chapter in the statewide WMI planning document (WMI Plan). This chapter is the Lahontan RWQCB's contribution to that effort.

To aid in preparation of the WMI chapters, the SWRCB distributed brief guidance titled *Principles for Initial Implementation of the Watershed Management Initiative*. Chapter instruction sets have been prepared by the WMI Workgroup to describe the minimum format and content of the chapters for this January 2002 update. The instructions cover the key program areas and other functions (watershed management, nonpoint source pollution, monitoring and assessment, wetlands, TMDLs, water quality standards, groundwater, and NPDES) to be addressed in the January 2002 update, and specifies how each organization should clearly and consistently describe their proposed activities. The chapters of the WMI Plan will be updated annually, or as necessary. The next statewide update is scheduled for completion in January 2003.

SECTION 1.2

FUNCTIONS OF THE WMI PLAN AND ITS CHAPTERS

Each chapter of the WMI Plan contains the strategies and proposed activities for one of the nine RWQCBs, the SWRCB, DWQ or the USEPA. Regional priorities are based on the strategies that each RWQCB has developed to address the watershed within its boundaries. Statewide priorities are developed by the SWRCB with the active participation of the Regional Boards and USEPA.

Ultimately, this Lahontan RWQCB chapter will contain prioritized inventories of all planned activities for the organization over a five year planning period. This current version of the chapter is for State Fiscal Years 02/03 to

06/07. Costs are estimated for activities described in the chapter. This chapter can be used in deciding which activities could be funded from existing fund sources. It can also be used to estimate future funding needs. Both watershed (specific to a given hydrologic unit) and regionwide types of activities are described.

This chapter itself is not a commitment to complete work. These types of work commitments are made annually in workplans specific to a fund source. Determinations of which activities will be funded by specific workplans will be negotiated on the basis of the information in this chapter. Annual program workplans and grant applications will still be prepared by program managers at the SWRCB and the RWQCBs to identify which activities are going to be funded in a particular year based on the fiscal decisions made. Program managers will still need to manage workplans and contracts, to evaluate program achievements, and to report on completion of commitments.

The chapter and its subsequent revisions will identify activities that are currently funded and those currently unfunded. The unfunded activities identified in the chapter, will be used in part to support requests for funding (e.g., the preparation of supplemental state budget requests to obtain additional funding). The watershed strategies and priorities in the chapter will be used to justify the need to fund activities not currently funded.

SECTION 1.3 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN THE PROCESS TO DEVELOP CHAPTER

The chapter is being developed by an interdisciplinary staff from Region 6's South Lake Tahoe and Victorville offices. RWQCB management, SWRCB staff, and USEPA, Region IX staff have reviewed preliminary drafts and discussed them with Region 6 staff. Initial drafts of this plan have been brought before the Lahontan RWQCB for discussion at two public board meetings. For this and future revisions, there will be opportunities for questions and comments from the public. Revisions may be made to the chapter at the direction of the RWQCB. There will be further opportunities for public participation in the implementation of specific chapter tasks, such as adoption and revision of permits, Basin Plan amendments, watershed management planning, TMDL development, etc., through avenues such as RWQCB agenda items, technical and policy advisory groups, and written public comment periods. Successes and failures in implementation will be used to provide feedback for periodic updates of the chapter as appropriate.

SECTION 1.4 DESCRIPTION OF IMPLEMENTING RWQCB ACTIVITIES BY FOCUS WATERSHEDS AND PRIORITY PROGRAMS

Because of finite resources, the watershed management approach can only initially focus on certain watersheds within the Region, switching its focus on other watersheds in the future. During two public meetings in February and March 1996, the RWQCB members concurred with staff's proposal to focus initial WMI implementation in five watersheds. The selected watersheds were Lake Tahoe Basin, Truckee River below Lake Tahoe outlet, Carson River, upper Owens River, and Mojave River. The five focus watersheds were selected based on their resource value, the significance of known water quality problems, and opportunities for implementing current and future RWQCB programs within a true "watershed planning" context.

Three of these five watersheds are currently designated the RWQCB's highest priority watersheds for development of Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs), and a watershed planning approach is expected to facilitate TMDL development and implementation. Within the larger Lake Tahoe, and Owens River watersheds, smaller subwatersheds are being selected for initial planning and implementation emphasis.

It is important to note that key water quality activities will continue throughout the Region, in areas outside of the five focus watershed boundaries. This chapter discusses current and proposed future activities within high priority programs, within and outside of the focus watersheds. These activities are described below in Section 1.5.

In Section 2 of this Chapter is a short description of each focus watershed and of the water quality problems and issues to be addressed, a narrative summary of ongoing and proposed activities to address these issues, and tables

showing estimated funding needs for each task. These are also descriptions which relates specific watershed tasks over the five year planning period to the more traditional programmatic organization as a clear demonstration that programmatic commitments are considered in the planning process.

SECTION 1.5 OVERVIEW OF EXISTING AND ONGOING RWQCB ACTIVITIES

The following is a summary of Region 6 activities which are currently funded by State and/or federal funds. Some formal SWRCB "programs" (e.g., underground tanks and Department of Defense activities) have been combined under a single heading. Baseline activities under all of these programs are expected to continue under the proposed watershed approach.

Nonpoint Source

Most of the water quality problems in Region 6 are due to nonpoint sources, and much of the core regulatory program (below) serves to control nonpoint sources of erosion and stormwater. The nonpoint source program involves coordination with other agencies and stakeholders to ensure implementation of nonpoint source controls for resource management activities such as livestock grazing on federal lands; participation in the SWRCB's ongoing nonpoint source planning program; coordination and facilitation of remedial efforts such as erosion control and wetlands restoration projects; and public outreach. Current nonpoint source funds do not allow intensive staff participate in all NPS planning activities within the region where such a presence would be desirable. (Also see Section 3.1 of this chapter.)

Core Regulatory

The Lahontan RWQCB issues federal NPDES permits for point source discharges to surface waters (including stormwater discharges), and state Waste Discharge Requirements (WDRs) or waivers for wastes contained on site or discharged to land. Both processes prescribe the quantity, quality, and conditions under which waste can be discharged and require self-monitoring. Activities include issuance of new permits/WDRs, updating of existing permits/WDRs, compliance inspections, review of self-monitoring reports, review of environmental documents, response to spills and complaints, and associated enforcement. Review and permitting of timber harvests and other forest management activities is also an important part of Region 6's core regulatory program. The RWQCB maintains its own laboratory which is capable of analyzing a variety of water quality parameters in samples from compliance and spill monitoring. Dealing with litigation related to permits also creates significant demands on staff time which are not funded under any current state or federal program. (Also see Sections 3.5, 3.6, 3.7 of this Chapter.)

Wetlands and Water Quality Certification

The RWQCB's Basin Plan includes a detailed program for the protection and restoration of wetlands. The RWQCB participates in the State Water Quality Certification process for federal Section 401 permits. Because of the sensitivity of the headwater and isolated streams and wetlands throughout the region, even small-scale proposals for filling and other disturbance are of concern.. (Also see Section 3.10 of this chapter.)

Standards, Water Quality Planning, and TMDLs

RWQCB planning activities include the Triennial Review process, ongoing update of water quality standards and development of numerical standards for specific waters which do not now have them, development of action plans, participation in watershed planning activities (including coordination with local watershed groups), and development of Total Daily Maximum Loads (TMDLs). Coordination with planning activities of other state, federal, local and regional agencies, and review of their plans and environmental documents, is also important. (Also see Sections 3.1 and 3.12 of this Chapter.)

Monitoring

Because the Region has few point source discharges, discharger self- monitoring does not provide adequate baseline biological and chemical data on the ambient quality of most surface waters in the Region. Baseline/trend monitoring is essential for the establishment and update of water quality standards, the development of TMDLs, and the assessment of progress on remedial programs. RWQCB staff also participate in steering committees for monitoring funded by other agencies such as the TRPA. The RWQCB maintains its own laboratory which could provide technical support for much more widespread baseline/trend monitoring by staff if funding were available. (Also see Sections 3.3 of this Chapter.)

Assessment

Since 1989, RWQCB staff have been participating in the SWRCB's formal Water Quality Assessment (WQA) process, which results in updates to water body lists required by the Clean Water Act such as the Section 303(d) list. Funding has not been available for more than cursory staff participation in ongoing assessment activities by other agencies, such as the Sierra Nevada Ecosystem Project and the California Rivers Assessment. (Also see Section 3.4 of this Chapter.)

Ground Water

In addition to core regulatory activities for discharges to land, activities to protect and clean up ground water are associated with the Well Investigation Program, the Spills, Leaks, Investigation and Cleanup (SLIC) program, the aboveground and underground tank programs, and site mitigation activities under the Department of Defense (DoD) and Superfund programs.

The regulatory oversight of DoD sites is funded through the Defense/State Memorandum of Agreement (DSMOA). This agreement is administered by the Department of toxic Substances Control on behalf of all state agencies participating in DoD regulation. DTSC coordinates cleanup activities of hazardous wastes with the RWQCBs to ensure that water quality issues are addressed. The Lahontan RWQCB oversees remediation at eight DoD sites and six formerly used defense sites. (Also see Section 3.11 of this Chapter.)

Insert Figure 1-1

Regional map

Insert Figure 1-2

Regional map