

Regional Water Quality Control Board
North Coast Region
Executive Officer's Summary Report
August 20, 2020

ITEM: 7

SUBJECT: Fiscal Year 2020-2021 Work Plan for the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board (*Matt St. John*)

BOARD ACTION: This is an information item only, no action will be taken by the Regional Board.

BACKGROUND: The purpose of this information item is to present the proposed Work Plan of the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board for Fiscal Year 2020-2021 and to receive feedback from Board members and the public. Work Plans have been developed for each of the four Regional Water Board Divisions – Point Source & Groundwater Protection; Non-Point Source & Surface Water Protection; Planning and Watershed Stewardship; and Cannabis & Enforcement. The Introduction to the work plans explains the purpose of the work plans, outlines special considerations reflected in the work plans due to the fiscal impacts from the coronavirus pandemic, and identifies several core and special activities of executive team members that are not discussed within the division-specific work plans.

DISCUSSION: The purpose for having these work plans is to prioritize and guide the work of Regional Water Board staff during the fiscal year, and to manage expectations regarding the scope, content and schedule associated with work plan milestones and deliverables. Included in the Introduction to the work plan is an explanation of the organization and outline of the components of each of the work plans.

All work plans serve as both a planning tool and a tool to track progress throughout the fiscal year. Throughout the fiscal year the Management Team meets to assess the status of projects/activities in the division-specific work plans and makes modifications, as necessary. The work of the Regional Water Board can be dynamic, with new, unplanned activities/projects emerging which require response and, in many cases, require action that takes time and energy away from planned work activities. Migrating the entire office to working remotely due to local shelter-in-place requirements and shifting to this new work paradigm is an obvious example. Responding to fires and floods is another real example that our region has faced regularly over the past several years. And, we are frequently asked to respond to requests, large and small, programmatic and administrative, from the State Water Board.

New Components to FY 20/21 Work Plans

New to the work plans this fiscal year is an explicit "line item" for Unplanned Work Activities. Including this line item within each of the work plans serves as an acknowledgment of the workload demands associated with these unplanned work activities. Responding to unplanned work often requires that managers assess the urgency of the work and reprioritize workload and project commitments. When

unplanned work is determined to be of high importance, other planned work commitments may be delayed or not completed.

Also new to the work plans this fiscal year is the consistent incorporation of an explicit line item or discussion about prioritizing staff supervision. Active and regular supervision of technical and administrative staff is a critical function of the unit senior, as is such active supervision of unit seniors and division chiefs by their supervisors. The unit senior supervises, plans, organizes, and directs the work of technical staff under their direction. Supervisory tasks include preparing individual work plans and performance evaluations; providing day-to-day guidance of technical staff to ensure they are appropriately trained, timely completing work, and implementing a shared set of agency expectations; providing first-level review and approval of written documents to ensure proper content, consistency, completeness, and accuracy; participating in meetings with stakeholders; and preparing items for Board action. Following the shelter-in-place orders due to the coronavirus pandemic, the transition of the office to working remotely required that staff and their supervisors develop new practices to ensure sufficient and effective levels of supervision, highlighting for all of us the value of the staff-supervisor working relationship. Explicitly including staff supervision within the work plans emphasizes the priority and importance we put towards this function.

Accommodating the Fiscal Impacts from Coronavirus Pandemic

Needless to say, the coronavirus pandemic has had major impacts at a worldwide scale, and there have been real fiscal impacts to the Water Boards. Included in the California budget for FY 20/21 is a 9.23% pay cut for all state employees; all Water Board staff will receive a salary reduction of two (2) days in pay (equating to 9.23%) and will accrue two days of personal leave credit per month. Though staff can use the personal leave credits at a time of their choosing, overall this reflects a nearly 10% reduction in work time, which will reduce, by approximately 10%, productivity in all programs.

In addition, in June all state agencies were directed to redirect 5% of their workforce to work on a limited term assignment as Covid-19 contact tracers, under the supervision of the California Department of Public Health. For the North Coast Regional Water Board four (4) staff have been redirected (voluntarily) to work fulltime for an indefinite period of months on this important work.

With the exception of the Cannabis Program positions discussed below, the Water Boards currently has no hard freeze for filling vacant positions. However, until the State Water Board's Division of Administrative Services (DAS) completes an assessment of the Water Board's budget and revenue projections based on fees, filling of most vacant positions is undergoing scrutiny. Currently, the Regional Water Board has 7 vacancies outside of the Cannabis Program; these positions have remained vacant for many months awaiting authorization from DAS to fill the positions. In combination, the near 10% reduction due to pay cuts, the redirection of 5% of our staff to serve as contact tracers, and 7 vacancies representing 7% of the Region's existing positions, the Regional Water Board's workforce capacity is currently reduced by approximately 22% for FY 20/21. The FY 20/21 work plans have been written to accommodate and reflect this very significant reduction.

Reductions to Funding of Cannabis Program Staff

Enrollments in the statewide Cannabis Program have been significantly below State Water Board projections, and revenues from the current fee schedule have not been sufficient to meet funding needs for the program. In May 2019, the State Water Board Deputy Director of the Division of Administrative Services froze all hiring within the statewide Cannabis Program in response to insufficient funding for the positions allocated to the program. The hiring freeze has resulted in 6 frozen positions for the North Coast Regional Board, impacting approximately 35% of the North Coast Region's 17 allocated staff, including 46% of the program's field staff positions. More recently, the North Coast Regional Board was instructed to redirect 2 existing Cannabis Program staff to other funded positions within the office. At the time of writing this report, we are still determining which Cannabis Program staff will be redirected and to which program vacant positions they will be redirected to. This significant change in staffing for the Cannabis Program was made after the Cannabis and Enforcement Division Work Plan was drafted and the Work Plan has not been revised to reflect this change.

At the August 20, 2020 Regional Water Board meeting, staff will provide a general overview and summary of the work plan's priority activities and projects, noting the special considerations this fiscal year given the significant fiscal impacts from the coronavirus pandemic. We look forward to feedback from Board members on these priorities for fiscal year 2020/2021 and welcome comments by interested stakeholders.

RECOMMENDATION: N/A

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS:

1. FY 20/21 Work Plan Introduction
2. Point Source & Groundwater Protection Division FY 20/21 Work Plan
3. Non-Point Source & Surface Water Protection Division FY 20/21 Work Plan
4. Planning and Watershed Stewardship Division FY 20/21 Work Plan
5. Cannabis & Enforcement Division FY 20/21 Work Plan