

State of California
Regional Water Quality Control Board
San Diego Region

EXECUTIVE OFFICER SUMMARY REPORT
September 10, 2014

ITEM: 8

SUBJECT: Information Item: Public Workshop on the State of Wetlands in the San Diego Region: Protection and Restoration Potential (*Kelly Dorsey*)

PURPOSE: This is an information item to update the San Diego Water Board on a broad range of issues and challenges pertaining to the development of improved strategies and tools for the protection and restoration of wetlands.

RECOMMENDATION: There is no recommendation as this is an information item and the Board will take no action.

KEY ISSUE: Improved strategies and tools are needed to protect and restore wetlands and to improve the capacity to evaluate attainment of no overall net loss and a long-term net gain in the quantity, quality and sustainability of wetlands.

PRACTICAL VISION: This informational topic was developed in conformance with the San Diego Water Board's Practical Vision entitled *Healthy Waters, Healthy People*. Wetland and riparian systems in the San Diego Region and throughout California are threatened by impacts from increasing population growth, land development, sea level rise, and climate change. Consistent with the mission of the *Stream, Wetlands and Riparian Systems* chapter of the Practical Vision, this item will provide important information to the San Diego Water Board on a number of key topics pertaining to protection and restoration of wetlands to inform potential management actions to address them. These topics include the status and trends of wetland and riparian systems, outcomes of mitigation projects to offset or lessen wetland impacts, programs to develop capacity for wetland assessment, and the development of biological objectives to create a regulatory framework for protecting and restoring wetland and riparian systems.

DISCUSSION:

A special meeting of the San Diego Water Board was held on August 18, 2014 to discuss and plan a wide range of broad-based scientific and policy topics for inclusion in this information item. As a result of that discussion an agenda was developed and several invited speakers and staff will be providing information and presenting recommendations on a variety of topics pertaining to wetland and riparian system protection and restoration.

Wetlands are complex ecosystems that, depending on type and on circumstances within a watershed, can improve water quality, provide natural flood control, diminish droughts, recharge groundwater aquifers and control erosion. Wetlands often support a wide variety of plants and animals, including rare and endangered species, migratory birds, and fish. Wetlands are essential in improving the chemical, physical, biological, and other characteristics of the waters of the State through mechanisms such as nutrient cycling, and sediment trapping and retention. Thus many important goals to restore and maintain water quality cannot be achieved if wetlands are not protected and restored.

More than 85 percent of these invaluable areas statewide have been lost to human land uses, including fill and development. Numerous reports indicate that Southern California in particular has experienced among the greatest loss of coastal wetlands of any coastal region in the United States. In response to these conditions, the Governor of California issued Executive Order W-59-93 over twenty years ago. Commonly referred to as the "No Net Loss Policy" for wetlands, this Order establishes the intent to advance statewide efforts to ensure no overall net loss and a long-term net gain in the quantity, quality and sustainability of wetlands in California.

Traditionally, California has relied heavily on the federal regulatory program under section 404 of the Clean Water Act (CWA) and the State's related water quality certification program to protect wetlands. To achieve no net loss of wetlands under these regulatory programs, permittees are expected to avoid deliberate discharges of materials into wetlands and then to minimize discharges that cannot be avoided. When damages are unavoidable, permittees are required to provide "compensatory mitigation" as a condition of issuing a permit. Underlying wetland compensatory mitigation is the assumption that it is scientifically possible to

recreate the structure and functions of a wetland, either by restoring a site that had previously been a wetland or by creating an entirely new wetland. Several presentations for this information item will be covering the ecological principles of wetland creation and restoration science and evaluating the current scientific ability of practitioners to restore or create various aspects of wetland functioning in a variety of environments.

**SUPPORTING
DOCUMENTS:**

None

PUBLIC NOTICE:

This item was noticed in the Meeting Notice and Agenda for the September 10, 2014 Board meeting.