

Practical Vision and Program Accomplishments for 2014

Calendar year 2014 was the first year implementing the Practical Vision - Healthy Waters Healthy People. The Practical Vision is a tool to focus our limited resources onto our region's highest priorities for the 2014 to 2020 time period. Fifteen of 36 projects identified in the various chapters of the Practical Vision were undertaken in 2014. An Operational Plan for implementing the 15 projects was created to assign staff and budget resources, and establish milestones and schedules for the projects. The Operational Plan was updated in August and September to reflect adjustments to the projects due to budget or staffing constraints, or other unforeseen issues.

In concert with the work of the Practical Vision is the day-to-day programmatic work of the San Diego Water Board. This work falls into three broad categories; planning, permitting, and enforcement. Every year, San Diego Water Board staff prepare program workplans that include performance measures or commitments that are tracked by the State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board) and reported to the legislature. Although some of the Practical Vision projects overlap with program workplan commitments, behind the Practical Vision is a large body of work to carry out the Board's core programmatic work.

This report briefly describes the 15 Practical Vision projects undertaken followed by a bullet list of the important project accomplishments and milestones for 2014. This report also describes the important program accomplishments submitted to the State Water Board for its annual report to the State Legislature.

Chapter 1. Healthy Waters

Strategy for a Healthy San Diego Bay. This project will develop a strategy for coordinating and prioritizing all San Diego Water Board regulatory programs in San Diego Bay to achieve the cleanup and restoration of key beneficial uses in key areas. The strategy will follow the framework and incorporate the principles of the Healthy Waters Chapter.

- Draft Strategy for a Healthy San Diego Bay completed in early 2014.
- Meetings conducted with the City of San Diego, San Diego Unified Port District, U.S. Navy, and San Diego Coastkeeper (the key San Diego Bay stakeholders) to discuss and receive feedback on the draft strategy conducted from April through July 2014.
- A revised Draft, incorporating comments received both internally and externally is in preparation.

Chapter 2. Monitoring and Assessment

Unified Beach Water Quality Monitoring and Assessment Program in South Orange County. In response to a request by the San Diego Water Board, staff convened a workgroup that included representatives of a variety of interests in and responsibilities for beach water quality in south Orange County. The workgroup successfully developed a unified regional monitoring and assessment program (unified program) for beach water quality in south Orange County. The unified program combines routine, ongoing beach water quality monitoring conducted by wastewater, municipal storm water, and public health agencies into one program that meets or goes beyond the requirements for beach water quality monitoring, and related public notification and reporting established by State law. The unified program is intended to be protective, reasonable, and equitable. Responsibility for implementation of the unified program is shared among dischargers, and implementation arrangements are flexible.

- Executive Officer directive issued in December 2014 requiring implementation of the unified program, effective April 1, 2015.
- Also in December, the San Diego Water Board revised two NPDES permits for ocean discharges of treated wastewater to replace existing beach water quality monitoring requirements with requirements for participation in the unified program, effective April 1, 2015.
- Draft language was included in revisions to the regional municipal storm water permit to replace existing beach water quality monitoring requirements for south Orange County municipal storm water agencies with requirements for participation in the unified program, effective April 1, 2015. The Board will consider adopting the revised permit in February 2015.

San Diego River Coordination and Improvement. This project seeks to coordinate surface water quality monitoring programs conducted by regulated parties and other interested parties in the San Diego River watershed to answer the four fundamental healthy water questions.

- Final report developed for the San Diego River Watershed Monitoring and Assessment Program.
- Surface water monitoring funded by SWAMP. Stream bioassessment and tissue sampling conducted to supplement existing efforts.
- Database tool developed to produce draft watershed report cards for ecosystem health.
- Partnership developed with San Diego State University. Efforts initialized to form a Watershed Science Institute at the University.
- Internal permit reviews initialized with staff to identify monitoring and coordination opportunities.

Revised Monitoring Program for Commercial Agricultural and Nursery Facilities Waste Discharge Requirements. This project is a new monitoring and reporting program (MRP) order to be adopted with waste discharge requirements for agricultural and nursery operations. The MRP will be consistent with the monitoring framework.

- The draft MRP is 75 percent complete.
- Requirements developed to make the draft MRP consistent with the Stormwater Monitoring Coalition's regional monitoring program, and to fill data gaps in that program.
- Requirements developed to make the draft MRP consistent with the Beaches and Creeks Bacteria and Rainbow Creek nutrient total maximum daily loads (TMDLs). These TMDLs identified agricultural and nursery operations in certain watershed as a primary sources of pollutants.

San Diego Bay Contaminant Bioaccumulation and Risk Evaluation. This project encompasses a variety of studies on bioaccumulation of pollutants in San Diego Bay sediments, and the risks they pose to human health and aquatic dependent wildlife. This study is being undertaken with partners comprised of SCCWRP, the Port of San Diego, and the City of San Diego who are all providing funding and resources for the project. The purpose of the project is to provide a better understanding of the process of bioaccumulation through the complex food web systems of San Diego Bay. The information obtained in this study will inform sediment cleanup decisions, total maximum daily load numeric targets, and provide a data set for development by SCCWRP and the State Water Board of assessment tools for the human health and aquatic dependent wildlife narrative sediment quality objectives.

- Analyses of sediment and tissue samples collected in 2013 are underway.
- Shallow habitat sediment and tissue samples collected in spring 2014.
- Fish Consumption Study Technical Advisory Group (TAG) formed.
- Preliminary Fish Consumption Study Design completed and reviewed by TAG.

Chapter 3. Recovery of Stream, Wetland and Riparian Systems

Resolution Regarding Streams, Wetlands, and Riparian Systems. This project will clarify expectations regarding our dredge and fill program for the public and staff, and will provide direction to staff to ensure those expectations are implemented.

- Two informational workshops conducted by staff to familiarize Board members and the public with the Wetland and Riparian Protection Unit (Wetland Unit) responsibilities and the key issues and challenges presented by the permitting process and wetland compensatory mitigation. Presentations were provided by wetland scientists from UCLA Department of Environmental Health Sciences, the Southern California Wetland Recovery Project, and the Southern California Coastal Water Research Project.
- Wetland Unit staff members continued to participate in the development of the statewide wetland policy.

- Wetland Unit staff consistently participated in pre-application consultations for projects that impact wetlands, interagency review team meetings, and regular meetings with other agencies that regulate wetlands.
- The Wetland Unit increased its compliance and enforcement activities by increasing the number of inspections conducted compared to previous years. These inspections assessed project compliance with the conditions of the Certifications. Staff took follow-up enforcement actions where appropriate. Additionally, the Wetland Unit added a staff position that will increase our ability to focus on wetland project inspections and compliance.
- Wetland Unit staff worked with the Executive Officer and Board Chair to explore ways to facilitate the implementation of wetland and riparian restoration projects that will help the San Diego Water Board achieve the wetland recovery goals of this chapter of the Practical Vision. This effort is ongoing.

Chapter 4. Proactive Public Outreach and Communication

Community Outreach Strategy. As the first phase of the development of a comprehensive community outreach strategy, the Practical Vision Team with Board member support will conduct scoping sessions and community workshops and discussions to develop the framework, identify target audiences and messages, solicit community participation in the Water Board and identify opportunities for the Water Board to collaborate with community groups to educate, protect water quality and restore or enhance beneficial uses.

- The Executive Officer and three Board Members conducted outreach with over 18 organizations and groups to gather information about the needs of environmental justice and disadvantaged communities in the San Diego Region.
- A tentative resolution was developed to support efforts through the Cleanup and Abatement Account and through supplemental environmental projects to serve these communities and further protect water quality through cleanups, community capacity building, and environmental education and outreach.
- A draft Budget Change Proposal was developed for fiscal year 14/15 to augment the Water Board staff to conduct outreach and coordination for the Border environmental justice efforts.
- Work was initiated on a draft Budget Change Proposal for fiscal year 15/16 to support a position dedicated to community outreach throughout the Region.

Chapter 5. Strategy for Achieving a Local Sustainable Water Supply

Salt and Nutrient Management Planning. The State Recycled Water Policy requires local recycled water agencies to prepare and implement Salt and Nutrient Management Plans for the State's groundwater basins. Plans are to be prepared with assistance from the San Diego Water Board and other stakeholders. In exchange, recycled water users are entitled to streamlined permitting for their landscape irrigation projects. Development of the SNMPs involves stakeholder outreach, groundwater basin

characterization, identification and quantification of salinity sources, supplemental monitoring, and assessment of salinity and nutrient management strategies. Once plans are approved, the San Diego Water Board must amend the implementation chapter of the Basin Plan to incorporate the plans if needed, or make appropriate amendments to water-quality standards for salt and nutrients if justified in the plans.

- Staff attended stakeholder meetings in San Diego and Riverside Counties, and stakeholder led public workshops during the local salt and nutrient planning process for high priority basins.
- Staff provided written comments on eight plans. Two of the plans (for Gower Basin – Ramona, and South Orange County) recommend changes to water quality objectives in the Basin Plan.
- Staff worked with the San Diego County Water Authority to incorporate implementation measures to control salts and nutrients in lower priority basins into the 2014 Integrated Regional Water Management Plan.

Basin Plan Amendment to Revise Nitrate Groundwater Objective. Nitrogen removal is an expensive process that adds to the cost of recycled water. Nitrogen in recycled water has the potential to degrade water quality in reuse areas. The San Diego Region has 43 groundwater basins with nitrogen water quality objectives that are more stringent than the maximum contaminant level for drinking water. Relaxing the water quality objective in those basins to the MCL likely will reduce the cost of producing recycled water by lowering the cost of nitrate removal, and potentially open up more reuse areas in those basins.

- CEQA Scoping Meeting held in July 2014.
- Draft nitrate groundwater objective revision combined in an amendment package that also incorporates the Onsite Wastewater Treatment System Policy, adds descriptions of other statewide policies adopted since the last Basin Plan Update, and makes other non-substantive changes and updates to the Basin Plan like deleting the expired waivers.
- Draft Amendment and Substitute Environmental Document released for public comment in December 2014.

Chapter 6. Supported Empowered Energized Engaged Community

Watershed White Boards. White boards were mounted near the break room and contain watershed-based information across all programs. Intention is to foster information sharing across the office.

- Whiteboards mounted near staff break room.
- Written rules and responsibilities for content and updates completed.
- Whiteboard content being updated on a monthly basis.

On-Boarding New Employees. New employees are often overwhelmed upon arrival for their first day of work, and on their own to assimilate into the culture of the San Diego Water Board. From the practical considerations of how to dress and where to eat, to office procedures and protocols, to learning about the breadth and depth of our responsibility, there is much to learn upon coming to the San Diego Water Board. This project improves the manner in which new employees are brought ‘on board.’

- A “New Employee Orientation Handbook” was finalized.
- Several new employees were brought on board using the practices in the Handbook.
- Positive feedback was received from senior staff.

Employee Reviews and Expectations. Create employee expectations and measurements as staff rotate, telecommute, or as operational needs require. Better articulate review periods and review content.

- Programmatic expectations drafted.
- All new hires and rotations received expectations conforming to the new approach.

Chapter 7. Effective and Efficient Mission Support

Fully Staff Mission Support Unit. As vacancies occur, the Mission Support Unit will prioritize filling the vacancies, and identify and communicate to staff the work that will be delayed as a result of the prioritized recruitment. The Administrative Officer will also review recent vacancies to identify retention opportunities.

- Mission Support Unit fully staffed by June 2014.
- No delay in staff work due to recruitment.
- No retention issues within our control identified.

Complete Enterprise Content Management Business Rules. This is a project to ensure all staff are familiar with and capable of implementing the Enterprise Content Management System (ECM, or paperless office) business rules. This requires the staff services analyst to identify statewide and regional rules, and transfer that knowledge to staff.

- ECM business rules completed.
- All final business rules distributed to staff to implement.

ECM Audits. Monitor ECM performance by developing audit analyses and reports such as determining the number of documents residing in individual workflow queues or inboxes.

- Staff services analyst conducted bi-monthly audits of all individual workflow queues.

- Audit reports sent to supervisors.
- Grid developed to show decrease in the number of documents in queues at each audit point.

Program Accomplishments Reported to the State Water Board

Federal Litigation Successfully Concluded and International Boundary and Water Commission NPDES Permit Reissued to Protect the Tijuana River and Estuary.

After successfully concluding 13 years of litigation in Federal Court with the International Boundary and Water Commission, the San Diego Water Board has been able to reissue the NPDES Permit for the International Wastewater Treatment Facility. The new permit includes significant new requirements to address cross border flows of polluted waters and improve coordination with State and Municipal agencies in Mexico to control the discharge of waste water. The Tijuana River, while still impaired, is significantly cleaner than in recent decades when it was composed primarily of untreated waste water flows. Sediment, trash, and occasional waste water discharges in Tijuana and Rosarito, however, remain a significant impact to the River Valley, Estuary, and Imperial Beach.

Finalizing a Treaty Minute to the 1944 Treaty on the Utilization of the Waters of the Colorado and Tijuana Rivers and the Rio Grande to Address Binational Sediment and Trash Issues. Since completing the Tijuana River Valley Recovery Strategy: Living with the Waters in 2012, the Tijuana River Valley Recovery Team (Recovery Team) has focused on partnering with Mexico to address sources of trash and sediment. As a result, in March 2014, the Comisión Internacional de Límites y Aguas and the Internal Boundary and Water Commission drafted a Treaty Minute to the 1944 Treaty for the Utilization of Waters of the Colorado and Tijuana Rivers and of the Rio Grande. When approved by both federal governments, it will establish a framework for Mexico and the United States to address trans-border sediment and trash issues in the Tijuana River Valley that exacerbate flooding and severely impact agricultural, recreational, and ecological values of the River Valley and Estuary.

Adoption of a TMDL to Restore Loma Alta Slough. The San Diego Water Board engaged a collaborative, stakeholder led group to develop measures to reduce sources of nitrogen and phosphorous causing gross eutrophication of Loma Alta Slough in northern San Diego County. The Resolution (R9-2014-0020) adopted by the Board directs the restoration of the Slough through reduction of urban runoff and sets out biological metrics to measure the successful attainment of healthy waters in the Slough.

Cleanup of San Diego Bay Shipyards. In 2012, The San Diego Water Board adopted a landmark Clean Up and Abatement order directing the remediation of two Shipyards in San Diego Bay. In 2013, the Water Board adopted the Waste Discharge Requirements for the remediation activities. In 2014, the NASSCO Shipyard remediation work was completed successfully and the BAE Systems Shipyard remediation commenced. The Cleanup will result in the single largest mass of contaminants including PCBs, TBT, PAHs, mercury, copper, arsenic and zinc ever removed from San Diego Bay and is being accomplished without decades of litigation.

Several intervals of post remedial monitoring will begin in 2015 to verify cleanup success using biological conditions, bioaccumulation analysis, and sediment chemistry and toxicity tests.

Adoption of 12 Waivers of WDRs. The San Diego Water Board adopted an Order with 12 conditional waivers of waste discharge requirements to replace and revise waivers that expired in February 2014. The waivers are critical to keep businesses and cleanup projects that produce low-threat waste streams functioning, and on track, while saving staff resources otherwise dedicated to permit writing. The Order included a waiver for the disposal of disaster related waste which was timely adopted during the May-June firestorm in San Diego County. A waiver for composting facilities was also included in the Order allowing the Region's composting facilities to come into compliance with Basin Plan prohibitions. The composting waiver saved significant staff resources that otherwise would have been dedicated to writing WDRs for these facilities ahead of the State Water Board's general composting WDRs. The Order's waiver for the discharge of fireworks over land also provided timely coverage for inland cities to conduct 4th of July fireworks shows.