

EXECUTIVE OFFICER SUMMARY REPORT
June 24, 2015

ITEM: 12

SUBJECT: Tentative Resolution to Support Restoration of Aquatic Ecosystems in the San Diego Region (Tentative Resolution No.R9-2015-0041) (*Kelly Dorsey*)

PURPOSE: To consider adoption of Tentative Resolution No. R9-2015-0041 (Tentative Resolution).

RECOMMENDATION: Adoption of the Tentative Resolution (**Supporting Document No. 1**) is recommended.

KEY ISSUE: The Tentative Resolution supports continued efforts to advance and promote aquatic ecosystem restoration and directs San Diego Water Board staff to conduct various activities in support of these efforts.

PRACTICAL VISION: Many of the San Diego Region's aquatic ecosystems, including rivers, streams, lakes, reservoirs, wetlands, enclosed bays, and estuaries, are home to sensitive beneficial uses and at-risk species. These aquatic ecosystems provide many services that have exceptional value to society. The structure, function, and biodiversity of aquatic ecosystems in the San Diego Region are threatened and vulnerable to disruption from increasing population growth, land development, sea level rise, and climate change. In response to these conditions the Tentative Resolution proposes that proactive, restorative measures are needed to repair the functions, prevent further degradation and increase the resilience of aquatic ecosystems. The Tentative Resolution also proposes to establish San Diego Water Board support for aquatic ecosystem restoration efforts that lead to a meaningful net gain in the quantity, quality, and acreage of aquatic resources in the San Diego Region. All of the findings and actions proposed in the Tentative Resolution are consistent with the *Recovery of Stream Wetlands and Riparian System* chapter of the Practical Vision strategy document which calls for the San Diego Water Board to more effectively protect and restore the health of aquatic

ecosystems in the San Diego Region. The San Diego Water Board's consideration of the Tentative Resolution for adoption is one of the Practical Vision implementation projects identified for completion by June 30, 2015 in the Board's *Practical Vision Annual Operational Plan 2015*.

DISCUSSION:

Southern California aquatic ecosystems have been dramatically altered or destroyed by agricultural and urban development over the past 150 years. Rivers and creeks have been rerouted, dammed, channelized, and paved. Wetlands have been filled and riparian areas have been lost. Wetlands have been altered through land use changes leading to habitat losses in terms of biodiversity and functionality. Native wetland species have been displaced by proliferating non-native invasive species. All of these factors have led to a significant decline in the overall general health and integrity of Southern California's aquatic ecosystems. In response to these conditions, the Governor of California issued Executive Order W-59-93 over twenty years ago. Referred to as the "No Net Loss and Net Gain Policy" for wetlands, this Order established 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 and associated aquatic ecosystems in California (**Supporting Document No. 2**).

Given the extent of historical loss and the limited opportunities remaining, restoration of aquatic ecosystems in Southern California must become a high priority to increase the pace and ecological effectiveness of aquatic ecosystem recovery. The term restoration is a broadly defined term that generally refers to the manipulation of a former or degraded aquatic ecosystem's physical, chemical, or biological characteristics to return its natural functions. Based on these considerations a decision was reached in October 2014, by the Water Boards' Water Quality Coordination Committee, to assign each Regional Water Board the task of supporting three restoration projects of varying complexity (easy, hard and aspirational), using all of the tools and authorities available to the Water Boards, until the projects reach completion.

The San Diego Water Board accepted this task and staff have prepared the Tentative Resolution to implement the task using guidance from the North Coast Water Board's *Policy in Support of Restoration in the North Coast Region*. The Tentative Resolution not only prioritizes three aquatic

ecosystem restoration projects for San Diego Water Board support, but also establishes aquatic ecosystem restoration as a major vehicle for achieving the goal of a meaningful net gain of aquatic resources called for in the Governor's Executive Order. It is anticipated that the other Regional Water Boards will be adopting similar Resolutions to support aquatic ecosystem restoration projects throughout the State.

The Tentative Resolution directs staff to, among other things:

- Actively promote and advance restoration projects that play an essential role in the protection, enhancement, and recovery of beneficial uses and work to achieve a meaningful net gain in aquatic ecosystems;
- Collaborate with restoration practitioners and other agencies to ensure viable and successful restoration projects;
- Collaborate with other programs and departments to facilitate the success of programs that monitor, assess, or restore aquatic ecosystems; and
- Support the development and implementation of the Brown Fill Property Restoration Project, the Mission Bay Wetlands Conceptual Plan, and the San Juan and Trabuco Creek Steelhead Recovery Watershed Management Plan, using available tools and authorities until these projects reach completion **(See Attachment 1 to the Tentative Resolution)**. This task will enable the San Diego Water Board to better understand ways in which the Board can help facilitate restoration projects in the San Diego Region.

LEGAL CONCERNS: None.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS: 1. Tentative Resolution No. R9-2015-0041
2. Governor of California Executive Order W-59-93