Attachment 1

Proposed Action

Project Need

While the objective of the Clean Water Act is to restore and maintain the chemical, physical, and biological integrity of the Nation's waters, existing water quality objectives in the San Diego Region emphasize the chemical integrity of waters on a pollutant-by-pollutant and waterbody-by-waterbody basis. This approach does not adequately assess or protect the biological integrity of the Region's waters, nor does it guide appropriate ecosystem restoration actions for chemically degraded waters in a holistic manner that considers other stressors, such as physical habitat modification. In this planned action, we are proposing a water quality objective for biological condition for streams that uses biological assessment, which is critical to restoring and maintaining the biological integrity of the region's waters. The science to support the proposed objective is now sufficient for establishing standards and evaluating methods and success for restoration and maintenance of biological integrity.

Legal Background

The Clean Water Act requires the San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board (San Diego Water Board) to establish water quality standards for waterbodies within the San Diego Region in its Water Quality Control Plan for the San Diego Region (Basin Plan). Water quality standards include designated Beneficial Uses for waters as well as water quality objectives to protect Beneficial Uses. Core Beneficial Uses include those uses associated with drinking water, human water contact recreation, fish and shellfish consumption, and ecosystem health. Water quality objectives may be narrative and/or numeric, with numeric water quality objectives usually consisting of chemistry-based numbers limiting concentrations of specific pollutants.

Biological Assessment

Biological assessments provide direct measures of the cumulative and integrated response of the biological community to all sources of stress, as the organisms are exposed to these stresses over time. Through this long-term exposure in their natural setting, biological communities provide the most comprehensive measure of the condition of the Beneficial Use to be protected. Biological objectives set the biological quality goal, or target, to which water quality can be managed against, rather than the maximum allowable level of a stressor(s) (pollutant or other water quality condition) that affects the aquatic life in that water body.

Evaluating the biological condition of waterbodies allows the San Diego Water Board and other regulatory and regulated agencies to take a more balanced and holistic approach when identifying priority areas for protection and restoration. This approach is also intended to better integrate biologically based Beneficial Uses with other core Beneficial Uses related to drinking water, recreation, and fish and shellfish consumption.

Summary of Basin Plan Amendment

The proposed Basin Plan amendment would update Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 of the San Diego Water Board Basin Plan. Chapter 3 includes the water quality objectives for the Region's waters and Chapter 4 includes the program of implementation to achieve the water quality objectives. The proposed Basin Plan amendment will do as follows:

1) Update Chapter 3 of the Basin Plan to include a numeric biological objective for perennial and seasonal streams; and

2) Update Chapter 4 of the Basin Plan to include a framework of implementation for the numeric biological objective for perennial and seasonal streams. The update will also incorporate narrative guidance for the development of future numeric biological objectives for additional waterbody types (e.g. lakes, vernal pools).

The proposed amendment is supported by a technical report prepared by San Diego Water Board staff (draft Staff Report). The draft Staff Report and supporting documentation provide the detailed factual basis and analysis supporting the proposed Basin Plan amendment.