

Monitoring Monday – Let’s look at the California Water Boards.

Join us each Monday as the Clean Water Team shares information and resources on water quality monitoring. This Monday we will look at the California Water Boards.

Water is a precious resource in California, and maintaining its quality is of utmost importance to safeguard the health of the public and the environment.

HISTORY

California’s water is vital to every aspect of our lives. In the mid-1940s, outbreaks of water-borne diseases, the degradation of fishing, coupled with rapid war-time industrial development and population growth prompted an appraisal of California’s water pollution control.

The California Assembly Committee on Water Pollution realized that existing laws were often unreasonable. Numerous jurisdictions tried to carry out the laws during hostility from agricultural, industrial, and recreational interests. The committee concluded that the state had reached the point where continued population and industrial growth would soon exhaust water supplies. California's water resources could only be protected and conserved if regulators found a way to maximize water quality objectives and water conservation.

Sweeping changes in California's approach to water pollution control and water quality were recommended. Acting on the committee's recommendations, the Legislature enacted the Dickey Water Pollution Act that took effect October 1, 1949. This act created the State Water Pollution Control Board. It had also been realized that California's water pollution problems were regional and depended on precipitation, topography, and population, as well as recreational, agricultural, and industrial development, all of which vary from region- to- region. This resulted in the act also establishing nine regional water pollution control boards in each of the major California watersheds.

These Regional Boards have responsibility for overseeing and enforcing the state’s pollution abatement program. Nine gubernatorial appointees, representing water supply, irrigated agriculture, industry, and municipal and county government in that region, served on each Regional Water Board.

The California Legislature recognized that California would not have enough clean water for agricultural, municipal, industrial, environmental and other uses unless water quality and water quantity decision-making were coordinated. The Assembly Water Committee's 1966 and 1967 reports proposed a coordinated water regulatory program. These reports included statutory changes that were enacted, and in 1967, the State Water Quality Control Board and State Water Rights Board merged and became the State Water Resources Control Board. This new Board was given broad authority and responsibility to protect water quality, and balance

competing demands on our water resources and attempt to resolve decades-long water disputes.

This new regulatory board merged the functions of two previous Boards: The State Water Quality Control Board (and 9 regional boards) and the State Water Rights Board. The former had its roots in the late 1940s, when legislators created a streamlined regulatory agency to address rising water quality problems with the state's explosive industrial and population growth. A water rights commission, which preceded the water rights board, was created in the early 1900s to arbitrate and resolve the state's water battles, which began during the 1849 Gold Rush. Back then, prospectors from throughout the world raced to the Sierra Nevada Mountains to stake their claims, using the cold mountain streams as a tool to unearth gold.

The State Assembly then asked a panel of industrial, agricultural, local and state government members to report on revisions to water quality laws. In 1969, the State Legislature enacted the Porter-Cologne Water Quality Control Act

The Porter-Cologne Act, also known as the California Water Code, Section 7, is the law that governs water quality regulation in California. It expanded the enforcement authority of the State Water Resources Control Board and the 9 Regional Water Quality Control Boards. The act provided for the California Environmental Protection Agency to create the local boards and better protect water rights and water quality.

The new state law was so influential that Congressional authors used sections of Porter-Cologne as the basis of the Federal Water Pollution Control Act Amendments of 1972 (known as the Clean Water Act).

The Clean Water Act required the states, or the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA), to set standards for surface water quality, mandate sewage treatment and regulate wastewater discharges into the nation's surface waters. It established a multibillion-dollar Clean Water Grant Program that, together with Clean Water Bond funding approved by California's voters, assisted communities in building municipal wastewater treatment facilities.

Rather than operate separate state and federal water pollution control programs in California, the State assumed responsibility for implementing the Clean Water Act. This involved blending state and federal processes together for setting water quality standards, issuing discharge permits, and operating the grants program.

The Water Board's Vision Statement

A sustainable California made possible by clean water and water availability for both human uses and environmental resource protection.

The five-member Board protects water quality by setting statewide policy, coordinating and supporting the Regional Board efforts, and reviewing petitions that contest Regional Board actions. Together with the regional boards, the State Board is authorized to implement the federal Clean Water Act in California. The Water Boards are housed within state government and are part of the California Environmental Protection Agency (CalEPA). Each of the five full-time salaried board members fills a different specialized position (representing the public, engineering expertise, water quality expertise, and water supply). The members are appointed to four-year terms by the Governor and confirmed by the Senate.

The State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board) and the nine Regional Water Quality Control Boards (Regional Water Boards), collectively known as the California Water Boards (Water Boards), are dedicated to a single vision: abundant clean water for human uses and environmental protection to sustain California's future. Under the federal Clean Water Act (CWA) and the state's pioneering Porter-Cologne Water Quality Control Act, the State and Regional Water Boards have regulatory responsibility for protecting the water quality of nearly 1.6 million acres of lakes, 1.3 million acres of bays and estuaries, 211,000 miles of rivers and streams, and about 1,100 miles of exquisite California coastline.

Water Board's Mission Statement

To preserve, enhance, and restore the quality of California's water resources and drinking water for the protection of the environment, public health, and all beneficial uses, and to ensure proper water resource allocation and efficient use, for the benefit of present and future generations.

The Regional Water Boards regulate discharges through waste discharge requirements. Anyone discharging or proposing to discharge materials that could affect water quality (other than to a community sewer system) must file a report of waste discharge. The State Water Board and the Regional Boards can conduct their own investigations or may require dischargers to carry out water quality investigations and report on water quality issues. Porter-Cologne provides several options for the enforcement of waste discharge requirements including cease and desist orders, cleanup and abatement orders, administrative civil liability orders, civil court actions, and criminal prosecutions. The State Water Board covers both water rights and water pollution control functions enabling it to consider water quality and the availability of unappropriated water whenever rights to water use are granted, or waste discharge controls are established.

COMPOSITION

The State Board organization is governed by five individuals, each having special expertise and experience in water issues. These individuals are appointed by the Governor to four-year terms and serve on a full-time basis. By law, these positions are filled by persons, one each of whom is:

- Qualified in the field of water quality
- Public Member
- Attorney qualified in the fields of water supply and water rights
- Civil Engineer qualified in the fields of water supply and water rights
- Sanitary Engineer qualified in water quality

Each Regional Board has seven part-time Members also appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Senate. Regional Boards develop “basin plans” for their hydrologic areas, govern requirements issue waste discharge permits, take enforcement action against violators, and monitor water quality. The task of protecting and enforcing the many uses of water, including the needs of industry, agriculture, municipal districts, and the environment is an ongoing challenge for the Water Board and Regional Boards.

Except as specified, each member shall be appointed based on his or her demonstrated interest or proven ability in the field of water quality, including water pollution control, water resource management, water use, or water protection. The Governor shall consider appointments from the public and nonpublic sectors. Regarding appointments from the nonpublic sector, the Governor shall consider including members from key economic sectors in a given region, such as agriculture, industry, commercial activities, forestry, and fisheries. At least one member shall be appointed as a public member.

GEOGRAPHIC DESTRIIBUTION

The State Board is located In Sacramento. There are nine Regional Water Boards, the boundaries of which are generally based on watersheds, also known as hydrologic areas. The nine Regional Water Boards are referred to by specific names, which are: (1) North Coast, (2) San Francisco Bay, (3) Central Coast, (4) Los Angeles, (5) Central Valley, (6) Lahontan, (7) Colorado River Basin, (8) Santa Ana, and (9) San Diego. Due to their size, and/or geographic spread, the Central Valley Board has three offices, and the Lahontan Board has two offices. In addition, the Drinking Water Program has fourteen District offices spread throughout the state.

Region 1 — [North Coastal Regional Water Quality Control Board](#)

Del Norte, Glenn, Humboldt, Lake, Marin, Mendocino, Modoc, Siskiyou, Sonoma, and Trinity counties.

Region 2 — [San Francisco Regional Water Quality Control Board](#)

Alameda, Contra Costa, San Francisco, Santa Clara (north of Morgan Hill), San Mateo, Marin, Sonoma, Napa, Solano counties.

Region 3 — [Central Coastal Regional Water Quality Control Board](#)

Santa Clara (south of Morgan Hill), San Mateo (southern portion), Santa Cruz, San Benito, Monterey, Kern (small portions), San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, Ventura (northern portion) counties.

Region 4 — [Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board](#)

Los Angeles, Ventura counties, (small portions of Kern and Santa Barbara counties).

Region 5 — [Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board](#)

Modoc, Shasta, Lassen, Plumas, Butte, Glen, Colusa, Lake, Sutter, Yuba, Sierra, Nevada, Placer, Yolo, Napa, (N. East), Solano (West), Sacramento, El Dorado, Amador, Calaveras, San Joaquin, Contra Costa (East), Stanislaus, Tuolumne, Merced, Mariposa, Madera, Kings, Fresno, Tulare, Kern. (Very small portions of San Benito, San Luis Obispo) counties.

Fresno Office: Fresno, Kern, Kings, Madera, Mariposa, Merced, and Tulare counties.

Redding Office: Butte, Glen, Lassen, Modoc, Plumas, Shasta, Siskiyou, and Tehama Counties.

Region 6 — [Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board](#)

Modoc (East), Lassen (East side and Eagle Lake), Sierra, Nevada, Placer, El Dorado, Alpine, Mono, Inyo, Kern (East), San Bernardino, Los Angeles (N/E corner) counties.

Region 7 — [Colorado River Regional Water Quality Control Board](#)

Imperial, San Bernardino, Riverside, San Diego counties.

Region 8 — [Santa Ana Regional Water Quality Control Board](#)

Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino counties.

Region 9 — [San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board](#)

San Diego, Imperial, Riverside counties.

RESOURCES:

About The State Water Resources Control Board

www.waterboards.ca.gov/publications_forms/publications/factsheets/docs/boardoverview.pdf

About the Water Boards

https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/board_reference/docs/about_the_waterboards.pdf

California Environmental Protection Agency (CalEPA)

<https://calepa.ca.gov/>

California Water Boards

www.waterboards.ca.gov/

Clean Water Act

www.epa.gov/laws-regulations/summary-clean-water-act

Citizens Guide to Working with the California Water Boards

www.waterboards.ca.gov/publications_forms/publications/general/docs/citizenguide.pdf

Division of Drinking Water District Offices

www.waterboards.ca.gov/drinking_water/programs/documents/ddwem/DDWdistrictofficesmap.pdf

History of the Water Boards

www.waterboards.ca.gov/about_us/water_boards_structure/history.html

Map of Regional Water Boards

www.waterboards.ca.gov/waterboards_map.html

Porter-Cologne Water Quality Control Act Water Code Division 7 and Related Sections (As amended, including Statutes 2022)

www.waterboards.ca.gov/laws_regulations/docs/portercologne.pdf

The Nine Regional Water Quality Control Boards in California

www.waterboards.ca.gov/publications_forms/publications/factsheets/docs/region_brds.pdf

Erick Burres

[Clean Water Team Coordinator](#)

[California Water Quality Collaboration Network Facilitator](#)

[Safe to Swim Network Co-facilitator](#)

erick.burres@waterboards.ca.gov

213 712 6862 mobile

Mailing address:

Erick Burres – Clean Water Team

C/O SARWQCB

3737 Main Street, Suite 500

Riverside, CA 92501-3348

