

March 30, 2007

STATE WATER RESOURCES
CONTROL BOARD

**WATERSHED MANAGEMENT APPROACH
FOR THE ADMINISTRATION OF WATER RIGHTS**

2008 MAY -1 PM 11:56

DIV OF WATER RIGHTS
SACRAMENTO

A. Overview of Watershed Management Approach

Watershed management and watershed-based approaches are well established concepts in water quality management and ecosystem restoration, but the watershed management approach is underutilized in water rights administration. Water rights applications have typically been processed individually rather than in groups of similarly situated applications. Traditionally, water rights permits and licenses tend to be implemented by water users and monitored by the SWRCB individually. A more holistic and collaborative approach to administering water rights is to utilize a watershed management approach. The goal of the watershed management approach is to satisfy competing environmental, land use and water use interests by taking advantages of opportunities to manage diversions collaboratively within a watershed, such as through cost sharing and coordination of diversions, that may not be available with the traditional approach. Under the watershed management approach, diverters could join together to develop local physical solutions to their watershed specific problems. For example, diverters could agree to coordinate management of their diversion schedules so that needed streamflows were maintained at particular points in a stream. Diverters could also share costs associated with developing data and monitoring conditions and could work together on projects that improved habitat at the most significant locations in the watershed, rather than only on their individual properties.

Because this approach would establish and enforce performance objectives for stream flows and other variables, which would be measured by actual stream conditions, the approach should be preferable for conservation. Because it would allow coordinated management and sufficient flexibility to achieve the watershed objectives in the most cost-effective manner, the approach should be preferable for water users.

The watershed management approach is an option which should be considered for all new permits in the North Coast region, and where appropriate, for coordination with existing permittees and licensees. The watershed approach differs from the traditional approach in that:

- Applicants will jointly conduct hydrological and biological analyses of the relevant watershed or stream reach, which will provide more comprehensive information and will reduce per-applicant costs;
- The watershed-specific analyses will enable the development of substantive instream flow performance standards for the specific watershed or stream reaches based on actual conditions and resource needs;
- The standards will be developed to address the most important issues in the watershed, in addition to the particular issues that may exist at the points of diversion;
- Applicants will be able to recommend and implement watershed management measures that could not be adopted in an application-by-application approach,