

Message from the State Water Board Executive Director, Dorothy Rice

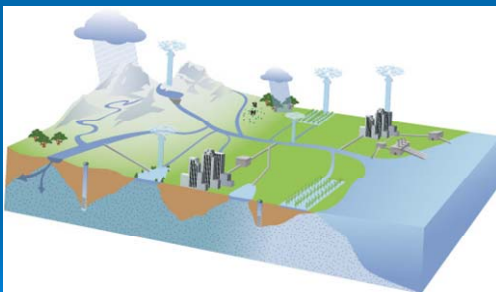
The major functions of the Water Boards have developed over the years to carry out our many federal and State mandates, and our mission.

As you review the information on our functions, I ask that you consider them in the context of how they should be implemented within the watersheds in the State. If we think of our

California Water Boards' Mission

To preserve, enhance and restore the quality of California's water resources, and ensure their proper allocation and efficient use for the benefit of present and future generations.

Illustrated Watershed and Hydrologic Cycle



Source: California Water Plan Update 2005

watersheds as an area of land that collects all of the water coming into that area and releases that water into our rivers, groundwater, and oceans, we begin to understand the magnitude and importance of all of our programs that establish limits on what can be discharged and how those discharges are to be managed within our watersheds.

In your role as Board members, you will be asked to make decisions that address site-specific and regional problems. With the diffuse nature of many sources of pollutants, a more holistic, integrated approach to decision-making would enable us to better understand the ecological processes, affected interests, and possible ancillary effects of what we do. Watersheds provide us with a context within which to blend these considerations.

So what are the some of the watershed issues facing us in general that impact water supply and water quality?

Consider just a few, beginning with land use. How we manage our lands can affect the natural flow of water into streams, rivers, and lakes. Alteration of land use in urban and rural areas affects how runoff is captured, the types of vegetation present, and degradation of stream channels, all of which affect water quality and water supply.

Human activities in watersheds, such as altering nutrient cycles, can result sometimes in dramatic changes to water bodies, vegetation, and animal communities. Nutrients are often transported away from the areas that they are introduced, to a point where they can support algae or other plant growth that impacts water quality.

As you move through the major Water Board functions, please keep in mind how the environmental threats that these functions are designed to address are or should be evaluated in a watershed framework. Consider how surface and ground waters are connected, and the relationships between water quality and water supply.

Many regions are shifting to using a watershed approach, from the development and implementation of TMDLs in a number of regions, to approaches to address erosion and other concerns. Each of your regions supports a Watershed Management Initiative coordinator that provides technical and planning support and outreach to your programs, local watershed groups, and other governmental agencies.

As I am sure you are all aware, the Water Boards administer a wide variety of programs affecting water quality and water supply. We certainly cannot present all of them to you in a day and a half workshop, but we hope that we have selected the principal functions that, as Board members, you will have the greatest interest in. There are a number of functions that are not discrete activities, but support all of our programs, that are not included.

For example, each year we analyze hundreds of bills that impact the Water Boards. While most of these may not make it out of their respective Committees or houses, many will reach the Governor's desk. A tremendous amount of effort is spent each year by our Office of Legislative Affairs coordinating bill analyses, soliciting State and Regional Board input, facilitating program review, and supporting Board members in their testimony before the Legislature.

Several years ago, one such bill reinvigorated the Water Board's public participation efforts, particularly for our cleanup programs, but for all other programs as well. Our Office of Public Participation provides critical support to the State and Regional Water Boards to ensure that the public is afforded ample opportunity to participate in the information development and decision-making processes for all of our functions.

For those of you from the more agricultural regions and urbanized areas of the State, you know that many communities may seem to bear a disproportionate burden of the facilities or activities that contribute to the degradation of water quality. These communities may also be disproportionately impacted by the pollution itself and they seek resolution, or "environmental justice," to address these actual or perceived wrongs. Our public participation program is geared particularly towards assisting these communities.

Because the State Board is looked to for providing the policy framework and process guidance to facilitate consistency statewide, these functions, plus many others such as legal, information technology, and administrative support, are housed at the State Board.

I hope that I have given you a few things to think about in relating our functions to healthy, functioning watersheds.