

Overview of the California Water Boards' grant program

April 20, 2008

California voters have been strong supporters of water quality bonds in the last decade - Proposition 13, 40, 50 and 84 have all had funds for water quality. These funds are dedicated to specific water quality program areas within the bonds.

In addition, US EPA also has some limited grant funds that come to California for water quality.

These bonds come with varying levels of direction on usage. Many bonds are quite explicit in what they can be used for. Follow-up budget and legislative language to add additional restrictions or direction is often seen. Legislation can continue for several years after the initial bond approval.

The most common restriction is that the bond needs to be used for capitol improvement projects. These are commonly thought of as "bricks and mortar" projects - ones that improve water quality through construction of a project. Monitoring/data collection, education, outreach, staffing and planning projects are difficult to fund.

The Division of Financial Assistance, with the help of the other State and Regional Board organizations, has distributed most of the bond money available to us from past bonds.

There are some remaining funds that are in the process of moving out now: Clean Beaches, Areas of Special Biological Significance, Integrated Regional Water Management Planning, Stormwater, Agricultural Water Quality, Drinking Water, State Revolving fund and federal 319 Nonpoint source grant funds.

Information on current grant processes is available in the background packets and on the website. Email lists are commonly used to keep prospective applicants informed of the progress of the grant program.

The Division is the lead organization for putting together public guidelines that give the "groundrules" for how the grant process will work and what types of projects are eligible and have priority.

Most bonds require formal guidelines, adopted after public hearing, with clear and transparent scoring and ranking systems.

This requirement adds clarity to the process and provides the applicant with a clear set of steps, but then limits flexibility as to changes during the final decision process. Guidelines are typically taken to the State Board for public hearing and final approval.

Staff at the State Board, and often the Regional Board, are involved in the rating and ranking of project proposals.

These are then provided to the State Board, most commonly, in a ranked list for State Board decision making on the grant distribution.

This Administration has been a strong proponent of Integrated Regional Water Management - bringing together individual agencies to develop a regional perspective on water quality and water supply needs and priorities. Prop. 50 and 84 provided large chunks of money to regions (similar to Regional Board boundaries) for regional planning and implementation efforts. Many of the water quality needs are being addressed through these new regional collaborations or agencies. This approach removes much of the specific program parameters and relies instead of agencies working together to develop multiple benefit projects or packages. Funding for water quality needs will need to be within this framework in the coming years as Prop. 84 provides a billion \$ through this approach. Recent bond proposals continue this approach as well.