



State Water Resources Control Board

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NEW CALIFORNIA WATER BOARD REPORT FOCUSES ON THE CONDITION OF REGULATED WETLANDS

SACRAMENTO—The State Water Resources Control Board today released a comprehensive study that evaluates the effectiveness of California's wetland regulatory program. The study found that permit holders generally complied with regulations and that some goals of state policy are being met. Overall wetland acreage is being maintained; however, the biological health of some of these replacement wetlands is low.

In light of these findings, the State Water Board is evaluating new regulatory initiatives to ensure the health of replacement wetlands is protected along with overall acreage. These initiatives include developing a wetland protection policy and determining the amount of additional resources needed for enforcement activities.

The 382-page study, titled *An Evaluation of Compensatory Mitigation Projects Permitted Under Clean Water Act Section 401 by the State Water Resources Control Board, 1991-2002*, was conducted by Dr. Richard F. Ambrose and Steven F. Lee of the University of California, Los Angeles, and Dr. John C. Callaway of the University of San Francisco. The State Water Board commissioned the study, one of the most extensive studies of wetland mitigation ever conducted, as an audit of the wetland regulatory program.

The study examined the health of wetlands established as a requirement of permits issued by the State and Regional Water Quality Control Boards to replace wetlands eliminated by various urban and rural development. Also, the degree of compliance with the permit conditions was evaluated.

It is important for the Water Boards to be aware of this information so they can know whether California wetlands are being protected as directed by the California Wetlands Conservation Policy that establishes the goal of sustaining and increasing wetland quantity and quality over time.

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In the years since European settlement of California, the state lost more than 90% of its original wetlands. That makes protection, enhancement and replacement of remaining wetlands vital because of the recognized services wetlands provide, including flood protection, groundwater replenishment and water quality improvement. .

The study found that developers' compliance with permits for 143 randomly selected mitigation projects was generally high. Because of the past loss of so much of California's wetlands, both California and the federal government have adopted a goal of "no net loss" of wetland acreage. The study found that, in total, California's regulatory program has achieved that goal. However, approximately 30% of individual permits impacted more acres of wetland than they produced.

A wetland assessment method, known as the California Rapid Assessment Method (CRAM), was used in the study to evaluate the condition of wetlands on 129 projects throughout California. A team of California wetland scientists developed CRAM with grant support from the federal Environmental Protection Agency. One-fifth of the developers' mitigation projects produced wetlands evaluated to be in optimal condition, while approximately one-quarter were in marginal to poor condition; the balance were rated as in sub-optimal condition.

The full report is available on the Web site at <http://www.waterboards.ca.gov>, in the center column under "Compensatory Mitigation Study Now Available."

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