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Arnold Schwarzenegger
Governor

2 February 2010

Dear Water Quality Stakeholders:

DEVELOPMENT OF BIOLOGICAL OBJECTIVES FOR CALIFORNIA

The State Water Board is initiating the process to develop biological objectives for freshwater streams and rivers in California. You are invited to participate in the project kickoff meetings on 8 and 11 March 2010.

8 March 2010, 1:00 – 4:00 p.m.
Cal EPA Building
1001 I Street, Sacramento

11 March 2010, 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
SCCWRP
3535 Harbor Blvd., Suite 110, Costa Mesa

The purpose of these meetings is to educate stakeholders on the project and initiate the process of assembling the stakeholder, regulatory, and scientific committees that will help guide the effort. A brief discussion of the purpose and background of the project is provided below.

Protecting the integrity of biological resources in streams and rivers is one of the primary goals of California's water quality regulatory efforts. Historically, the Water Boards focused their monitoring, assessment, and regulatory efforts almost exclusively on chemical and physical criteria. Recognizing the value of directly measuring biological integrity, several Water Board programs conduct bioassessment monitoring and some require bioassessment in permits. However, State and Regional Water Board plans and policies do not contain numeric objectives or guidance for using biological data in regulatory decision-making. Therefore, biological objectives are needed to provide the narrative or numeric benchmarks that describe conditions necessary to protect aquatic life beneficial uses. This initial effort will focus on wadeable perennial streams and rivers.

The absence of biological objectives or the lack of guidance has limited the effectiveness of many Water Board programs, leading to:

- the inability to objectively assess whether aquatic life beneficial uses are supported;
- the inability to assess whether chemical and physical criteria are sufficient to protect aquatic life (i.e., whether permits relying on chemical and physical criteria alone are achieving healthy streams & rivers);
- inconsistencies in identifying impaired waterbodies;
- costly development of biological targets on a project-by-project basis.

These problems can be resolved by employing modern tools for directly measuring and protecting aquatic life and developing thresholds and guidance for assessing the data.

California Environmental Protection Agency

2 February 2010

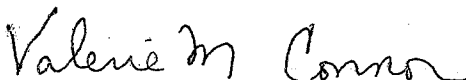
State Water Board managers are committed to developing biological objectives for assessing the health of streams statewide.

The state has invested significant resources to develop the technical tools needed to directly measure biological condition (assessing the organisms living in streams) laying the groundwork for using these tools in regulatory programs. The State Water Board plans to develop biological objectives for all perennial, wadeable streams and rivers in California taking into account the range of natural variation and degree of development in the state. The objectives likely will be in the form of a narrative statement that will be applied statewide. This narrative objective will be accompanied by a detailed implementation plan that, where possible, sets regionally appropriate numeric targets. Where data are not sufficient to define numeric targets, the implementation plan will describe the process for developing them.

Three oversight committees will be established for the development and public vetting of the regulatory and technical policy statements: 1) a **Stakeholder Committee** that will communicate the project goals to interested stakeholders and carry their input back to the scientific and regulatory committees to ensure that stakeholder input is incorporated into the technical and policy elements throughout the process, and play a key role in advising the State Water Board; 2) a **Scientific Steering Committee** of external experts that will provide review of the technical aspects of the project; and 3) a **Regulatory Oversight Committee** that will coordinate with staff in other State Water Board programs and at all Regional Water Boards to ensure that the project delivers the tools that regulators and managers need, and to provide outreach and training to ensure that the tools are used correctly and equitably.

We look forward to working with you and encourage you to forward this letter to those we may have missed. Your participation at this early stage in the project is critical to ensure that the range of public interests is represented throughout the process. Thank you in advance for your participation in this important effort. We look forward to seeing you in March. If you have any questions or would like additional information regarding this matter please contact Karen Larsen at (916) 319-9769 or klarsen@waterboards.ca.gov.

Sincerely,



Valerie M. Connor, PhD, Director
OFFICE OF INFORMATION MANAGEMENT AND ANALYSIS