



STATEWIDE WATERSHED PROGRAM

PUBLIC ADVISORY COMMITTEE

PROGRAM RECOMMENDATIONS

INTRODUCTION

The California Secretary of Resources requested that the former CALFED Watershed Program make a transition to become a Statewide Watershed Program, to be administered by the Department of Conservation (DOC).

The Secretary appointed an Advisory Committee of 24 experienced watershed community leaders from around the State to help complete that transition. Subsequently, the Committee held public meetings throughout the State to solicit input about watershed management needs. These recommendations reflect the results of the public outreach.

THE CHALLENGE

The State of California is working to develop strategies to address climate change. Recent work has focused largely on ways to decrease and mitigate greenhouse gasses and other drivers of the change. Regardless of the degree of reduction, however, it is clear that, while mitigation strategies may alter the amount of change, change itself is irreversible. It is important now that the State continue to develop and implement effective adaptation strategies to respond to the changes.

Innovative approaches to natural resource management must be developed and implemented to address the growing impacts of climate change, especially in the context of several other areas of concern, including:

- Statewide pressure on water supplies
- Water quality concerns
- Agricultural sustainability and stability
- Population growth and development
- Need for integrating priorities and policies across multiple scales to maintain the added value of sustained local contributions
- Pressure for more open space, housing, recreation needs

An adaptive resource management policy based on watersheds as organizing units will significantly contribute to both the organizational as well as the policy needs confronting the State. It will also help inform and integrate management efforts among many different scales, resulting in a more comprehensive strategy and response.

The science of natural resource management has increasingly focused on managing resources from a watershed perspective as an approach to ensuring long-term sustainability. Watersheds have proven to be an effective management unit for natural resources, yet no single agency or organization can effectively manage them. Coordinated strategies must be developed that involve community level management working in partnership with local, State, Tribal and Federal agencies.

Many resource management agencies throughout the nation, as well as a number of States, are adapting their management strategies to this end. This new approach embraces multiple objectives and produces multiple benefits, while reducing conflicts among traditionally independent resource management entities. These benefits include:

- ✓ Provision of water supplies and protection of water supply origins
- ✓ Ground water recharge
- ✓ Water supply reliability
- ✓ Carbon sequestration
- ✓ Provision of food, fiber, and fuel
- ✓ Water purification and natural waste treatment
- ✓ Flood and wildfire mitigation
- ✓ Drought mitigation and flow attenuation
- ✓ Provision of aquatic and terrestrial habitat
- ✓ Soil fertility, health, and productivity
- ✓ Nutrient and mineral cycling and delivery
- ✓ Biodiversity maintenance
- ✓ Recreational opportunities
- ✓ Climate moderation
- ✓ Buffering salinity intrusion
- ✓ Aesthetics

ADVISORY COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

The Statewide Watershed Program Advisory Committee (Committee) recommends that the State of California establish a State Watershed Program ***that will advance sustainable watershed based management of California's natural resources using community based strategies.*** The program will help mobilize local communities and resources to advance watershed management practices, by providing important tools that the State is uniquely suited to provide.

The Committee recommends that the transition of the successful CALFED Watershed Program to the Statewide Watershed Program be adopted. In the near term the program will complete a foundation to improve and unify natural resource management based on watersheds across the State and, in the long term, greatly increase the effectiveness and efficiency of management practices at the local, regional and State level.

The Committee further recommends that the State carry out the transition incrementally. During the next two years, using currently available funding, the foundation for the program will be completed. It will be composed of three elements:

- ✓ A communication and coordination element that links watershed managers at all levels with other stakeholders to enable efficient exchange of information and knowledge among local, regional, state, tribal and federal levels.
- ✓ A State clearinghouse that links and compiles pertinent information about regional watersheds, and the practice of effective watershed management, and makes the information easily accessible to managers and other stakeholders.
- ✓ A Statewide Watershed Program infrastructure of offices and personnel dedicated to implementation of the Program. In the first two years, the infrastructure should be established with existing resources that have been put in place over the past several years as part of related initiatives such as the CALFED Watershed program.

As the program develops and the necessary funding becomes available, an additional element of financial assistance will be reestablished. This element will be used to help develop and implement watershed management plans and programs at the local and regional scale; monitor status and condition of individual watersheds, and; monitor and track performance and progress of local and regional management.

In order to adapt current resource management approaches toward a systemic watershed approach, regional managers have requested assistance from the State in designing and implementing watershed-based strategies.

STAKEHOLDER SURVEY SUMMARY *(see appendix A for a full report)*

The Committee conducted a wide-ranging public outreach campaign throughout the state from February through May 2008. Meetings were held in each of the ten hydrologic regions of the State. The Committee received thousands of comments from attendees, through the meetings, and from letters, emails, and personal interviews. Additional comments came from online surveys.

Analysis of outreach responses showed that stakeholders in local and regional watershed management efforts consistently identified specific watershed management support needs:

- Greater communication and coordination among those active in natural resource management, from local to national levels, in both government and non-government arenas.
- Improved access to scientific and technical information to support watershed management.
- Support for funding watershed management efforts at both the project and organizational level.

CONCLUSION

The State can promote natural resource management adaptations to large scale change. It should use the effective base resulting from an effective transition of the CALFED Watershed Program to a Statewide Program. Considerable support for this approach exists at the community level throughout the State. Resource managers and planners both in government and in nongovernment organizations already are working to reorganize their management practices to improve watershed functions. The State can move this effort forward by providing essential support to local and regional agencies, as well as to organizations whose mission it is to improve resource management at the watershed level.

The Statewide Watershed Program can provide communication and coordination assistance to better connect State programs with regional and local natural resources management efforts. Adaptation to climate change and population growth is best achieved by considering whole natural systems contexts, such as watersheds, in order to more effectively adjust policies and actions to cope with change as it occurs.

To develop effective adaptive strategies to adjust to climate change, the state will require a different, whole systems approach to natural resource management decision-making. Greater information sharing and synthesis across management scales will allow the state to develop dynamic responses to changing conditions.

