

Central Valley Regional
Water Quality Control Board



Photo by Guy Chetelat

Central Valley Water Board's Strategic Plan 2021



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The Strategic Plan

The Central Valley Water Board has an incredibly broad charge: to protect beneficial uses in water bodies throughout a region that spans over 40 percent of the State of California. The Central Valley Water Board accomplishes this regulatory charge through the implementation of 19 water quality programs. In late 2019, the Board embarked on a strategic planning effort to unify these efforts through the development of a Strategic Plan that would include a mission statement, internal and external vision statements, a common set of values, program assessments, and strategic objectives.

This Strategic Plan, the product of that process, will guide the Board's efforts for the next 5-7 years. This Strategic Plan has been developed by the Board members in collaboration with the Board's Strategic Planning Committee after conducting both a comprehensive situational assessment that included a Strength, Weakness, Opportunity and Threat (SWOT) analysis and dialogues with each of the Board's Program Managers and a thorough public process where questionnaires, interviews, and workshops were used to gather input from a wide spectrum of stakeholders. These assessments, along with stakeholder input, has been used to develop strategic objectives that all the Board's programs will collectively be responsible for implementing.

The Central Valley Water Board

The Central Valley Water Board regulates activities and industries that can have an effect on groundwater and surface water quality in the largest and most diverse region in California. The Central Valley Region stretches from the Goose Lake watershed on the Oregon border to northern Los Angeles County – about 60,000 square miles, or nearly 40 percent of the state. All or part of 38 of California's 58 counties fall within the Central Valley Region.

The Central Valley includes some of the most valuable and diverse habitats in the world, ranging from desert, wetland, and chaparral to riparian and alpine forests. The Central Valley also hosts nearly 80 percent of California's irrigated agricultural land, planted in more than 300 different crops. About 42 percent of the Central Valley Region is forested lands. The Board address water quality issues associated with timber harvest, environmental restoration, fuels management projects, and post-fire restoration activities. Other water quality challenges in the Central Valley are related to activities that occurred more than a century ago; many of the remnants of the Gold Rush persist in the Sierra-Cascade and Coastal Ranges in the form of abandoned mine lands, which still discharge heavy metals and other pollutants to surface waters. The effects of this legacy are still being felt by recreational anglers, subsistence fishers and tribal communities throughout the region.

The exigency of the climate crisis, and its uneven impact on economically disadvantaged communities and communities of color, is also being felt in the Central Valley. Hundreds of thousands of the Valley's residents still lack access to safe, clean,

and affordable drinking water, in part due to water quality contamination. This means that Central Valley Water Board's duty, to protect the quality of the region's waters for all beneficial uses, has never been more important. To the increasingly diverse communities that rely on the state's rivers, reservoirs, lakes, aquifers, and wetlands for drinking water, cultural uses, and recreation, water quality protections are essential for the long-term sustainability of the region as a whole.

Mission Statement, Vision Statements and Values

The Central Valley Water Board developed mission and vision statements so that all stakeholders, internal and external, can be aware of its core beliefs and aspirations. In the process of developing mission and vision statements, the Board also sought to define the values that motivate it as an organization.

Mission Statement

The Board's mission statement is an affirmative statement of the Board's primary objective. All the Board's efforts are in service to this mission. The Board's mission statement, based on the greater mission of the State Water Board, is:

To preserve, enhance, and restore the quality of the Central Valley's water resources for the protection of the environment, public health, and all beneficial uses for the benefit of present and future generations.

External Vision

The Board's External Vision defines a future state that all its stakeholders can experience if the Board is successful at implementing its mission. The Board's External Vision is:

A Central Valley where aquifers and surface waters meet or exceed water quality necessary to support all beneficial uses, where all communities have access to safe, affordable, and resilient water supplies, and where all people have a shared responsibility for water quality that is sustained through multi-generational stewardship that begins in the homes and classrooms throughout the region.

Internal Vision

In conjunction with the development of the Board's External Vision, the Board also developed an Internal Vision, which helps define a future that would be experienced by internal stakeholders – staff and management. The Board's Internal Vision is:

A well-run organization with strong and dutiful executive leadership where technical, managerial and administrative staff know that their work is highly valued and where a culture of public engagement, collaborative problem-solving, transparency and outreach is fostered by management.

We Value...

The following is a list of values that the Board considers core to its mission. These were used in the development of the Board's Mission and Internal and External Vision statements:

Integrity

Professionalism

Collaboration

Diversity, Inclusion, and Anti-Racism

Water Quality Protection

Beneficial Outcomes for All

Public Health

Environmentalism

Transparency

Economic Fairness

"Generational" Preservation of Water

Community

Adaptability

Commitment to do better for the environment

Assessment: Portfolio Management and the Board's Programs

The Board has responsibility for addressing a wide variety of water quality issues throughout the largest region in the State of California. In 2011, the Board's management engaged in a Program Management Implementation Strategy designed to more efficiently and effectively manage the 19 water quality programs that implement the Board's programmatic objectives. Central to the Board's Program Management Strategy are the Board's Program Managers, who are key managerial personnel tasked with developing and implementing annual work plans through a Portfolio Management process.

Portfolio Management was developed as the framework to support the Board's water quality mission. Annual workplans, developed by the 19 Program Managers in collaboration with the executive management team, are operations plans that provide a clear picture of how a water quality program will contribute to the achievement of the organization's goals over the next year. Portfolio Management is based on a matrix organizational structure, meaning employees have dual reporting relationships, one to a functional manager (direct line supervisor) and one to a Program Manager.

The strategic objectives contained in this Strategic Plan will ultimately be implemented through the Portfolio Management Process; Program Managers and executive

management will work to incorporate the strategic objectives into annual workplans, thus allocating our resources to support the long-term objectives of the Board.

Strategic Planning Implementation – Board Programs

In developing the Strategic Plan, the Board's Strategic Planning Committee queried the 19 Program Managers to help understand how individual water quality programs could ultimately contribute to the strategic objectives that were under development. The following section describes the results of this fact-finding effort to help define the current state of the Board's regulatory work. In addition to general summaries of the water quality programs, Program Managers were asked to provide a frank assessment of the main challenges that their programs face, to enhance transparency.

Permitting Programs

NPDES

The federal Clean Water Act's National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) program is a federal program that U.S. EPA has delegated to the State of California for implementation. This program protects beneficial uses by regulating point source discharges of pollutants to surface waters. Point sources include wastewater treatment facilities, fish hatcheries, and industrial facilities that discharge through discrete conveyances (like pipes). NPDES permits are issued to individual facilities defined by U.S. EPA as "major" or "minor" depending on a facility's threat to water quality. NPDES permits are updated every five years per federal regulations.

The NPDES Program faces challenges with the implementation of the State Water Board's new Toxicity Provisions. Permitting issues include reduced U.S. EPA funding to support the Program, difficulty in obtaining quality data for permit development, and the time-consuming permit process which requires Board approval.

Waste Discharge to Land Program

The Waste Discharge to Land Program primarily regulates waste discharges that may affect groundwater quality. The Program is the oldest state water quality control program, covering a wide variety of discharges. In the Central Valley, the Program regulates wastewater treatment facilities, food processors, wineries, and other industries that discharge non-hazardous wastes to land. The Program currently regulates over 1,400 facilities.

Several State Water Board general orders and Central Valley Water Board actions have helped streamline requirements for types of similar discharges. Permitting staff are interacting with dischargers to support implementation of the CV-SALTS programs, as well as other special issues. Challenges include the unique nature of many of the discharges as well as resource limitations, which can result in a permitting backlog.

Water Quality Certifications

The Water Quality Certifications Program protects the integrity of high resource value wetlands, riparian areas, and headwaters by regulating the removal or placement of materials in wetlands and waterways. Examples of such projects include navigational dredging, flood control channelization, levee construction, channel clearing, fill of wetlands for development, bridge piers, docks, etc. These types of projects generally require a Clean Water Act Section 404 permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps), and the State's Water Quality Certification is issued pursuant to Section 401 of the Clean Water Act. Water Quality Certifications have enforceable provisions to ensure that projects meet state water quality requirements. The Water Quality Certifications Program is also responsible for implementing the State and Federal Wetlands No Net Loss Policies and the State Water Board's new Dredge and Fill Procedures.

Program challenges include implementing the Dredge and Fill Procedures and new procedural application requirements, as well as the increased workload required to issue Waste Discharge Requirements for impacts to non-federal aquatic resources. Additionally, a need for increased compliance and enforcement has been identified but is limited by a high work to staff ratio.

Stormwater

The Storm Water Program implements construction, industrial, and municipal stormwater permits to regulate the discharge of pollutants to waters of the U.S. The permits require implementation of Best Management Practices (BMPs) and other program elements to minimize the discharge of pollutants. Pollutants frequently associated with storm water discharges include sediment, petroleum products, pesticides/herbicides, metals, bacteria, trash, and other debris. Program staff review individual projects, make site-specific recommendations, and ensure compliance with permitting requirements through inspections and enforcement. Staff pursue water quality protection at construction and industrial sites through a strong field presence and through a close review of reports and monitoring data. Staff pursue water quality protection associated with municipal separate storm sewer systems (MS4) discharges by ensuring approved management plans are being effectively implemented.

Challenges in the near future include implementation of revised construction, industrial and Caltrans storm water permits, which are expected to be adopted by State Water Board within the next year. Oversight of the multi-faceted municipal permits is also complex and time-consuming. The high work to staff ratio and the need for increased compliance and enforcement relative to municipal permits are ongoing issues the program continues to face.

Planning, Monitoring and Assessment

Planning (including Delta & TMDL)

Water Quality Control Plans or "Basin Plans" provide the foundation for all Central Valley Water Board regulatory actions. Basin Plans identify beneficial uses of surface and groundwater, water quality objectives to protect those uses, implementation actions to achieve objectives, and monitoring and surveillance programs to ensure implementation actions are effective. The Planning Program is responsible for overseeing the implementation and updates of the Tulare Lake and Sacramento-San Joaquin River Basin Water Quality Control Plans (Basin Plans). Major focuses of the Program are developing Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs) for impaired waters, performing Triannual Reviews of the Basin Plans, and implementing the Delta Program.

The challenges to the program are related to the nature of water quality planning. Projects undertaken by the planning program are generally complex projects which require a large investment of resources and often take years to complete. Furthermore, these projects influence other water quality programs, which requires a high degree of inter-program coordination. Lastly, planning efforts require extensive public engagement, which, if done correctly, takes time. Going forward, the Planning Program's work will include CV-SALTS implementation, Tribal Beneficial Use development, Integrated Report development, and continued focus on TMDLs, Triennial Reviews, and the Delta Program.

CV-SALTS

The Central Valley Salinity Alternatives for Long-Term Sustainability (CV-SALTS) initiative is a stakeholder-driven effort that developed a regulatory framework to address legacy and ongoing salt and nitrate accumulation. The goals of the program are to ensure safe drinking water supplies, to reduce salt and nitrate loading to protect beneficial uses, and to implement long-term, managed restoration of impaired water bodies. To meet these prioritized goals, the Salt and Nitrate Control Programs have been phased, with specific implementation activities required for salt and another set of implementation activities required for nitrate. Both implementation approaches provide permittees the option to select their means of compliance: either through a conservative permitting approach focused on individual source control or through an alternative coordinated, multi-discharger management approach.

The water quality impacts associated with the recent drought (salts in surface waters, and salt and nitrate impacts to groundwater) demonstrate how critical this program's implementation is to the long-term sustainability of the Central Valley's groundwater resources, including those components that require extensive stakeholder engagement.

SWAMP

The California Surface Water Ambient Monitoring Program (SWAMP) was created to fulfill the legislative mandate for a unifying program that would coordinate all surface water quality monitoring conducted by the State and Regional Water Boards. The SWAMP conducts water quality monitoring directly and through collaborative partnerships, and provides numerous reports, fact sheets and tools, all designed to support water resource management in California. SWAMP monitoring projects assess overall water quality status and trends, identify water quality problems and potential sources, and evaluate program effectiveness.

The Central Valley Water Board has four overarching goals for its SWAMP efforts: 1) evaluate ambient water quality, beneficial use protection, and potential sources of impairment; 2) evaluate effectiveness of the Water Board water quality improvement policies; 3) coordinate internal and external monitoring efforts to leverage limited resources; and 4) ensure timely availability of monitoring results. Challenges for the near future include incorporating climate change metrics whenever possible into monitoring design (e.g., ambient temperature) and database integration, particularly with CIWQS and other databases such as GeoTracker, CEDEN, and CalWQA

Nonpoint Source

Nonpoint source (NPS) pollution is the leading cause of water quality impairments in California. The primary nonpoint sources in the Central Valley include runoff and percolation from land use activities related to agriculture, timber harvests, cannabis cultivation, abandoned mines, recreation, and urban and rural development. The Nonpoint Source Program has been operational for over 20 years. Leveraging limited federal grant funds, the Nonpoint Source Program works to restore waters impacted by NPS pollution and to protect unimpaired water bodies by assessing problem sources and implementing management programs. Grant administration priorities are determined annually, and funded projects must generally be linked to a TMDL in the Basin Plan.

Over time, the administration of funds has become less flexible and a large portion of the funds are used to administer the program itself. With limited resources spread across numerous staff members, it can be challenging for staff to provide any one project with the required amount of time and energy to effectively implement the project, and the high volume of reporting compared to volume of work is a considerable issue impairing the ability of project funds to effectively address water quality issues.

Administrative Support

The Board employs approximately 250 permanent employees and 40 temporary or part-time employees. Of those staff, less than 6% serve as our Administrative Section team. The Administrative Support Program provides administrative support for the management of 19 technical and regulatory programs across three offices (Rancho Cordova, Redding, and Fresno) within the Central Valley Water Board.

Administrative program staff play a key role in accomplishing the Board's mission, from day-to-day operations to working within the regulatory program areas to ensure that staffing resources are used efficiently. The Administrative Support team is responsible for activities that are related to budget projection and tracking, contract/grant development and management, procurement, managing laboratory services, record keeping, billing, personnel/human resources, recruitment, physical distribution of mail/electronic content management, vehicle fleet, data management, and logistics. Program challenges include minimal staff to adequately support core activities and technical programs, ongoing communication issues with the State Water Board on critical updates and processes, constant changes to processes, and procurement delays.

Special Permitting Programs

Irrigated Lands

In the Central Valley region, there are approximately 30,000 irrigated agricultural operations on over 6 million acres of land. The Irrigated Lands Regulatory Program (ILRP) regulates these operations to protect beneficial uses of surface and groundwater. Growers who are part of a third-party group (coalitions) are regulated under one commodity-specific and seven geographic General Orders. Coalitions monitor receiving waters and develop management plans to address water quality problems, while growers implement practices to protect water quality.

The goal of the ILRP is to prevent discharges from irrigated lands from causing adverse impacts to beneficial uses in surface and groundwater through Order implementation, appropriate compliance, outreach, enforcement, and coordination with all stakeholders. This includes working to implement the human right to safe, clean, affordable, and accessible water while also acknowledging the value of a healthy and sustainable irrigated agricultural industry in the Central Valley.

Program challenges include groundwater nitrate contamination which has impacted drinking water sources for disadvantaged communities and tailoring requirements suited for the numerous different commodity types and extensive geographic areas within the Region.

Oil Fields

Most California oil production occurs in the Central Valley. Formation water produced with the oil, known as produced wastewater, comprises the largest volume of wastes generated by oil production. Produced wastewater is disposed of by land application (primarily to ponds) or by underground injection. Other oil field wastes include drilling muds, solids, and sludges generated when tanks and equipment are cleaned. The goal of the Oil Fields Program is to properly regulate oil field discharges and oversee monitoring activities to ensure the protection of surface and groundwaters and human health.

Oil field produced wastewater is often high in salts, boron, metals, and can contain significant amounts of organic compounds. Discharges to land have the potential to adversely impact beneficial uses. Similarly, improperly sited underground injection control wells and stimulated wells have the potential to adversely impact beneficial use waters. The Oil Fields Program is tasked with issuing effective regulatory orders to ensure discharges to land do not impact beneficial uses, and is responsible for reviewing proposed aquifer exemption applications, UIC permits, and Senate Bill 4 related groundwater monitoring programs to ensure permitted activities are protective of water quality. Challenges to the Oil Fields Program include a high workload to staff ratio and working with a stakeholder group new to being regulated by the Board.

Land Disposal

The Land Disposal Program regulates the land discharge of solid and liquid wastes to prevent water quality impacts. These wastes include municipal solid waste, hazardous wastes, designated wastes (such as petroleum-impacted soils), and nonhazardous and inert solid wastes. In general, these wastes cannot be discharged directly to the ground surface without impacting groundwater or surface water and, therefore, they must be contained in facilities designed to prohibit the wastes from migrating to groundwater.

The primary goal of the Program is to protect groundwater and surface water quality from contaminants associated with landfills, liquid waste surface impoundments and other waste containment units. The Program achieves this goal by ensuring permits contain current applicable regulations and by implementing timely enforcement where necessary. Challenges include the regulation of closed facilities that were constructed prior to current waste management standards and issues pertaining to the enforcement of the Title 27 regulations, which are overdue for revision.

Confined Animals

The Central Valley is home to a variety of agricultural operations that rely on animals, including cows, steers, sheep, goats, pigs, and poultry. Confined Animal Facilities (CAFs) are ranches where livestock are held and provided food for a significant part of the time. Discharges from CAFs include manure, wastewater, and storm water runoff that may contain waste constituents. The primary constituents of concern in these discharges are salts and nitrogen. Permits regulating CAFs typically include requirements for animal housing and corrals, production areas, ponds or lagoons, and land application areas (cropland).

Challenges to the program include overseeing a high number of facilities, a high workload to staff ratio, and navigating the complexities of nitrogen management. Future goals for the program include overseeing the development and implementation of improved practices for nitrate management and ensuring that these practices are protective of water quality.

Mines

Central Valley Water Board staff have identified 106 mine sites with known or potential water quality impacts. This is a subset of the 47,000 abandoned mine sites with physical and/or environmental hazards identified throughout California by the Department of Conservation. Most mine sites regulated by the Central Valley Water Board are closed and abandoned mines that have not operated for decades, with some mines inactive for more than 100 years. Discharges of waste from these mine sites can have devastating effects on receiving waters and can significantly limit or obliterate beneficial uses for miles downstream. Primary pollutants from mine sites include low pH and heavy metals.

The ultimate programmatic goal for inactive mines (including abandoned mines) is to eliminate surface water and groundwater impacts from past mining and prevent further degradation of waters of the state. Cleanup actions may be facilitated using voluntary agreements, permitting mechanisms, or enforcement orders. Due to the age of many mines, locating viable responsible parties to fund cleanup of pollution is challenging. Furthermore, if a responsible party is located, they rarely have the adequate funding or knowledge to address pollution from the mine waste discharges.

Cannabis

The Cannabis Program began in 2014 and is tasked with enforcement and permitting cannabis cultivation sites regulated under a statewide order that replaced regional orders in 2019. The program works collaboratively with multiple agencies, including law enforcement, to address both permitted and illegal grows. The Cannabis Regulatory Program focuses on four core objectives:

- Increase enrollments in the General Order;
- Perform targeted enforcement in high-value watersheds;
- Continue education and outreach to cultivators;
- Coordinate with other agencies at the state and local level.

Through implementation of these objectives, the Program strives to prevent cultivation activities from negatively impacting water quality. Impacts stem from erosion and sediment discharge associated with ground disturbing activities including cultivation pads, access roads, and dam construction; use and improper storage of fertilizers, pesticides, and fuels; improper septage disposal; and poor housekeeping. The Program is hindered by the low number of counties that allow cultivation, the proliferation of illegal grows, and a transient enrollee community. Staffing and resources are limited, and enforcement is disproportionately resource-intensive compared to comparable water quality enforcement actions due in part to the presence of hazards to field staff that must be addressed collaboratively with law enforcement agencies.

Forest Activities

Dating back to the 1970s, the Forest Activities Program is focused on nonpoint source discharges related to timberland management. Tasked with overseeing both federal and non-federal lands, the program is increasingly involved in wildfire preparation and post-

wildfire recovery. The scale and scope of management activities occurring in the state is large and difficult to manage, and pre- and post-fire regulation is increasingly complex. California's forested lands produce the highest quality waters and provide most of the state's water, but activities in forested lands threaten to produce nonpoint source pollution, which is the leading cause of water quality impairments in California. The goal of the Program is to prevent impacts to surface waters due to discharges of pollutants related to forestland management, including sediment, petroleum products, pesticides/herbicides, and other waste materials, in accordance with the state's 2004 Nonpoint Source Implementation Policy.

Through regulatory oversight of commercial timber harvesting, vegetation management, post-fire salvage and other forestland management activities with the potential to affect waters of the state on federal, state, and private lands, the Program aims to restore access to habitat for fish; reduce anthropogenic stream channel modifications; and reduce impacts to surface waters. Impacts may be generated from legacy roads and watercourse crossings, post-fire utility work, hazard tree removal, and timber salvage operations. Data tracking is extensive and represents a significant time investment for staff, and adequate supporting technology is not always available. Unknown factors related to climate change (severity of fires, duration of fire season, changes in precipitation pattern affecting forest health) also represent an increasing concern.

Enforcement and Cleanup

Compliance & Enforcement

The state and regional water boards have authority under the Water Code to pursue enforcement actions against any person unlawfully impacting the quality of the waters of the state. The water boards' compliance and enforcement actions are guided by the State Water Board's 2017 Enforcement Policy. The Compliance and Enforcement Program aims to protect water quality by regulating facilities which have the potential to adversely impact water quality and by enforcing state and federal laws and policies. To assess compliance with waste discharge and other requirements, staff document and track violations in various databases.

Where violations occur, staff are responsible for taking swift and fair enforcement actions. To do this, Compliance and Enforcement staff must review self-monitoring reports, conduct compliance inspections, respond to complaints, identify sites requiring a permit, provide technical and regulatory oversight, and issue enforcement actions consistent with the Enforcement Policy to ensure compliance and protection of human health, the environment, and water quality. Program challenges include the complexity involved in ensuring dischargers are provided procedural due process in administrative hearings, interpreting and applying changing regulations, and identifying Program priorities.

Site Cleanup

The Site Cleanup Program regulates and oversees the investigation and cleanup of contaminated sites. Staff oversee investigation and cleanup actions at sites that have been impacted by releases of pollutants to soil, soil gas, groundwater, surface water, sediments, and indoor air. Sites include large industrial facilities, military bases, oil refineries, factories, and smaller facilities such as dry cleaners and metal plating shops. Many properties are in urban areas and environmental justice communities, and cleanup often results in contaminant removal, reduced impact to water and economic growth. The types of pollutants include fertilizers, heavy metals, solvents, and many others.

To accomplish its mission, staff identify contaminated sites, provide technical and regulatory oversight of cleanup activities, and ensure that remedies result in site restoration and protection of human health, the environment, and water quality. The Site Cleanup Program is challenged by emerging contaminants as well as limited funding to investigate and remediate known contaminants in disenfranchised areas.

UST/AGT

The Underground Storage Tank (UST) and Aboveground Storage Tank (AST) Program addresses leak prevention, oversight of leaking underground tank cleanups, and reimbursement to responsible parties conducting cleanups. Board staff are primarily involved with the oversight of cleanups. Since inception of the program, over 3,000 UST releases have been investigated, remediated, and closed at the direction of the Board. While only a few hundred sites remain open, a large portion of these are uniquely challenging or suffer from a lack of viable responsible parties to lead investigation and remediation.

The highest priority for the UST Program is to protect the public and environment from the effects of unauthorized releases from UST through the investigation and mitigation of the released constituents. Staff will continue to work with Responsible Parties to close active UST cases in as short of time needed to complete the work. When applicable, the Program will implement the state's Low-Threat Closure Policy and concentrate work on the remaining high-threat cases.

Strategic Objectives

Development of Strategic Objectives

The following are four strategic objectives that reflect the Board's synthesis of the many comments and public and internal input with the Board's mission, visions, and values. The strategic objectives are meant to be touchstones, guiding the Board's programmatic work as works to achieve its long-term objectives. All Program Managers will consult these objectives during the development of annual work plans and, where appropriate, will integrate them as they develop resource allocations and prioritize the work of the staff working within their programs.

Adaptive Prioritization - Tailoring Permits, Enforcement and Planning Based on Threat to Water Quality

Both internal and external stakeholders expressed a strong desire for the Board to carefully consider how it invests its resources to address water quality problems. Stakeholders also asked the Board to remain cognizant of the burdens that various permitting requirements may impose on dischargers. As an agency primarily funded by permit fees, the desire to address a multitude of water quality problems while also minimizing costs imposed on dischargers can sometimes create competing demands, since expanding Board programs generally must require additional resources.

The most effective way to deploy limited resources to address critical water quality problems while simultaneously considering cost of compliance is to engage in continuous prioritization, where ineffective or inefficient projects are evaluated and scaled back to make additional resources available for high-impact water quality efforts. The goal of adaptive prioritization will be to engage in these types of continuous assessment, improvement and streamlining processes that will enable the Board to focus resources on those activities that are most impactful.

The Board is a science-based, data-driven organization. Each program uses a unique set of outreach methods, communication tools, and data sets to identify how resources, including staff time, are best spent. However, issues regarding water quality are dynamic and subject to regular change. Threats to our region's water bodies tend to emerge rapidly. In addition, many water bodies in our region have been impacted by legacy pollution, a variety of pollution sources, or other factors, making work to re-establish and bolster beneficial uses complicated at best. For these reasons, the methods, tools, and data used to both evaluate threats to water quality and help stakeholders reach compliance with the Board's policies also need to be continually assessed.

Objectives identified by stakeholders and Board staff which may aid in adaptive prioritization include:

- An evaluation of the Board's tools and communication methods to explore whether paths to compliance can be simplified.

- Evaluating data collected in our programs and considering integrating data sets to make sure that we are collecting information that is meaningful and actionable.
- Utilize or develop data-driven tools to aid staff in prioritizing water bodies and potential threats in a qualitative manner (e.g., the development of a “score card” for water bodies or the wider use of prioritization schemes).
- Encourage cross-unit collaboration among Board staff, especially where collaboration may lead to a better understanding of a specific locality, water quality threat, or water resource.
- Strengthen and build relationships with other organizations engaged in activities related to water resource protection, especially for water bodies identified as a high priority.

Ultimately, Program Managers should seek new and innovative ways of developing quantitative evaluations of project efficiencies in their areas of expertise. This may mean asking questions about which tools or work processes exist to address threats to water quality, what resources are available, and which stakeholder/Board concerns can be addressed with reasonable investments.

Strategic Engagement with Underserved and Underrepresented Communities

In the last couple decades, the work of the Board has expanded due to the increased value that our society has placed on water quality protection. An Irrigated Lands Regulatory Program has grown to focus its efforts not just on protecting in-stream water quality, but also on protecting the groundwater that many disadvantaged communities rely upon for their drinking water. The Forest Activities Program and a new Cannabis Program operate on lands where numerous tribes have an interest in restoring water quality. Cleanup of contaminated sites in the Valley’s urbanized areas is vital to increasing housing opportunities by ensuring contaminated properties are responsibly returned to productive use. Vast new programs have been established by the state to develop drinking water solutions for disadvantaged communities. All these efforts require that the Board to be more responsive to the need for disadvantaged and underserved communities to have a voice in the Board’s decision-making processes.

In this strategic plan, the Board makes a commitment to strategically engaging with underserved and underrepresented communities. The Board does so with the explicit recognition that, historically, these communities have been left out of many critical decision-making processes, and that a great deal of time and investment is needed to help ensure that these communities and individuals have the opportunity to participate alongside those stakeholders that have traditionally had a voice before the Board. The Board pledges to help build community capacity, to work towards participatory parity, and to engage with communities in a manner that is both respectful of their time and that allows for meaningful and significant engagement with the Board’s decisions.

In practice, enhancing opportunities for underserved and underrepresented communities to engage with the Board will strengthen the Board’s decisions and will

help the Board focus its efforts on those endeavors that benefit the communities that it is here to serve. Additional engagement will mean pursuing resources for facilitating dialogues with underserved communities, proactive engagement to understand the communities' various priorities before the Board begins to set priorities, broadening language assistance and translation services, and reinforcing a commitment to reach those communities where they are. This will also mean further investments in digital participation, including understanding and working to bridge digital divide issues that may still present barriers for meaningful collaboration.

Development of Climate Change Dashboard/Portal

For the California's Central Valley, Climate Change is not something looming on the horizon – from an agricultural sector crippled by droughts to disadvantaged communities that have lost their source of drinking water, from small wastewater treatment plants grappling with increasing salinity to megafires that have devastated whole communities, the effects of climate change are already being felt throughout the Valley. In the Board's strategic planning outreach effort, stakeholders ranked Climate Change/Drought as their single most important issue. Fortunately, prioritizing climate change work will not take a huge new commitment of resources, because each and every one of the Board's water quality programs is already spending a great deal of time and energy working on issues related to climate change and drought. However, it is clear that the Board needs to more effectively communicate and coordinate these efforts in order for the public and the Board to better understand the impact that climate change is having on water quality in this region.

The Board therefore sets a strategic objective of developing a better means of coordinating climate change efforts across the Board's programs and increasing transparency of these efforts. This effort may result in the development of a Climate Change Dashboard, a Climate Change Portal, or other means of coordinating and disseminating climate change-related work.

In practice, the Board may also engage in other coordination efforts to more efficiently address the need to better align its climate change work. For example, a Central Valley Regional Climate Change Work Plan was adopted in 2017 following a public engagement effort to present current and proposed initiatives that the Central Valley Water Board was undertaking in response to climate change. Key focus areas for the Work Plan included addressing impacts due to drought and flooding, issues related to groundwater quality, changes in surface water flow and water supply, impacts on facilities with NPDES permits and Waste Discharge Requirements (WDR) permits, and impacts to disadvantaged communities. This Work Plan should be updated to integrate a Climate Change Dashboard/Portal concept, which may include community engagement to receive input regarding climate change priorities, increasing transparency with regards to the climate change related projects, and providing real time feedback on success at meeting the work plan's objectives. Furthermore, these efforts must be coordinated with the Governor's Water Resiliency Portfolio work and similar efforts underway at the State Water Board.

In implementing a strategic objective requiring greater coordination and transparency for climate change-related work, the Board will also need to effectively develop metrics to assess and track progress, which may include the development of resiliency tools needed to respond to extreme climate events (e.g., wildfire, flood, power outages, etc.) in the offices and for our stakeholders.

Internal Process Improvements to Achieve Greater Efficiency and Higher Employee Engagement

The Board's Administrative Program is a key component in the implementation of every one of the Board's other 18 water quality programs. However, as the complexity of the Board's programs has grown and as the Board has taken on new water quality programs, the Board's Administrative Program has not grown in proportion to the Board's overall workload. The Board's Administrative Program is not only tasked with mission critical support in the form of document processing and traditional administrative clerical duties, but has also taken on database management, complex financial duties, and operations of a work environment that is transitioning to a hybrid workplace model.

Changes to the Board's regulatory programs occur regularly. In instances where changes are made in response to legislative mandates, the Board may occasionally receive additional staff resources to implement those mandates. The Board is hereby making the commitment to be diligent in pursuing opportunities to strengthen the Board's Administrative Program by increasing the number of administrative professionals to support internal process improvements and greater efficiency.

The Board has also identified additional operational needs that will further the Board's mission by promoting more efficient use of staff resources and higher employee and stakeholder engagement. The Board's Leadership Team will continue to look for ways to incorporate the following objectives into our operations:

- Continue to identify and incorporate process improvements to streamline workflow, promote regionwide consistency, ensure web-based information is current and readily available to staff and stakeholders, provide for more cross-program collaboration and encourage cross-training and mentorship opportunities regionwide.
- Incorporate the principles and practices of Racial Equity to promote civility, inclusion, and staff diversity; ensure internal and external feedback loops are established across all levels of the organization to encourage feedback regarding the Board's practices and program effectiveness.
- Develop an effective hybrid work environment that accommodates State policies and ensures the highest level of customer service.

Conclusion

The Mission, Vision Statements, Values, and Strategic Objectives in this Strategic Plan represent a distillation of the expertise of a group of Board members, members of the public, staff persons from all levels of the organization, and other stakeholders. As the Board embarks on its journey to implement this Strategic Plan over the next 5-7 years, it is cognizant of the fact that we inhabit a world where the one constant is change – whether it be the influence that the climate crisis is having on our programs, or changes brought about by new laws, regulations, and policies. However, it is with a strong sense of optimism, grounded in the fact that the Board’s staff and stakeholders can, in collaboration, overcome even the largest water quality challenges, that the Board adopts this Strategic Plan.

Adopted on [date].

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