



California Regional Water Quality Control Board



Central Coast Region

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CENTRAL COAST WATER BOARD PRIORITIES FOR EXTERNAL PROJECTS

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Vision – Healthy Watersheds

The Central Coast Water Board is moving in a fundamentally new strategic direction, based upon the vision for Healthy Watersheds¹ and measurable goals including healthy aquatic habitat, sustainably managed land and clean groundwater. The vision represents a refocusing of our approach – a new framework for how we conduct business and achieve measurable results in water quality improvement. The vision structures our work towards our highest water quality priorities and more strategically aligns us with current and future challenges and opportunities in water quality. Our intent is to direct external projects (grants, settlements, and supplemental environmental projects) toward achieving our vision and goals, and the greatest possible outcome for the Central Coast region over the long term. The Central Coast Water Board has identified the highest priorities for external projects as Low Impact Development (LID), Irrigation and Nutrient Management, Groundwater Recharge Area Protection, and Riparian Buffer Zone Designation and Protection. This document summarizes these priorities, including the scope, scale, and key project elements. Equally important is our focus on project performance and funding accountability.

Project Scope and Scale

The Central Coast Water Board has directed staff to consider “regional benefit” and “leveraging” when developing, reviewing, and awarding proposals for funding. This is a fundamental shift from the previous “request for proposals” process that resulted in an overwhelming number of proposals that often missed our priority targets and lacked accountability. It is also a shift from a focus on symptoms of watershed degradation to a focus on the problems that cause the degradation. Our expectation is that grantees develop and implement projects effectively by considering water quality impairment at the local and watershed scales, and employing practices that focus on the core

¹ Healthy Watersheds function well ecologically and are sustainable; support healthy, diverse aquatic habitat; have healthy riparian areas and corridors; and have near natural levels of sediment transport and near natural levels and quality of groundwater. A Healthy Watershed sustains these characteristics through measures that ensure the dynamics that provide these healthy factors and functions are protected. Healthy sustainable watersheds have more vegetative cover and canopy, less energy use for imported water, fewer greenhouse gas emissions, and a lesser carbon footprint than unhealthy watersheds. Our goal of Healthy Watersheds is compatible, supportive, and in coordination with the larger issue (beyond water quality) of Sustainability and the State’s Global Warming Solutions Act.

problems in a way that achieves lasting, broad scale watershed and regional water quality benefit. As part of this evaluation, grantees are encouraged to consult Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) project reports for watershed scale assessment information, especially TMDL implementation plans. In addition, we expect grantees to coordinate with each other and integrate their projects to maximize success.

Priority Categories and Project Elements

The Central Coast Water Board encourages local agencies and organizations to support healthy watersheds through funding opportunities and to engage early in the grant process, by attending scoping meetings, commenting on draft grant program guidelines, and attending applicant workshops. Consistent with our vision of healthy watersheds, Water Board staff has identified the following high priority categories and project elements.

1. Low Impact Development

One of the most important issues we face in the Central Coast region is watershed degradation due to urban sprawl. The Pew Oceans Commission report, *Coastal Sprawl: The Effects of Urban Design on Aquatic Ecosystems in the United States*, describes how watersheds break down and stop functioning due to pollutant loading, impervious surfaces, and habitat consumption. Thus, the Central Coast Water Board has made implementation of LID a top priority to reduce urban pollutant loading, erosion, sedimentation, and stream modifications, and to maintain the natural recharge of groundwater. The best proposals include the following:

- Coordination of necessary public and private agencies and partners to address water quality impairment, identify effective LID strategies at the local and watershed scale, and opportunities and impediments to successful LID implementation,
- Partnerships with developers, builders and lenders to implement innovative LID strategies
- Integration of LID as a priority component in Watershed Master Plans and Hydromodification Management Plans (HMPs),
- State-of-the-art community level designs, including transportation infrastructure, from a watershed protection perspective (not site-specific approaches that merely incorporate LID features),
- Full protection of critical watershed features such as wetlands and riparian and groundwater recharge areas,
- Maximum infiltration of storm water and minimum pollutant loading,
- Design standards that will be incorporated into local ordinances,
- A project comparison with traditional development approaches, including project costs and water quality impacts, and
- Effectiveness monitoring, including key measures of success, and a plan for continuing monitoring beyond the term of the grant.

2. Irrigation and Nutrient Management

The Central Coast region has ubiquitous nutrient and toxicity water quality problems, as evidenced by the Central Coast Ambient Monitoring Program, agricultural cooperative monitoring program and other monitoring efforts. Much of this pollution is associated with the intensive farming that occurs in the Central Coast region. More than any other management practice, the widespread adoption of proper irrigation and nutrient management practices stands the greatest chance of ameliorating current high nutrient concentrations, reducing toxicity, and reducing overdraft and subsequent seawater intrusion. The primary goal is to reduce agricultural tailwater, nutrient, sediment and pesticide run-off into surface and groundwater within the Central Coast region, by providing expert technical assistance to support farmers in implementing effective irrigation and nutrient management practices. The best proposals include the following:

- Regional coordination,
- Irrigation efficiency assessments using mobile irrigation labs,
- Highly trained irrigation and nutrient advisors and agronomists to apply data and information to specific conditions, and communicate results and recommendations to growers,
- Targeted and focused implementation of best management practices to reduce agricultural tailwater and associated pollutants, and
- Effectiveness monitoring, including key measures of success and a plan for continuing monitoring beyond the term of the grant.

3. Groundwater Recharge Area Protection

Protecting groundwater from contamination is one of the most effective methods to preventing overall water quality degradation, and is especially important where groundwater is the sole or primary source of drinking water. Thus, it is critical that we preserve groundwater quality at the source, by identifying and protecting groundwater recharge areas. The best proposals include the following:

- Identifying and prioritizing groundwater recharge areas,
- Zoning to prevent land use practices that would contaminate or reduce the recharge of the identified aquifer, and design criteria for low impact development, and
- Effectiveness monitoring, including key measures of success.

4. Riparian Buffer Zone Designation and Protection

Riparian lands adjacent to streams, lakes, or other surface water bodies that are adequately vegetated provide important environmental protection and water quality benefits. It is critical to protect and maintain the biological and physical integrity and function of riparian areas in the Central Coast region by implementing broad-scale specifications for the establishment, protection, and maintenance of riparian vegetation. This is especially important for areas known to be salmonid rearing habitat. The best proposals include the following:

- Zoning to protect riparian areas and their buffer zones,
- Preventing excessive nutrients, sediment, and organic matter, as well as pesticides and other pollutants, from reaching surface waters by optimizing opportunities for filtration, deposition, absorption, adsorption, plant uptake,

biodegradation, and denitrification, which occur when stormwater runoff is conveyed through vegetated buffers as stable, distributed sheet flow prior to reaching receiving waters,

- Providing for shading of the aquatic environment so as to moderate temperatures, retain more dissolved oxygen, and support a healthy assemblage of aquatic flora and fauna,
- Providing for the availability of natural organic matter that provide food and habitat for small bottom dwelling organisms, which are essential to maintain the food chain,
- Increasing stream bank stability and maintaining natural fluvial geomorphology of the stream system, thereby reducing stream bank erosion and sedimentation and protecting habitat for aquatic organisms,
- Maintaining base flows in streams and moisture in wetlands,
- Controlling downstream flooding,
- Conserving the natural features important to land and water resources, (e.g., headwater areas, groundwater recharge zones, floodways, floodplains, springs, streams, wetlands, woodlands, and prime wildlife habitats), and
- Restoring and maintaining the chemical, physical, and biological integrity of water resources.
- Prevention is much more important than restoration, because restoration often only addresses symptoms), and
- Effectiveness monitoring, including key measures of success.

Performance and Funding Accountability

In January 2007, Governor Schwarzenegger signed an executive order to establish guidelines and procedures for spending Strategic Growth Plan bond funds efficiently, effectively and in the best interests of Californians. Consistent with the Governor's executive order, the Central Coast Water Board has made grant project performance and accountability a high priority to ensure that projects and activities use funds appropriately and achieve their intended purposes. For more information on bond accountability, please visit the California Bond Accountability website at <http://www.bondaccountability.ca.gov>.

Additional Information about the Central Coast Water Board Grants Program

We look forward to working with our partners in the water quality community to implement these grant project priorities for the Central Coast region. For detailed information about upcoming Water Board funding opportunities, please visit our Grants Program website at <http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/centralcoast/Grants/index.htm>. You may also contact our Grants Program Coordinator, Angela Schroeter, at (805) 542-4644 or aschroeter@waterboards.ca.gov.

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