WATER QUALITY CERTIFICATION (WETLANDS) PROGRAM

Wetlands Inventory

Wetlands are important water resources that are sensitive to a number of the stressors and subject to a number of the water quality problems and threats listed in **Tables 8 through 11**. Wetlands provide habitat for many species of biota and serve water quality protection functions for downstream waters. A large percentage of wetland acreage has been lost or degraded as a result of dredging, filling, and other physical modifications.

The SDRWQCB participates in the Southern California Wetlands Recovery Project (formerly the Southern California Wetlands Clearinghouse) as part of an effort to preserve and protect remaining wetlands. Major coastal wetland resources in the San Diego region (and other parts of southern California) are identified in the *"Southern California Coastal Wetlands Inventory"* (SCCWI), prepared by the wetlands recovery project. The SCCWI briefly describes the major coastal wetlands, land ownership, land use, hydrology, water quality, soil, habitat types, wildlife resources, enhancement status, watershed management issues, and major pressures and/or threats facing the coastal wetlands. The SCCWI is not all-inclusive. Very small coastal wetlands and the inland wetlands of the region have not yet been added to the SCCWI, although SDRWQCB staff is participating in efforts to do so. The SCCWI includes profiles for the following San Diego region coastal wetlands.

<u>Orange County</u>
San Juan Creek Mouth

<u>San Diego County</u>
San Mateo Lagoon
Las Flores Lagoon
Santa Margarita Lagoon
San Luis Rey River Estuary
Buena Vista Lagoon
Agua Hedionda Lagoon
Batiquitos Lagoon
San Elijo Lagoon
San Dieguito Lagoon
Los Penasquitos Lagoon
Mission Bay
Famosa Slough
San Diego Bay
Tijuana Estuary

Wetlands Grants

SDRWQCB staff intends to increase efforts to obtain wetlands protection grants for wetlands in the San Diego region. These grants, which are offered pursuant to Clean Water Act section 104(b)(3), are available to state, tribal and local (regional, county, and municipal) governments. SDRWQCB staff intends to work with other agencies to develop project ideas and grant proposals. The SDRWQCB recently received a 104(b)(3) wetlands grant to do hydrogeomorphic functional assessments Whether the SDRWQCB or another entity is the grantee, such grants could make an important contribution to protecting and restoring wetlands of the region.

Long-term Wetlands Goals

The following provisions of the *California Wetlands Conservation Policy* (established August 23, 1993 through Executive Order W-59-93) are long term goals for wetlands in the San Diego region:

"Ensure no over all net loss and achieve a long-term net gain in the quantity, quality, and permanence of wetlands acreage and values in California in a manner that fosters creativity, stewardship and respect for private property."

"Reduce procedural complexity in the administration of State and Federal wetlands conservation programs."

"Encourage partnerships to make landowner incentive programs and cooperative planning efforts the primary focus of wetland conservation and restoration."

The SDRWQCB will utilize the following guiding principles and strategies to ensure that these long term goals for wetlands in the Region are achieved:

- Protect and preserve existing wetlands.
- Restore historical salt and brackish marsh habitats wherever possible.
- Protect existing salt and brackish marsh habitats from conversion to freshwater marsh habitats.
- Restore and enhance freshwater wetland habitats, except in areas where such habitats would encroach into salt or brackish water marsh habitats.
- Protect vernal pool complexes as unique wetland habitats which are extremely difficult to recreate.
- Preserve high quality ephemeral stream habitats in those areas (such as on military bases and in large rural parks) which can be protected from the hydrological changes which accompany urban development. (The concept of such “stream

reserves" was discussed in the 1988 SDRWQCB staff report on "*Stream Enhancement and Reclamation Potential - 1988 through 2015*.")

- Preserve wildlife corridor and connectivity functions alongriverine systems.
- Protect wetlands from the invasion of non-native species.
- Provide sufficient vegetated buffer around wetlands to protect wetland habitat functions.
- Promote public awareness of the important habitat and water quality protection functions of wetlands.
- Expand the acreage of wetlands in developing areas to treat urban runoff, recognizing that wetlands provide water quality protection functions.
- Encourage the use of constructed wetlands to improve water quality and enhance beneficial uses throughout the region.
- Encourage the use of "live stream" discharges, where appropriate and beneficial to both stream habitat beneficial uses and increased use of reclaimed water.
- Promote management measures that preserve the natural hydrology of the floodway and do not require clearing or other maintenance of native riparian and wetland vegetation in order to maintain flow capacities needed to reduce damage from flooding along riverine systems.

Water Quality Certification (CWA Section 401)

Section 401 of the Clean Water Act requires each person applying for a federal permit or license for an activity that may result in a discharge of pollutants into waters of the United States to obtain certification from the state that the activity meets all applicable state water quality standards, limitations, and restrictions. TheSDRWQCB's water quality certification activities have focused on projects requiring federal Section 404 permits for the discharge of dredged or fill material to surface waters. The SDRWQCB evaluates applications and assists the applicants for each proposed project requiring water quality certification to ensure that water quality standards (both beneficial uses and water quality objectives) will be met. Where standards will be met, the SDRWQCB may waive water quality certification (through a waiver of waste discharge requirements) pursuant to California Code of Regulations, Title 23,Article 4 or recommend certification or conditional certification to the SWRCB. A recommendation to the SWRCB for denial of certification is made only if the proposed project cannot be modified to meet water quality standards. Careful consideration is given to addressing

the potential impact of each proposed project on wetland habitats, using the aforementioned principles and strategies.