

ROLE OF STAKEHOLDERS GROUP IN UPDATING THE WATER QUALITY MANAGEMENT PLAN (WQMP) FOR NATIONAL FOREST SYSTEM LANDS IN CALIFORNIA

How will the WQMP content be updated?

The existing WQMP was originally developed as a U.S. Forest Service (USFS) effort in the early 1980s to protect water quality in National Forest System land. The WQMP consists primarily of eight sets of best management practices (BMPs) addressing a variety of activities that could cause discharge of non-point source pollution (see http://www.swrcb.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/nps/docs/wqmp_forests/usfs_wqmp2000.pdf).

The proposed WQMP will update existing BMPS as well as addressing additional issues such as remediation of legacy problem sites and recovery of impaired water bodies (see http://www.swrcb.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/nps/docs/wqmp_forests/proposed_outline4.pdf).

On what topics will the WQMP update focus?

At the November 30, 2009 public workshop, participants were asked to identify their priorities for WQMP BMP topics by placing paper dots on a diagram of forest activities. The results showed that participants placed the highest priority on the following topics:

- Timber management
- Rangeland management
- Forest roads
- Off-highway vehicles
- Fuels treatment/forest health projects.

(See

http://www.swrcb.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/nps/docs/wqmp_forests/publics_wqmp_priorities.pdf)

These public priorities correspond with those of Water Boards and USFS staffs.

Because of the restricted time frame, we cannot get to all of the BMP topics we would like to include in the updated WQMP, so we will focus on updating BMPs for these priority topics during the next 12 months. (We expect to subsequently address other BMP topics, so stakeholders' group representatives with expertise outside these priority areas are encouraged to remain on the stakeholders group and participate as the additional topic areas are subsequently addressed.)

Role of stakeholders' group

The group will provide independent technical advice and input to Water Boards and USFS staffs regarding the priority BMPs set forth above. During formation of the group, we sought representatives who were highly knowledgeable regarding the effectiveness and feasibility of BMPs. We did not expect that every representative would be equally knowledgeable and qualified regarding every topic, but we encourage group members to solicit input from people within their interest group who do have relevant subject-matter expertise. We do not expect the representatives to reach consensus, but to provide us with the breadth of their perspectives.

We will provide two primary opportunities to provide advice to USFS and Water Boards' staffs regarding each priority topic during the next several months:

- 1) Before we begin drafting proposed BMP language for a new topic, we will proactively seek advice from the stakeholders' group, and we will incorporate that advice into the language being drafted as we deem appropriate.
- 2) After we have drafted proposed BMP language for a topic, we will electronically transmit that language to the stakeholders group members for their review and comment. We will want comment within 30 days of transmittal. We will incorporate such suggestions as appropriate before sending our proposed BMP language on to the policy-level group. While any group member may respond, responses will be solicited only from members with identified subject-area expertise.

Final language will be transmitted to the stakeholders group and will be posted on the State Water Board's website.

Stakeholders' Group meetings and schedule

Except for the initial January 12, 2010 meeting, we will let the group decide when and how it may want to meet. The group may choose to have face-to-face meetings, and staff would provide requested facilitation and/or logistical support (not funding) for such meetings. Alternatively, the group may decide to convene by conference call, or representatives may respond directly electronically. We expect that many of these decisions will be made at the initial meeting.

Stakeholders group meetings will be open to the general public. Members of the general public will not be allowed to participate in group discussions, but a time for their comments may be allowed at each meeting.

What is the timeframe?

We expect to start transmitting proposed BMP language in late January 2010 and continue that process as work products are completed for about the next 8 months.

What happens once BMPs are developed for the priority forest activities?

The BMP modules that have been completed, together with other complementary material approved by the policy-level group, will be incorporated into the proposed updated WQMP. The revised WQMP will be adopted in two different contexts:

- 1) It will be submitted for approval by the State Water Resources Control Board as the basis for a statewide Water Board regulatory mechanism (i.e., either a waste discharge requirement or a conditional waiver thereof).
- 2) It will be adopted by the USFS as an official handbook, making it a required part of the USFS administrative system.

What will be the regulatory role of the Water Boards?

Beginning about July, 2010, State Water Board staff will begin a CEQA process to develop a statewide regulatory mechanism to comply with state and federal mandates regarding protection of water quality. (See http://www.swrcb.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/nps/docs/wqmp_forests/process_timeline2.pdf)

That framework could include development of a statewide waiver of waste discharge from activities on national forest system lands. Compliance with the revised WQMP would likely be a condition of the waiver. Other regulatory mechanisms will be considered that could include development of general waste discharge requirements on a statewide basis (a general order). The goal is to have a regulatory mechanism in place by January, 2011.