



# Comparability

## Guidance, Quality Assurance, and Data Management

### What is it?

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) defines comparability as “the measure of confidence with which one data set, element, or method can be considered as similar to another”. Comparability is an especially important consideration with SWAMP data, which represents a wide variety of objectives, organizations and procedures over many years, both governmental and non-governmental. SWAMP has developed guidelines and tools for projects funded by SWAMP, and for groups who are interested in being SWAMP-comparable. These include the SWAMP Data Management Plan, the SWAMP Quality Assurance Program Plan, the SWAMP Help Desk, and the newly revised SWAMP Comparability Fact Sheet.

SWAMP has focused its initial program efforts on developing program guidance (namely procedures, tools, and guidelines) that monitoring entities can use to ensure that their monitoring project designs produce data that are SWAMP comparable. Examples of SWAMP Guidance include the Comparability Fact Sheet, the SWAMP Quality Assurance Program Plan, the QAPP Advisor Tool, the Algae Standard Operating Procedures, and the Bioassessment Quality Assurance Program Plan. Bio-objectives for implementation of bioassessment as a regulatory tool are currently under development. Examples of data management comparability and coordination include online data sheets, templates, and documentation for data submission, Online Data Checker, and a much enhanced Data Management and Quality Assurance Team Website. The SWAMP Help Desk provides live information and answers questions on SWAMP comparability.

## **Why is it important to the State?**

In the past, funding was invested in projects that generated valuable data and resulted in a tremendous increase in knowledge about ambient water quality. However, it was difficult and not always possible to evaluate or summarize data across projects to answer general management questions on the condition and trends of our States waters. As a first step to addressing coordination and consistency, SWAMP has established basic guidance and monitoring data quality objectives to establish a common framework for all monitoring projects to follow.

## **Why is it important to me?**

The high quality data that SWAMP and its partners collect and manage provides information that can be used to help answer the questions:

- How well are we managing California's precious resource water resources?
- Are we protecting the beneficial uses of our water – namely, is the water safe for me to swim in, is the fish caught in it healthy so that I may eat it, is the overall ecosystem healthy? How well does do our surface waters support aquatic life?
- Are we investing our limited state resources effectively and focusing them on the right water quality problems.

Better coordination between projects and agreement on basic approaches such as data and measurement quality objectives means funds will be spent effectively and efficiently.

## **How will these tools be used?**

These “tools” will be used by other state, federal, and local agencies as well as monitoring groups who conduct ambient water quality monitoring in California. The use of these tools helps to ensure comparability of data. They also ensure that the data collected will be of known and documented quality.