



Introduction

Surface Water Ambient Monitoring Program (AB982)

What is SWAMP?

The mission of the Surface Water Ambient Monitoring Program (SWAMP) at the State Water Resources Control Board is to provide the information about surface water quality that our society needs to make informed decisions about how to manage, restore, and allocate water resources. SWAMP was created to fulfill the State Legislature's mandate (AB982) for a comprehensive and unifying program that would coordinate all surface water quality monitoring conducted by the State and Regional Water Boards. SWAMP has produced conventions for monitoring design, measurement indicators, data management, quality assurance, and assessment strategies, so that data from many programs can be combined and used in integrated assessments that answer critical management questions. Statewide and regional monitoring programs that receive funding from SWAMP are each designed to evaluate one or more of the following assessment questions:

- Status: What is the overall quality of California's surface waters?
- Trends: What is the pace and direction of change in surface water quality over time?
- Problem Identification: Which water bodies have water quality problems and which are at risk?
- Diagnostic: What are the causes of water quality problems and where are the sources?
- Evaluation: How effective are water quality improvement projects and programs at protecting or restoring beneficial uses?

An important step for SWAMP in implementing the State Legislature's mandate has been to forge partnerships with outside agencies and organizations. The collaboration that results, allows SWAMP and its partners to leverage their limited funds for monitoring, promote communication between groups, and lay the foundation for further cooperative projects.

Why is SWAMP important to the State?

SWAMP's mission is to provide resource managers, other decision makers, and the public with timely, cost effective, high-quality information to evaluate the condition of all surface waters throughout the State. To accomplish this mission, SWAMP proceeds primarily along two pathways: 1) SWAMP conducts limited monitoring on statewide and regional scales and relies on partnerships and collaboration to stretch limited monitoring resources, and 2) SWAMP has created a common framework that coordinates monitoring efforts by offering a uniform approach and important tools. Tools include a Quality Assurance (QA) program that ensures that the data collected are of known and documented quality; a standardized data storage system that meets the growing need for data standardization and integration; a set of standard operating procedures for sampling that promote comparability among projects conducted by different groups; and peer review of monitoring plans for each project that ensures scientific rigor. Additionally, SWAMP continues to create a water quality indicator list to further enhance the tools available to assess water quality. All of these elements assist SWAMP in fulfilling its stated mission and the State having meaningful data to fulfill federal regulatory mandates in a cost effective manner.

Why is SWAMP important to me?

Water is precious to all Californians. Its value is directly related to its quality. Every year, hundreds of decisions are made that influence water quality. These decisions range from local development decisions to statewide policy implementation. Without monitoring data, we would not know the affect of these decisions on water quality until it was visually obvious – which is usually too late. SWAMP provides data that can inform state and local officials about the current condition of a water body as well as how quickly the condition of a water body is changing.

How will this information be used?

The State is required to report on the status of the waters of California and to identify and report on impaired water bodies. Data collected by SWAMP and its many collaborators and partners provides information that can be used to help answer the above questions as well as used for making management decisions such as recognizing that a water body is not meeting water quality objectives and requiring that actions be taken to make the water cleaner. Additionally, this information is used by other agencies. For example, the Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment uses SWAMP data along with monitoring data from other agencies to develop fish consumption advisories and safe eating guidelines.