



4/3/07 BdMtg Item 5
Big Bear Lake
Deadline: 3/19/07 noon

19 March 2007

Song Her, Clerk of the Board
State Water Resources Control Board
1001 I St.
Sacramento, CA 95814



RE: Nutrient TMDL for Dry Hydrological Conditions for Big Bear Lake

Dear Ms. Her:

On behalf of the Big Bear Lake TMDL Task Force, I write to express our support for the proposed nutrient TMDL in Big Bear Lake. The TMDL Task Force is comprised of all the major stakeholders in the watershed including: the City of Big Bear Lake, the County of San Bernardino, CalTrans, Big Bear Area Wastewater Authority and the Big Bear Municipal Water District.

The proposed nutrient TMDL represents the culmination of a five year effort by the Task Force, the Regional Water Quality Control Board, the U.S. Forest Service and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to develop a watershed-wide approach for protecting beneficial uses in Big Bear Lake. Today, water quality in the lake is the best it has ever been and continues to improve. We note, with great pride, that the State Board recently showcased Big Bear Lake as a TMDL "Success Story" on their government website. We attribute much of this success to the increased emphasis on water quality after the lake was added to California's 303(d) list and to the significant grant support provided by the state to supplement local investment in environmental protection.

From the outset, developing the TMDL has been a cooperative effort between the Regional Water Quality Control Board and the regulated community. Throughout the process, the Board staff has listened closely to our concerns and worked diligently to address each one without compromising the overall mission to preserve and enhance Big Bear Lake.

We are particularly pleased that the Regional Board recognized that the lake is a complex ecosystem affected by many different natural and man-made factors. And, as such, the TMDL implementation plan provides plenty of time to estimate natural background loading and develop biocriteria. In addition, the TMDL identifies a wide range of causal targets and response targets that can be used to assess the lake's overall condition and to develop appropriate site-specific water quality objectives in the future.

During the last five years, several million dollars have been invested in remediation efforts designed to improve water quality in Big Bear Lake. These include: alum treatments to sequester phosphorous, sediment dredging programs, noxious aquatic plant control programs, lake level stabilization, aeration projects, fishery management techniques, public education and water conservation programs. We are pleased to report that these strategies have been very successful and the lake is looking better than ever.

As you probably know, Big Bear Lake was created when a dam was constructed in the early 20th century. Old photos show that eutrophication was a problem from the very beginning. This is not surprising given that the lake was built on top of an ancient marshy wetlands. Even if no humans were present in Bear Valley, the 26,000 acres of surrounding forest would continue to contribute a significant nutrient load to the lake that virtually guarantee some natural limitations on water quality in the lake.

Because much of the new nutrient loading arrives during very wet ("El Nino") years, when it is impossible to control the huge volumes of rainwater and snowmelt cascading down the mountain, our only practical option is to remediate the problems in the lake to the best of our ability. We are doing that with great success. Our challenge is to be able to continue our efforts in the future.

To that end we encourage your support for the Regional Water Quality Control Board's proposed nutrient TMDL for dry weather conditions in Big Bear Lake. And, in particular, for the Board's decision to emphasize real-world mitigation strategies designed to fix the problem over expensive and time-consuming "monitoring" programs designed to study the problem. As a small community of less than 12,000 people, we simply do not have the tax base to pay for fancy computer models or other theoretical exercises. In all honesty, some state requirements (such as the QAPP or SWAMP program) waste scarce resources and actually make it harder to get the job done.

Nevertheless, all members of our TMDL Task Force remain strongly committed to improving water quality in Big Bear Lake. Our collective goal is to ensure that the lake lives up to its natural full potential. Recognizing that the lake has many different designated uses, we are now in the process of developing a beneficial use map that we will soon utilize to ensure an on-going balance between providing for aquatic habitat and recreational opportunities.

In the end, while we may never gain full control over nitrogen and phosphorous concentrations in Big Bear Lake, I am quite confident that we will be able to forestall most, if not all, of the adverse effects these pollutants have on the environment. With your help, the six million people who trek up the mountain each year to rediscover nature will not be disappointed.

Once again, allow me to thank you for your previous grant support and for your own strong commitment to protecting Big Bear Lake. On behalf of the Board of Directors at Big Bear Municipal Water District and other members of the TMDL Task Force, I invite the members of the State Water Resources Control Board (and your staff) to schedule a meeting at our office next summer. Come see this marvelous success story for yourselves.

Respectfully,



Sheila Hamilton, General Manager

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