

Issue Paper 3. CWC Public Benefits Discussion: Recreation

The Issue

This issue paper is concerned solely with the definition of recreation benefits for purposes of economic quantification under SBX7-2 (the Act).

What recreation-related benefits should be eligible for public funding under the Act's definition of recreation benefits? Do any and all economic recreation benefits that result from use of qualified water storage qualify as a recreation public benefit?

Background

SBX7-2 Chapter 8 (the Act), codified as California Water Code §79740 et seq., requires the California Water Commission (Commission) to develop and adopt, by regulation, methods for quantification and management of public benefits associated with eligible water storage projects.

The Act's definition of recreation public benefits is:

Recreational purposes, including, but not limited to, those recreational pursuits generally associated with the outdoors.

The definition of what can be counted may influence the ranking of projects, and through cost allocation, the exact definition and scope of recreation benefits will influence the share of cost allocated to public benefits. Regardless of the definition, only changes in recreation benefits caused by the proposed project would be counted.

Staff believes that reservoir and flow-based recreation such as fishing, boating and swimming that directly result from the proposed project would qualify. Less clear is whether recreation that results from the use of a water supply, such as improvements to or increased use of public parks, public swimming pools, or golf courses would qualify. Can the cost of providing the water supply to, say, a public park or golf course be eligible because it supports an outdoor recreational activity? Since no limit is defined, what about recreation benefits from water provided to private recreation facilities such as water parks, private golf courses and private swimming pools?

A secondary issue has already been discussed in Issue Paper 2 for SBX7-2 Chapter 8 Regulation: Ecosystem Improvement. The Act's definition of ecosystem improvement public benefits is:

Ecosystem improvements, including changing the timing of water diversions, improvement in flow conditions, temperature, or other benefits that contribute to restoration of aquatic ecosystems and native fish and wildlife, including those ecosystems and fish and wildlife in the Delta.

Under one option for ecosystem improvement benefits, any recreation benefits that result from "restoration of aquatic ecosystems and native fish and wildlife" would be counted as ecosystem restoration benefits. Under the other option, the same benefits would be counted as recreation benefits. This secondary issue is not discussed further in this issue paper.

Staff's proposed option #1

Only water-based recreation benefits that occur on or adjacent to the proposed project, or that result from stream flow or reservoir surface area improvements caused by the project's operation, are eligible.

Some examples of how this clarification would be applied are:

1. A surface storage project provides surface water recreation features including marinas, campgrounds and swimming areas. The water storage provides habitat for a freshwater recreational fishery. Also, water is released from storage in order to contribute to flow for in-river recreation downstream. All related recreation benefits would be eligible for funding.¹
2. The project increases system storage, increasing average storage and surface area at other reservoirs. Any increase in recreation benefits at the other reservoirs because of increased surface area would be eligible for funding.
3. The project also provides water supply for public parks, playfields, and private golf courses that are not adjacent to or part of the proposed project. These water supply benefits would not qualify as public benefits.

Staff's proposed option #2

Expand the scope of outdoor recreation benefits beyond option #1, to include also recreation benefits in public parks and playfields, where the benefits result from improved water supply reliability.

The purposes of this option may be to include types of recreation that are more available to urban populations, and to encourage public benefits of urban parks including recreation activities that contribute to public health. Some examples of how this definition would be applied are:

1. A water storage project provides a variety of outdoor recreation services, as described under option #1 above. The associated benefits would qualify (same result as in option #1).
2. The water supply project provides urban water supply for public parks and playfields. Any resulting increase in recreation benefits would qualify. The increase in benefits might result from new park or playfield acreage or improved park conditions during water shortage. A benefit could not be claimed for providing project water instead of some other supply, because the amount of recreation benefit would be unaffected.
3. The project also provides urban water supply for recreational use on private lands. Any resulting increase in recreation benefits would not qualify. Recreation improvements in private facilities that are caused by water supply improvements would not qualify, even if those private facilities are open to the public.

¹ Depending on the clarified definition of ecosystem benefits, some of the recreation fishing benefits might qualify as ecosystem improvement benefits.