

Summary of Water Commission Work Activities and Objectives On Public Benefits of Water Storage Projects

Since 2011, the California Water Commission has been working to determine the best ways to measure certain public benefits as well as clearly define which specific activities in each of these categories might be eligible. The Commission directed DWR to prepare work products on quantification and management of public benefits. These documents included a survey of economic tools and methods to quantify the public benefits of water projects, and working drafts of potential language for inclusion in regulations and guidelines if the current proposed bond measure is approved by voters in 2014. The Commission has also worked with the Department of Fish and Wildlife and the State Water Resources Control Board to incorporate the priorities of those agencies as directed in WC §79744.

These documents were presented to the Commission in August 2012 and discussed at the September and October 2012 meetings. At the October 2012 meeting, staff presented a document entitled, “Items for Follow-up Discussion” which summarized issues requiring additional Commission and public review, input, and direction. Additional discussion on definitions for water quality, ecosystem, and recreation benefits were held at the Commission’s recent meetings.

At those meetings, the following definitional questions have been raised for future consideration. While the benefits themselves would not be eligible for bond funding, the value of qualifying public benefits could be used to allocate public funding for a proposed water project:

1. Water Quality Benefits (November 2012 Meeting): Which of the water quality benefits that are produced by a water storage project should qualify when determining the public benefits of that project?

- Are these benefits limited to those water quality benefits directly related to public trust uses or that clean up groundwater? Or should consideration be given to water quality benefits that accrue to local water users in areas that could be far from the water storage project, such as improved drinking water quality?
- Additional consideration will be given to projects with water quality benefits meeting the priorities of the State Water Resources Control Board. The Commission must determine how to incorporate those priorities.

2. *Ecosystem Benefits (December 2012 Meeting):* Which of the ecosystem benefits produced by a water storage project should qualify when determining the public benefits of that project?

- Can a benefit only qualify as an ecosystem improvement if it results from the restoration of aquatic ecosystems and native fish and wildlife?
- Should benefits resulting from restoration of native fish and wildlife, such as increased catch of fish or activities resulting from increased/more reliable water flows, count towards recreation or water supply, or should they count towards ecosystem improvements?
- Additional consideration will be given to projects with ecosystem benefits meeting the priorities of the Department of Fish and Wildlife. The Commission must determine how to incorporate those priorities.

3. *Recreation Benefits (January 2013 Meeting):* What recreation benefits generated by a water storage project should qualify when determining the public benefits of that project?

- Would those recreational activities on or adjacent to the new facility be the only benefits that qualify?
- Or would those further away that exist due to a more reliable water supply provided by the project be considered as well?