



**Action Item: Discussion of Definitions of Public Benefits of Water Storage Projects**

**Background**

Since 2011, the California Water Commission has been considering information and receiving public testimony on ways to effectively quantify, measure, manage and define public benefits for water storage projects. As part of this work, the Commission directed DWR to prepare a survey of economic tools and methods to quantify these public benefits. 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.

From August 2012 through January 2013, the Commission heard a series of presentations specific to water quality, ecosystem, and recreation benefits. 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. At those meetings, the following questions were raised for future consideration:

*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?

DWR staff will present additional information on these questions for Commission consideration.

**Contact**

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