

Watershed Management Issues

Issue Statement: There is a perception among stakeholders that CALFED does not believe there is a link between the upper watersheds (area above dams) and the Bay-Delta. This perception comes from the experience of stakeholders with the CALFED Category III process when they are told that they, the stakeholders, must prove to CALFED that there is a link. This implies to the stakeholders that CALFED does not believe there is a link.

Action: The policy group (and management team) need to decide what level of recognition the program will give to the upper watershed areas. CALFED needs to acknowledge there are links, not require stakeholders to "prove" the links. This should include the types of actions CALFED will "sponsor", and a policy statement on the role upper watersheds play in the overall CALFED strategy. (Note that "Upper Watersheds" does not need only apply to areas above dams but also to watersheds that drain directly to the Bay and provide habitat).

Background: The Watershed Management Strategy (WMS) was originally included as an element in the Water Quality common program. In March 1998, the WMS was elevated to a common program and a team of personnel from CALFED agencies was assigned to develop the program. Stakeholders in areas of origin have expressed concern that CALFED has "artificially" split watersheds at dams and does not recognize that activities above dams can have serious deleterious impacts on beneficial uses below dams.

The mission of CALFED is to improve habitat and water quality in the Bay-Delta. Stakeholders argue that actions that improve the quality and quantity of water delivered to the Bay-Delta or provide additional migration habitat (Bay tributaries) are within the mission and goals of the CALFED program. Thus programs to improve water quality in reaches above dams, programs that reduce the amount of water exported from the Delta (eg water use efficiency in urban delivery areas), or programs that increase the inflow of water to the Delta all contribute positive benefits to the beneficial uses within the Bay-Delta.

While dams are a barrier to fish migration, dams are not a barrier to water transport from area of origin to the Bay-Delta. State and federal water quality programs are strongly focused on improving water quality in source water areas to ensure downstream beneficial uses are maintained or enhanced. None of these programs assume that water quality above dams is inconsequential to water quality below dams. Chemical, biological, and physical contaminants are all transported to some degree over dams from areas of origin.

Many stakeholders are also critical of the concept that dams will always be barriers. They point to several recent cases where either dams are scheduled for removal or technology is being developed to move fish over dams. Since CALFED will extend 30 years to the future as a minimum, these stakeholders believe that CALFED should invest to some degree to ensure that upper watershed areas such as those identified by Moyle are maintained or improved so that they could once again be anadromous habitat. Similarly, stakeholders in watersheds draining into the Bay believe that restoration of their habitat may be crucial to the restoration of anadromous or Delta fish stocks. Investment in their watersheds may lessen the need for habitat in the Sacramento/San Joaquin system.

Through the WMS, CALFED has the opportunity to define the links to upper watershed areas and describe the type of projects that would contribute to the mission. CALFED can also use the WMS to define the importance of the upper watershed areas within the scope of the entire CALFED process. There is a perception that the Watershed Stewardship program is only in place to placate area of origin stakeholders and is not given as much credence as the other programs. By defining the links and the "relevance" of projects to the CALFED mission, the upper watersheds will be more fully integrated into the CALFED program. The current Category III solicitation is an example of assigning relevance. The upper watersheds are included and about 4% of the funds available have been assigned to that program. Future programs could focus funding in the same manner based on the outcome of the analysis provided in the WMS.

Options: CALFED could decide that it's mission is tightly focused on the Bay-Delta and minimally fund or assist groups above dams or in Bay tributary watersheds. The pros for this view are: would allow all funds to be allocated to the Sacramento/San Joaquin system avoiding "dilution" of scarce funding. If this is the case, changes need to be made in EIR/EIS to more clearly state the focus. The cons for this view are: may be closing the door on future options, eg a catastrophic wild fire in the foothills covering thousands of acres could generate enough sediment to severely reduce reservoir capacity. Also, if in the future it is determined that upper watershed habitat is necessary for recovery, some currently suitable streams may become unsuitable through continued neglect or occurrence of some event. There is also a political reality since the upper watersheds are the source of the water supplied to the Bay-Delta, stakeholder acceptance of the CALFED process may be dependent on the inclusion of upper watersheds in the funding program.

CALFED could decide to fund upper watershed projects in a staged manner. That is, develop a strategy based on the above discussion with the strongest link (sediment reduction) being the initial focus. At the end of Stage I, reassess the needs for habitat above dams or in the Bay watersheds. Cons: dilutes scarce dollars for a program with less direct results on Bay-Delta species. Pro: Maintains future options and acknowledges the link. If future work shows there is no real benefit, then we have the data and more science than we have now to say there is no link. Staging allows CALFED to back out of the program if no benefit is derived.