

Proposed Environmental Flows Workgroup

Should the Monitoring Council Establish an Environmental Flows Workgroup?

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Statement of Issue

Multiple state and local agencies share responsibility for setting flow targets that protect and improve the ecological health of California's water resources. These efforts have historically not been coordinated at the state level, resulting in fragmented and siloed flow management programs. Consequently, environmental flow data are not readily available or comparable across the state. Moreover, the focus has been on site-specific solutions, rather than to holistically manage the health of California's watersheds.

Technical Workgroup Established in 2016 Outside of the Monitoring Council

- A workgroup was formed to coordinate technical approaches for the development and implementation of environmental flow efforts in California.
- The workgroup members pooled their knowledge and worked to reconcile differences in technical approaches and methodologies.
- They have worked to develop a statewide strategy for advancing the science and management of environmental flows in California; *however, thus far, they have had limited agency involvement.*

Environmental Flows Workgroup Requested to Convene Under the Monitoring Council

- The workgroup sees joining the Monitoring Council as an opportunity to broaden agency participation and as a means to improve coordination.
- The request to join the Monitoring Council was initially made at the May 2017 Council meeting and discussions continued at the August meeting.
- The Council decided to delay their vote to bring the workgroup into the Monitoring Council in order to receive guidance from the agency heads.

Benefits of Forming an Environmental Flows Workgroup Under the Monitoring Council

- Broader agency participation will promote interagency collaboration and improve the connection between technical products and agency program needs.
- It would better enable the workgroup to develop and implement a consistent and defensible statewide framework for rapidly assessing environmental flows.
- It would provide support for resource managers, by creating a "clearinghouse" for tools, data, case studies and lessons learned from past applications.
- The resulting products will be more closely aligned with agency needs and constraints.

What are Environmental Flows?

The workgroup defines environmental flows as the magnitude, timing, duration, rate of change, and frequency of flows and associated water levels necessary to sustain healthy water bodies.

Why are Environmental Flows Important?

Flow alterations contribute to the loss of biodiversity, water quality impacts, and can increase a streams susceptibility to climate change effects.

Environmental flows are not necessarily "natural flows," as they allow for some degree of hydrologic alteration due to other uses. Environmental flows are intended to mimic the patterns and ecological outcomes of the natural flow regime.

Why Assess Environmental Flows?

- To evaluate and inform water resources and water quality management actions and policy.
- To set instream flow standards to protect biological communities and instream natural resources.
- To assess vulnerability of streams to future changes in flow conditions.