

## North Bay Watershed Association

### Integrated/Multi-Benefit Water Management Projects Policy

Final Draft  
September 22, 2008

#### BACKGROUND

The (insert member agency name) is a member agency of the North Bay Watershed Association (NBWA). The NBWA is a collaboration of City, County and public utility agencies and non-governmental organizations in Marin, Sonoma, and Napa Counties. All of the NBWA member agencies develop and implement projects to fulfill their respective duties. Many of these projects are water management projects, including water supply, storm water management, waste water management, flood control, public access, recreation, and watershed resource management projects.

Population growth, environmental constraints, climate change, integrated land use planning, funding mechanisms, and other forces are driving a fundamental change in water management. State and Federal agencies are tying substantial water management funding to the development of Integrated Regional Water Management Plans (IRWMPs), such as State bond propositions 50 & 84 and other sources. These programs emphasize and give priority to integrated, multi-benefit projects and strategies. The NBWA member agencies have been developing integrated projects, to some degree, and want to continue to encourage informal collaboration for future integrated/multi-benefit projects.

The North Bay Watershed Association (NBWA) recognizes that many water management challenges are best approached through projects which combine two or more of the following benefits: flood reduction, water supply, water quality, water treatment, habitat enhancement, aesthetics, and recreation. In response to the new

paradigm for water management, the NBWA and its member agencies are establishing this policy for taking an integrated/multi-benefit approach to project planning and implementation.

## **DESCRIPTION OF INTEGRATED/MULTI-BENEFIT PROJECTS**

An integrated or multi-benefit project is one that is planned, designed, implemented, and maintained with the intended purpose of providing two or more benefits or of meeting two or more objectives. For NBWA members, these benefits can include: flood reduction, water supply, water quality, water treatment, habitat enhancement, aesthetics, and recreation. Examples of a multi-benefit project include: a flood control+habitat enhancement+public recreation project; a water supply+flood control+habitat enhancement project; a water supply+water quality improvement project. There is no limit on the number of combined benefits that a project can have, but it must have at least two intended benefits to be considered an integrated or multi-benefit project. The benefits from the project must also be intended and purposely planned into the project goals and objectives; they should not simply be mitigations for impacts from a single-purpose project. However, at the same time, if mitigation measures are built into the project description, it will add to the benefits from a project and can minimize the level of environmental review required for CEQA and environmental permitting.

## **POLICY STATEMENT**

It is the policy of \_\_\_\_\_ (insert NBWA member agency name) \_\_\_\_\_ to integrate multiple benefits into the planning and implementation of all water management projects and to coordinate these projects with the other NBWA member agencies, to achieve the maximum number of benefits from a project. All of the NBWA member agencies develop and implement water management projects that may include water supply, storm water management, waste water management, flood control, public access, recreation, and watershed resource management projects. It is the intent of this policy

to encourage informal collaboration within and among member agencies to integrate and achieve multiple benefits from these water management projects.

One of the goals of this policy is for water management projects within the NBWA region to be eligible and competitive for State bond and Federal grant programs that fund integrated, multi-benefit projects. These programs prioritize projects that are integrated to: protect communities from drought; improve water supply reliability and security; support water conservation and water use efficiency; protect and improve water quality; improve storm water capture, storage, and treatment; remove invasive plant species; create and enhance wetland habitats; acquire and protect open space and watershed lands; improve recreation and access to public lands; reduce and control non-point source pollution; implement groundwater recharge, desalinization, reclamation, and other supply, treatment, and conveyance technologies; encourage water banking and water exchange; provide multipurpose flood control that protects property and protects or improves wildlife habitat; restore and protect fisheries and ecosystem functions; include watershed management planning and implementation; and develop new drinking water treatment and distribution methods. The legislation and guidelines for these State bond and Federal grant programs stipulate that the projects must be planned and implemented through an integrated approach in order to even be eligible for funding.

By coordinating projects with other NBWA member agencies, multiple partnerships can be built around a project and conflicts with other projects and benefits can be avoided. This can reduce costs for the agency and may help minimize environmental impacts.

Multi-benefit projects are specifically intended to provide two or more benefits as the project's goals and objectives. They can often reduce or eliminate mitigation requirements. They can achieve long-term goals in a single project, rather than over a series of projects. They can effectively resolve significant water-related conflicts within a region. It is most often in the public interest to develop integrated, multi-benefit projects.

It is recognized that some projects, particularly maintenance of existing facilities, may not readily lend themselves to being able to have multiple benefits. However, this is not to exclude those projects from being considered to be multi-benefit projects. Multiple benefits should be considered and pursued in all instances.

It is also recognized that providing multiple objectives can add complexity and, in some instances, significantly increase the cost of a project. However, the cost-benefit analysis may still be acceptable when considering benefits of a project over a long time period. Therefore any cost-benefit analyses conducted for a multi-benefit project will take a broad view of benefits over time and will consider the time period that will be appropriate for all benefits to be achieved. Also, the cost-benefit analysis will consider the costs that would be incurred by comparing the multi-benefit project with the costs if the benefits were only achieved individually, as several single-benefit projects. All possible benefits will be quantified in any cost-benefit analysis of a project.

The approach to multi-benefit projects will be incorporated into all phases of a project, beginning with project conception and carried through the planning, permitting, design, and construction phases.

Coordination and communication about multiple benefits, amongst staff and between agencies, is necessary through all phases of the project. When a project is first developed, communication with other agencies will be made to investigate where partnerships can be formed towards achieving the project as a multi-benefit project. In some cases, informal collaboration may be sufficient for an integrated, multi-benefit project to be developed. This should be encouraged whenever possible. In other cases, a more formal agreement between agencies may be necessary.

During project planning, there will be a project team meeting specifically to brainstorm and discuss potential multi-benefits of the project and feasible benefits will be carried forward. The project team will consist of engineers, planners, and biologists/natural resource managers, or some comparable multidisciplinary group of personnel within the

agency. The team meeting will include a discussion of the scope and timeline of a project and the time period in which benefits from a project can be realized. The team meeting will also compare the timeline and costs of a multi-benefit project versus the time and costs of the benefits being achieved as several single-benefit projects.

Staff training will be encouraged to foster support for and build expertise in the multi-benefit project approach. An opportunity for supporting guidance will exist through the Marin County Watershed Stewardship Plan. The Watershed Stewardship Plan will draft guidelines that will outline an approach for determining, describing, prioritizing, and implementing multi-benefit projects, including guidelines to rank aquatic resource projects. The Stewardship Plan will also provide criteria to evaluate and rank multi-functional benefits and specific project contributions to watershed health. The criteria development will be consistent with best management practices. It will also develop criteria to assist with selecting and ranking actions that address ecological as well as infrastructure needs. The Stewardship Plan and other, future, activities will provide a model for NBWA agencies to use to build expertise and experience in implementing multi-benefit projects.