My Water Quality Website

Maximizing the Effectiveness of Water Quality Data Collection and Dissemination

Implementing Recommendations of the
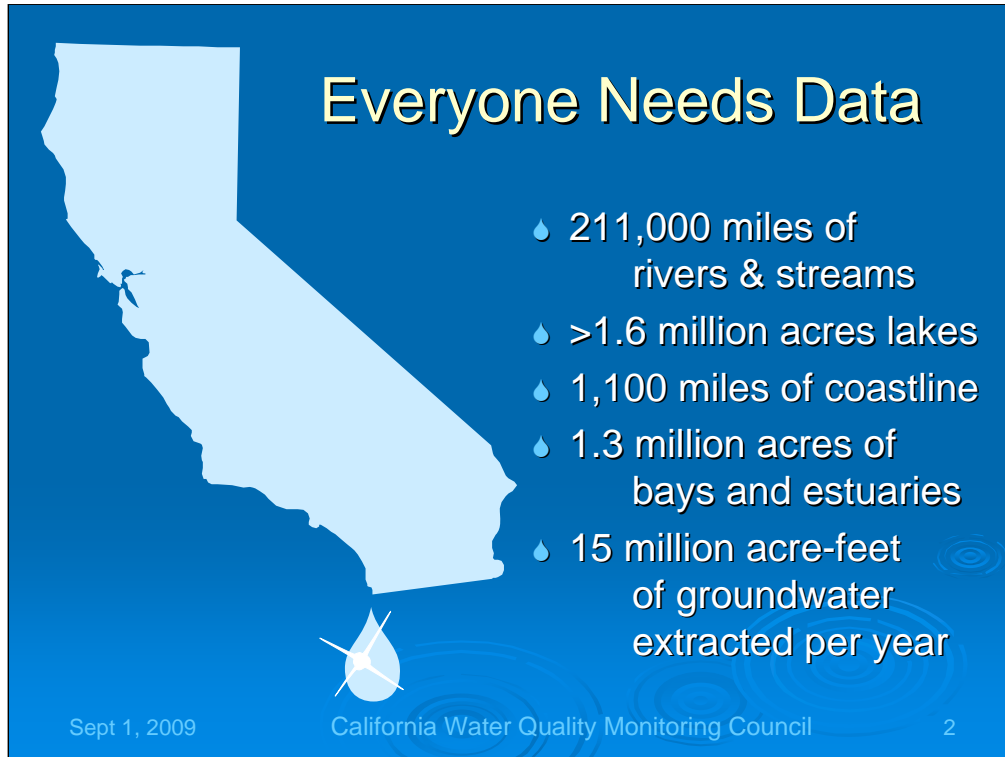California Water Quality Monitoring Council

www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/
programs/monitoring_council

I am Jon Marshack, with the Office of Information Management and Analysis.

I am staff to the California Water Quality Monitoring Council.

Today I will provide you with a status report on **implementation** of the Monitoring Council's recommendations.

Those recommendations were made
to the Secretaries of Cal/EPA and the Natural Resources Agency
last December, and may be found on the internet at the address shown here.

Everyone Needs Data

- 211,000 miles of rivers & streams
- >1.6 million acres lakes
- 1,100 miles of coastline
- 1.3 million acres of bays and estuaries
- 15 million acre-feet of groundwater extracted per year

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Many agencies, regulated dischargers, and hundreds of water bond grant recipients spend millions of dollars each year collecting water quality data.

These data must be turned into useable information to help decision makers and stakeholders understand

- The status of our waters and aquatic ecosystems,

- Public health and welfare issues related to water quality, and

- The effectiveness of agency programs to manage our water resources.
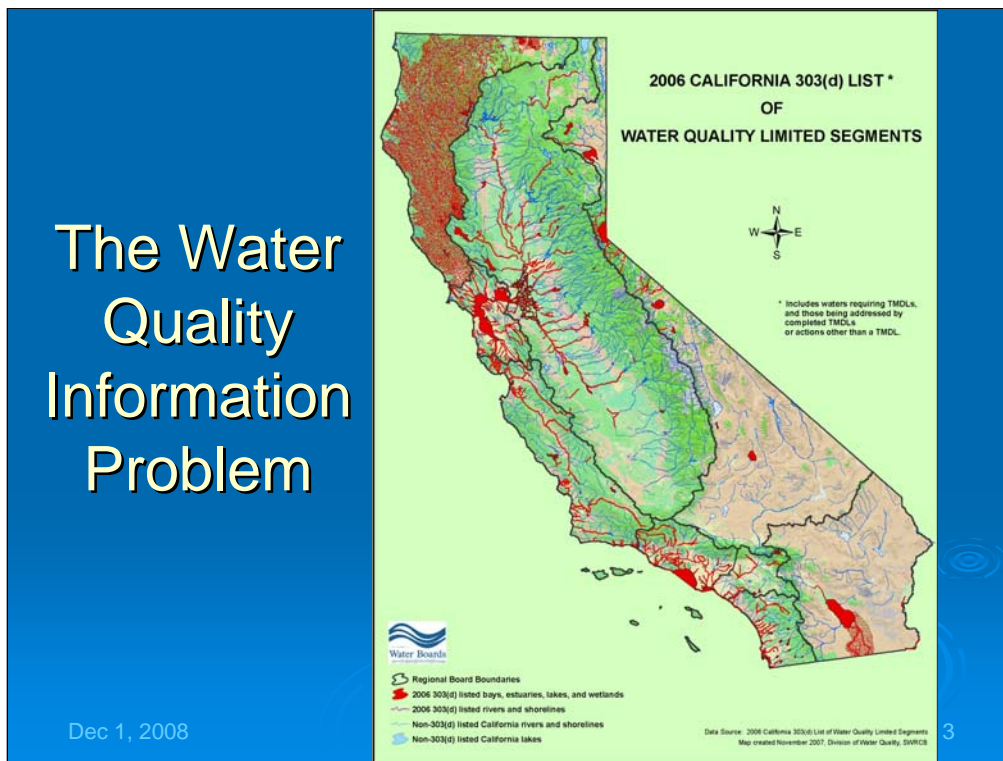
But California's water quality information system is defective

- There are inconsistent monitoring objectives and methods to collect and assess the data, as shown in this map of 2006 impaired waters listings.

  In this example, differences in assessment strategies makes it appear that North Coast Region waters are the most impaired, when they are actually some of the state's cleanest waters.

- Often it is not possible to integrate data from different studies.

- And there is no single user-friendly place to access the data.

In response, Senate Bill 1070 was signed into law in 2006, requiring Cal/EPA and the Resources Agency to establish the California Water Quality Monitoring Council.

Members of the Monitoring Council are represented here.

The legislation required that by December 1, 2008 the Monitoring Council report its recommendations

- For maximizing the efficiency and effectiveness of existing water quality data collection and dissemination,

- And for ensuring that collected data are available for use by decision makers and the public.

The Monitoring Council's Solution

Don't get mired in technical details!

- Focus first on streamlined data access
  - Theme-based web portals
  - Single global point of entry

- Issue-specific workgroups

- Overarching Monitoring Council guidance

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Rather than focusing on technical details, such as methods consistency and standard data formats, the recommendations present a new solution.

The Monitoring Council believes that the best way to coordinate and enhance California's monitoring, assessment and reporting efforts is **first** to provide a platform for intuitive, streamlined **access** to water quality information that directly addresses users' questions.

Issue-specific workgroups, under the overarching guidance of the Monitoring Council,

- Will evaluate existing monitoring, assessment and reporting efforts

- And work to enhance those efforts so as to improve the **delivery** of water quality information to the user, in the form of theme-based web portals.
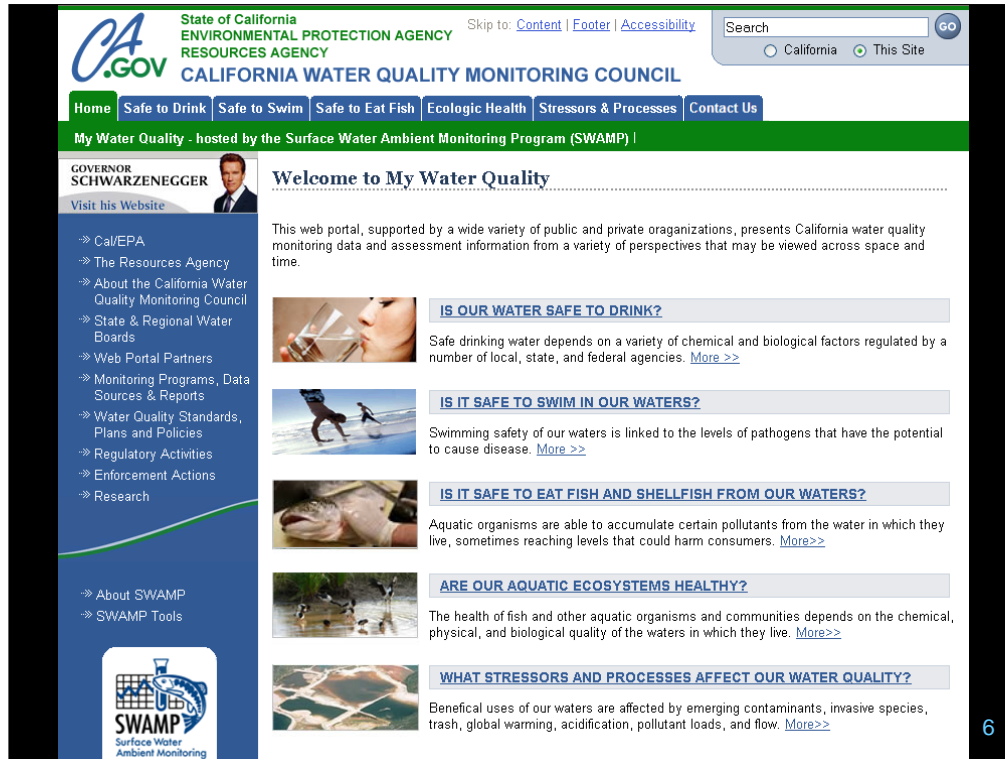
To illustrate this concept, the Monitoring Council is developing the **My Water Quality** website to provide a single, global access point to a set of theme-based web portals for water quality monitoring data and assessment information.

The website is designed around intuitively clear questions that are readily understood by managers, the public, and scientists.

- Is our water safe to drink?
- Is it safe to swim in our waters?
- Is it safe to eat fish and shellfish from our waters?
- Are our aquatic ecosystems healthy?
- What stressors and processes affect our water quality?

Each question will lead to a series of web pages that provide map-based access to summary assessment products and more detailed monitoring data.

Links along the left-hand side of each page will enable users to access technical information specific to each theme.
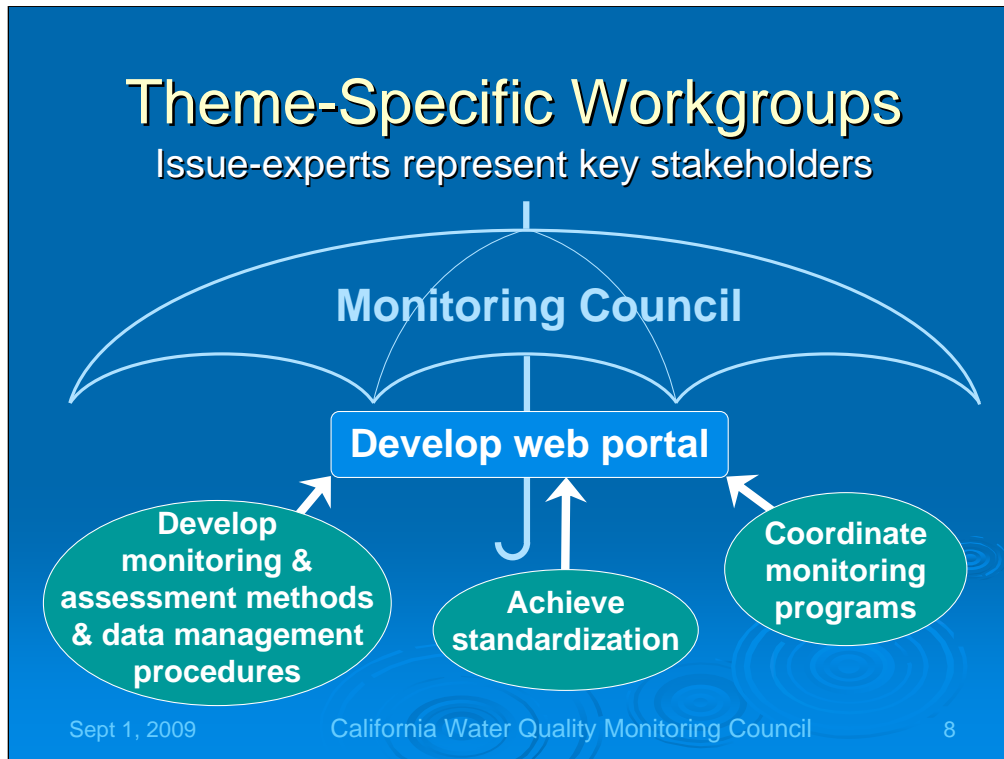
To achieve its solution, the Monitoring Council envisions a number of theme-specific workgroups. The green circular shapes at the bottom together represent the efforts of a workgroup. The workgroups are

- staffed by issue experts representing key stakeholders
- that will develop a web portal devoted to their theme or sub-theme.
- Each workgroup will develop underlying monitoring and assessment methods and data management procedures according to performance measures defined by Monitoring Council.
- The workgroups will coordinate existing monitoring programs,
- achieve standardization necessary to meet users' needs, and
- will report periodically to Monitoring Council.

Role of the Monitoring Council

🔹 Establish policies and guidelines

🔹 Clearinghouse for
   🔹 Standards
   🔹 Guidelines
   🔹 Collaboration

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The Monitoring Council will

- Establish common policies and guidelines for the workgroups and the monitoring programs they represent; and

- Act will as a clearinghouse for standards, guidelines, and collaboration.

Four sub-themes have been chosen for initial action, building on existing efforts that have already made substantial progress.

First, Safe to swim – Coastal beaches, bays & estuaries

- The Beach Water Quality Workgroup coordinates beach monitoring efforts of the Water Boards, Department of Public Health, county health agencies, and coastal dischargers

- These monitoring data and a variety of assessment tools are included in this web portal, that was released to the public in July

- Heal the Bay's Beach Report Card website is included as one of the featured assessment tools

Second, Safe to eat fish & shellfish – Sport fish

- The Bioaccumulation Oversight Group is a collaborative effort of the Surface Water Ambient Monitoring Program, the Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment, and others to assess the accumulation of pollutants, such as mercury and legacy pesticides, in fish that people eat

- A portal based on their work will be released in the very near future

(Continued from prior slide)

Third, Aquatic ecosystem health – Wetlands

- The Wetlands Monitoring Workgroup coordinates the assessment of the extent and function of California's wetlands
- Their Wetland Tracker website will become the portal for their sub-theme, to be released by early October

And **fourth**, Safe to drink – Groundwater

- The GeoTracker GAMA website brings together groundwater monitoring efforts of the Department of Public Health's drinking water program, U.S. Geologic Survey, Water Boards' contaminated site programs, Department of Pesticide Regulation, and Lawrence Livermore National Labs
- The Monitoring Council has asked that GeoTracker GAMA be featured in a question-based web portal on the Safe-to-Drink Groundwater sub-theme, to be released by early November

I will now provide you with a tour of the Safe-to-Eat Fish and Shellfish portal.