Getting a Grip on Waste(d)water Management

HTO COLLABORATING WITH DWR ON STATE INVENTORY PROJECT

Heal the Ocean has taken our “waste(d)water” campaign statewide.

James Hawkins, Policy Analyst for Heal the Ocean, has been working with the Water Recycling & Desalination Section at the State of California Department of Water Resources (DWR), on an inventory of all ocean discharges of wastewater in California. The goal is to estimate and document the volume of wastewater that could be reclaimed without adverse impacts to downstream water rights or environmental uses.

The final report will be launched during the summer of 2016, and be accessible to all.

HTO’s "California Ocean Wastewater Discharge Inventory," published in 2010, found that coastal treatment plants were discharging approximately 1.3 billion gallons of wastewater per day into the sea, representing a significant source of potential recycled water. While conservation measures in California’s drought have likely reduced total wastewater discharges to an extent, it is expected that the updated report will show that California still has a significant supply of wastewater available to help alleviate water scarcity in the state.

HTO initiated the project in the spirit of the California Water Action Plan, which states that “working together and continued collaboration is essential” to achieve progress in California water management. Specifically, documenting the volume of wastewater potentially available for water recycling is a critical component for meeting the objectives of the Water Action Plan to achieve reliability, restoration, and resilience in California’s water system.

Working with Michael Ross of DWR’s Water Recycling & Desalination Section, James and HTO Operations Coordinator Corey Radis have consulted CIWQS/eSMR data portals, reviewed dischargers’ NPDES permits, and contacted each of the six Regional Water Boards with coastal jurisdiction to ensure the lists are complete and accurate.

This project has the potential to fill in critical missing data points in California water management and ensure the protection of our limited water resources. It is our hope that the project will better inform the water debate at a time when we need to prioritize sustainable water resources, like recycled water.