

San Diego Regional Water Board Releases Draft Total Maximum Daily Load to Restore Conditions for Steelhead in San Mateo Creek.

Would make federal funding available to help restore an endangered species

Overview: The California Water Quality Control Board San Diego Region (San Diego Water Board) is considering a draft invasive species Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) and plan to certify that actions of other entities will correct impairments to San Mateo Creek, which is currently listed as impaired under Section 303(d) of the Clean Water Act (CWA) due to invasive species. The presence and proliferation of invasive species in San Mateo Creek threatens the ability of the creek to support the federally-endangered southern California steelhead. The plan would enable collaborative watershed planning and restoration activities to be eligible for state and federal funding.

The San Diego Water Board released a draft invasive species TMDL for San Mateo Creek on June 15, 2022, for public review and comment. Public comments on the draft TMDL are due no later than 5 p.m. on November 1, 2022, via email to sandiego@waterboards.ca.gov.

There are steelhead in San Diego?

Yes. The southern California steelhead is a native species in the San Diego Region. Steelhead live a portion of their life in the ocean before returning to rivers and streams to spawn. Unlike most salmon, steelhead do not die after spawning, and some individuals may spend a significant portion of their life in freshwater (where they are often referred to as “rainbow trout”). While much of the steelhead’s habitat in the San Diego Region has been cut off by obstructions like dams, San Mateo Creek remains a free-flowing stream from its headwaters in the Elsinore Mountains to the Pacific Ocean at the border of Orange and San Diego Counties. San Mateo Creek historically contained large numbers of steelhead, with estimates in the thousands, and was even targeted for steelhead fishing by southern California residents.

How would the TMDL work?

The TMDL establishes invasive species and steelhead targets for San Mateo Creek. Eligible parties would be able to apply for funding to implement management measures that could restore the creek’s impairment. The management measures include:

- 1) Addressing sources of invasive species getting into San Mateo Creek from ponds in the watershed, and
- 2) Direct removal of invasives species present within San Mateo Creek.

Funding would also be available to implement a watershed-based monitoring program to determine the success of these actions. Monitoring would be conducted to determine if invasive species have been removed from San Mateo Creek concurrent with monitoring to determine if the steelhead population has been restored.

Does the TMDL require actions by private landowners?

The draft TMDL would not mandate any actions by homeowners who may have a pond on their property. The TMDL relies upon the voluntary implementation of mitigation measures for ponds to address invasive species that may be transported into San Mateo Creek. Recent legislation has been passed (Assembly Bill 315 and Senate Bill 155) to promote these actions, and the TMDL implementation would allow 3rd parties, such as Resource Conservation Districts or non-profits, to educate and work with willing landowners to help mitigate existing sources of invasive species to restore San Mateo Creek.

Regardless of the proposed TMDL action, the San Diego Water Board does have authority and responsibilities under the federal CWA and State Porter-Cologne Water Quality Control Act to regulate any actual or potential discharges of pollutants, including dredge or fill material, into San Mateo Creek and its tributaries.

What is the process?

The draft TMDL is currently available for public review and comment through November 1, 2022. San Diego Water Board staff will review and respond to written comments and may propose changes to the draft TMDL based on those comments. The draft TMDL will then be scheduled for consideration of certification by the San Diego Water Board at a public meeting or by its Executive Officer. Upon certification, the TMDL would be added to the State's nonpoint source pollution (NPS) plan. Projects in the NPS plan are eligible for funding using CWA section 319 grants. In 2022 California had \$4 million available for CWA 319 grant funding. The San Diego Water Board may pursue a memorandum of agreement with interested parties for implementation of the TMDL using NPS funding.

More information can be found on the San Diego Water Board website
<https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/sandiego>.

The San Diego Water Board is a state agency responsible for implementing provisions of the federal Clean Water Act and the California Water Code to protect the quality of water in the ocean, streams, bays, and underground aquifers. The Basin Plan designates beneficial uses for water bodies within the region and establishes water quality objectives and implementation plans to protect those beneficial uses.

(This Fact Sheet was last updated June 15, 2022)