

**STATE OF CALIFORNIA
REGIONAL WATER QUALITY CONTROL BOARD
CENTRAL COAST REGION**

STAFF REPORT FOR REGULAR MEETING OF FEBRUARY 20-21, 2025

Prepared on January 9, 2025

ITEM NUMBER: 10

SUBJECT: ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE, RACIAL EQUITY AND TRIBAL AFFAIRS - ANNUAL UPDATE

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KEY INFORMATION:

Location: Region-Wide

ACTION: Information/Discussion

SUMMARY

The Central Coast Water Board has a long history of prioritizing environmental justice issues and engaging underrepresented communities in water quality programs, especially related to drinking water protection. This item is to provide the Environmental Justice, Racial Equity and Tribal Affairs Annual Update. In February 2024, the Central Coast Water Board developed an Environmental Justice, Racial Equity, and Tribal Engagement Action Plan (Action Plan) to prioritize actions to integrate environmental justice, racial equity, and tribal engagement into the Central Coast Water Board's water quality programs and organizational culture. This staff report provides an update on staff's efforts to implement the Action Plan and related projects. In addition, this agenda item will also include invited environmental justice project presentations by the San Luis Obispo Beaver Brigade, Santa Cruz County Water Resources Program - Environmental Health Division, and the State Water Resources Control Board Safe and Affordable Funding for Equity and Resilience Program (SAFER).

As a follow-up to the Environmental Justice, Racial Equity and Tribal Affairs - Annual Update, Item 15 is a field trip to the Morro Bay National Estuary Program (MBNEP) in

Morro Bay, CA. The field trip will include a visit to the Morro Bay Estuary Nature Center and presentations by staff from the MBNEP/Bay Foundation of Morro Bay, Central Coast Ambient Monitoring Program, Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary, and Northern Chumash Tribal Council Monitoring Program. The public is invited to participate; however, space is limited, and transportation will not be provided. Reservations are required in advance. Please see the [agenda](#)¹ for information on the meeting and how to RSVP for the field trip.

DISCUSSION

Background

Consistent with the Central Coast Water Board's Strategic Plan², staff advance environmental justice, racial equity, and tribal engagement as part of our ongoing activities to implement our water quality mission in coordination with our statewide Water Board counterparts, environmental justice partners, Tribes, community members, and regulated entities we serve. To optimize the use of available resources, the Central Coast Water Board's approach is to 1) implement a highly coordinated Environmental Justice Leadership Team to support continuity and positive momentum to integrate environmental justice, racial equity, and tribal engagement into our organizational culture and water quality programs, 2) consider the State Water Board's Racial Equity Action Plan as a starting point to leverage existing resources and avoid redundancy, 3) focus resources on specific high priority actions, and 4) utilize annual updates to the Board and routine project updates in the Executive Officer's Report to inform the Board and obtain public input. In addition, the Central Coast Water Board maintains an [Environmental Justice, Racial Equity, and Tribal Engagement Website](#)³ and [Project Tracker](#)⁴ to increase transparency and provide opportunities for community and tribal engagement on specific activities and projects.

To effectively integrate environmental justice, racial equity, and tribal engagement into our organizational culture and water quality programs, the Central Coast Water Board provides clear expectations and guidance to program managers and staff to ensure they are knowledgeable and participate in training on the relevant policies and guidance, including:

1. Central Coast Water Board [Human Right to Water Resolution R3-2017-0004](#)⁵
2. Central Coast Water Board [Racial Equity Resolution R3-2023-0002](#)⁶
3. State Water Board [Tribal Consultation Policy](#)⁷

¹ https://waterboards.ca.gov/centralcoast/board_info/agendas/2025/2025_agendas.html

² https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/centralcoast/board_info/agendas/2024/oct/item20_att1.pdf

³ https://waterboards.ca.gov/centralcoast/water_issues/programs/enviro_justice/enviro_justice.html

⁴ https://waterboards.ca.gov/centralcoast/water_issues/programs/enviro_justice/dashboard.html

⁵ https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/centralcoast/board_decisions/adopted_orders/2017/2017-0004_hrtw_fnl.pdf

⁶ https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/centralcoast/press_room/press_releases/docs/2023/r3-2023-0002.pdf

⁷ https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/tribal_affairs/docs/california_water_board_tribal_consultation_policy.pdf

4. Central Coast Water Board [Environmental Justice, Racial Equity, and Tribal Action Plan](#)

In addition, the Central Coast Water Board provides support and resources to staff to develop project outreach plans and effectively engage communities and Tribes.

Environmental Justice, Racial Equity, and Tribal Engagement Action Plan

The Central Coast Water Board's Action Plan sets goals to prioritize actions to integrate environmental justice, racial equity, and tribal engagement into water quality programs and organizational culture and identifies performance indicators to measure progress. The Action Plan is intended to be a dynamic document that staff can adjust based on emerging priorities, public input, and available resources to achieve the following desired results:

- The Central Coast Water Board effectively integrates environmental justice, racial equity, and tribal engagement throughout the organization's policies, programs, practices, and decision making.
- Central Coast Water Board staff have a working knowledge of relevant environmental justice, racial equity, and tribal engagement policies and practices and have tools and resources to integrate this knowledge into program implementation.
- The Central Coast Water Board provides meaningful opportunities for underrepresented communities to participate in and provide input on water quality issues that affect them.
- Central Coast Water Board staff and management reflect the diverse communities that we serve.

Since the development of the Action Plan in February 2024, staff have made significant progress to implement many actions to address environmental justice, racial equity, and tribal engagement. The Environmental Justice Leadership team is in the process of data collection to inform the performance indicators in the Action Plan and will continue to update the Board on our findings. Table 1 in the Action Plan describes the performance indicators and example actions conducted during FY 24-25 are described below. The staff presentation for this agenda item will provide additional information about specific activities.

Strategic Direction #1 – Integrating Racial Equity, Measuring Impact

- Maintained Environmental Justice Leadership Team.
- Attended all statewide Environmental Justice Roundtable and Tribal Coordination Meetings.
- Included specific priority projects in the FY 24-25 Strategic Plan that address environmental justice, tribal engagement, or support to underrepresented communities.
- Provided staff with easily accessible outreach and community engagement tools and resources (implementation guides, maps and data to identify).

underrepresented communities, language isolation tools, outreach plan templates, community partner and tribal contact lists).

- Developed project specific outreach plans.
- Facilitated drinking water well testing.
- Facilitated replacement water (e.g. bottled water, drinking water treatment).
- Met with tribal representatives, community groups, and environmental justice organizations.

Strategic Direction #2 – Creating, Maintaining Spaces for Inclusion and Belonging

- Ensured that staff have knowledge and training on relevant Water Board policies related to environmental justice, racial equity, and tribal engagement.
- Included assessment of knowledge, skills, and abilities related to being a part of a diverse workforce and interacting with a diverse group of stakeholders during hiring and recruitment activities.

Strategic Direction #3 – Activating Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) Wisdom and Sharing Power

- Maintained easy public access to environmental justice, racial equity, and tribal engagement data and project information on website.
- Included a summary of environmental justice, racial equity, and community and tribal engagement activities for every Board item.
- Supported projects that address climate change impacts that may disproportionately impact unrepresented communities (e.g. Central Coast Community Based Water Quality Grants Program).
- Conducted project-specific external engagement with underrepresented communities. See Project Tracker (e.g. San Lucas Water District drinking water project, Hacienda Apartments wastewater consolidation).
- Conducted project-specific external engagement with California Native American Tribes (e.g. Tribal Beneficial Uses Project, Northern Chumash Tribal Council Monitoring Program). Participated in the statewide Tribal engagement “call-athon” to conduct outreach to each known Tribal contact and confirm their contact information and strengthen relationships with Tribes in the region.
- Facilitated opportunities for Board Members and staff to meet with community members and Tribes to listen and discuss community priorities (e.g. San Lucas Water District drinking water project, Hacienda Apartments wastewater consolidation, and various Board Member field trips).

Environmental Justice Project Tracker

The purpose of the [Environmental Justice, Racial Equity, and Tribal Engagement Project Tracker](#)⁸ is to increase transparency and provide opportunities for community and Tribal engagement on activities and projects implemented by the Central Coast Water Board that may be of increased interest to underrepresented communities and Tribes. In addition, the Project Tracker assists in staff coordination to increase effectiveness and to reduce redundancy and outreach burdens on the community.

⁸ https://waterboards.ca.gov/centralcoast/water_issues/programs/enviro_justice/dashboard.html

GUEST PRESENTATIONS

San Luis Obispo Beaver Brigade - Paso Robles Drinkable Rivers Project

The San Luis Obispo (SLO) Beaver Brigade - Paso Robles Drinkable Rivers Project establishes a "Drinkable Rivers" program in Paso Robles, in which the group will engage five Spanish- and Mixtec-speaking youth in a summer internship program. The student training will include scientific and indigenous knowledge of the river, exploration of connections of the Salinas River with water sources in their communities of origin, strategies for water conservation, water quality and data collection and compilation, as well as public dissemination of information about the health of our community water. The underlying goal of the program is to initiate discussion and actions on water quality and protection of beavers whose dams can reduce common aquatic pollutants such as nitrates, phosphates, metals, and excess sediments. The biggest obstacle for beavers in SLO County is lack of education on the benefits of beavers to area watersheds. The potential benefits of this project are significant, not only for water quality but to environmental justice, as youth will engage in science and nature-based education and experiences, gain career preparation skills, including data collection skills and presentation skills. Participants will also establish relationships with Cal Poly College Corps Fellows collaborating on the project, and experience new roles in their communities as river stewards, all of which will be favorable on college, job, and scholarship applications.

Santa Cruz County Water Resources Program - Environmental Health Division Household Well Assistance Program

Within Santa Cruz County there are approximately 8,000 unregulated private domestic wells and small water systems. Many of these wells have never been tested for the most common contaminants found in drinking water. Groundwater testing associated with Central Coast Water Board indicates widespread basin-scale pollution of the drinking water supply due to nitrate, arsenic, and other pollutants. Drinking water well testing is essential to identify areas of potentially unsafe drinking water supply, inform drinking water well users of water quality, and measure individual groundwater basin health. To meet this need Santa Cruz County received funding from the State Water Board's Safe and Affordable Funding for Equity and Resilience (SAFER) Program to implement the [Household Well Assistance Program](#)⁹. Through the Household Well Assistance Program and in partnership with the [Central Coast Drinking Water Well Testing Program](#)¹⁰, Santa Cruz County staff conducts outreach, analyzes well water quality, provides drinking water replacement, and installs point-of-use (POU) treatment systems for households whose wells are impacted by pollutants. As of January 3, 2025, the Household Well Assistance Program has enrolled 5 households that are served by nitrate impacted wells. One household has installed a POU treatment system which has successfully reduced the level of Nitrate to acceptable levels. The other four households are served by the same well and have been receiving bottled water deliveries while they

⁹<https://www.scceh.org/NewHome/Programs/WaterResources/DroughtResponse/HouseholdWellAssistance.aspx>

¹⁰ <https://sites.google.com/view/ccgroundwater>

assess the feasibility of POU treatment. Between all four households, approximately 240 gallons of bottled water has been delivered.

State Water Resources Control Board Safe and Affordable Funding for Equity and Resilience Program (SAFER)

The Human Right to Water recognizes that “every human being has the right to safe, clean, affordable, and accessible water adequate for human consumption, cooking and sanitary purposes.” In 2019, to advance the goals of the Human Right to Water, California passed Senate Bill 200, which established the State Water Board’s Safe and Affordable Funding for Equity and Resilience Drinking Water program (SAFER program). The [SAFER Program](#)¹¹ is a set of tools, funding sources, and regulatory authorities designed to ensure that Californians who currently lack access to safe drinking water receive safe and affordable drinking water as quickly as possible. The SAFER program also aims to reach sustainable operations for all the state’s drinking water systems and is a critical element for achieving the goals of safe, accessible, and affordable water for all Californians. The Safe and Affordable Drinking Water (SADW) Fund provides \$130 million per year that will be used to develop and implement sustainable solutions for small systems with violations of drinking water standards. The money may be spent on operations and maintenance costs, cost of consolidating with larger system, provision of replacement water, and funding for administrators to run the small systems. The SAFER Program also helps with interim drinking water supplies, emergency repairs, technical assistance, administrators, planning, operations and maintenance and construction projects via various funding sources. To implement the SAFER Program, the State Water Board developed a Drinking Water Needs Assessment to identify communities served by failing public water systems, as well public water systems, state small water systems, and domestic wells that are at risk of failing, especially disadvantaged communities.

Human Right to Water, Environmental Justice, and Climate Change

As described in this staff report, the Central Coast Water Board’s approach to advance environmental justice, racial equity and tribal engagement prioritizes underrepresented communities¹² and promotes the human right to water by implementing Central Coast

¹¹ <https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/safer/>

¹² Underrepresented Communities include but are not limited to Disadvantaged Communities (DACs), Severely Disadvantaged Communities (SDACs), Economically Distressed Areas (EDAs), Tribes, Environmentally Disadvantaged Communities (EnvDACs), and members of Fringe Communities. DAC: a community with an annual median household income that is less than 80% of the statewide annual median household income (Public Resources Code section 80002(e)); SDAC: a community with a median household income of less than 60% of the statewide average. (Public Resources Code section 80002(n)); EDA: a municipality with a population of 20,000 persons or less, a rural county, or a reasonably isolated and divisible segment of a larger municipality where the segment of the population is 20,000 persons or less with an annual median household income that is less than 85% of the statewide median household income and with one or more of the following conditions as determined by the department: (1) financial hardship, (2) unemployment rate at least 2% higher than the statewide average, or (3) low population density. (Water Code section 79702(k)); Tribes: federally recognized Indian Tribes and California State Indian Tribes listed on the Native American Heritage Commission’s California Tribal

Water Board Resolution R3-2017- 0004 and California Water Code section 106.3, subdivision (a) that states that it is the policy of the State of California “that every human being has the right to safe, clean, affordable, and accessible water adequate for human consumption, cooking, and sanitation purposes.” Additionally, the Central Coast Water Board supports projects that address climate change impacts that may disproportionately impact unrepresented communities. Furthermore, the Central Coast Water Board is committed to providing all stakeholders the opportunity to participate in the public process and provide meaningful input to decisions that affect their communities.

CONCLUSION

The Central Coast Water Board is committed to advancing environmental justice, racial equity, and tribal engagement as we implement our mission so that the access the Central Coast Water Board creates, and outcomes we influence, are not determined by a person’s race and the benefits are shared equitably by all people. The Central Coast Water Board’s Action Plan identifies specific actions that staff will take to integrate environmental justice, racial equity, and tribal engagement into our water quality programs and projects. The Central Coast Water Board will adjust the Action Plan based on emerging priorities, public input, and available resources, and staff will continue to update the Board annually and in the Executive Officer’s Report, as appropriate.

Consultation List; EnvDACs: CalEPA designates the top 25 percent scoring census tracts as DACs. Census tracts that score the highest five percent of pollution burden scores but do not have an overall CalEnviroScreen score because of unreliable socioeconomic or health data are also designated as DACs (refer to the CalEnviroScreen 4.0 Mapping Tool); Fringe Community: communities that do not meet the established DAC, SDAC, and EDA definitions but can show that they score in the top 25 percent of either the Pollution Burden or Population Characteristics score using the CalEnviroScreen 4.0.