

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

STAFF REPORT FOR REGULAR MEETING OF APRIL 16-17, 2026

Prepared on April 1, 2026

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. This item is to provide the Environmental Justice, Racial Equity and Tribal Affairs Annual Update, with a focus on staff's ongoing efforts to prioritize and implement the Human Right to Water. In addition, this agenda item also includes a presentation by the Community Water Center, highlighting their drinking water work in the central coast region.

DISCUSSION

Background

Consistent with the Central Coast Water Board's Strategic Plan¹, 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 coordinated Environmental Justice Leadership Team to support continuity and positive momentum, 2) leverage the State

¹ https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/centralcoast/board_info/agendas/2025/oct/Item10_SP.pdf

Water Board's Racial Equity Action Plan² to consider 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 public. 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 related to 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 we are all 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
4. Central Coast Water Board [Environmental Justice, Racial Equity, and Tribal Action Plan](#)⁸

Environmental Justice, Racial Equity, and Tribal Engagement Action Plan

The Central Coast Water Board's Action Plan (Action Plan) includes specific Strategic Directions and prioritizes actions to integrate environmental justice, racial equity, and tribal engagement into water quality programs and organizational culture. As described in the Action Plan, the Central Coast Water Board provides support and resources to staff to develop project outreach plans and effectively engage communities and Tribes. 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 outcomes at the Central Coast Water Board:

- We effectively integrate environmental justice, racial equity, and tribal engagement throughout the organization's policies, programs, practices, and decision making.
- We 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.

² https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/racial_equity/docs/reap-2024-annual-report.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

⁸ https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/centralcoast/water_issues/programs/enviro_justice/ej_docs/ej-action-plan.pdf

- We provide meaningful opportunities for underrepresented communities to participate in and provide input on water quality issues that affect them.
- We reflect the diverse communities that we serve.

Since the development of the Action Plan in February 2024, staff have continued to make progress implementing actions to address environmental justice, racial equity, and tribal engagement. Example actions implemented during FY 25-26 include the following:

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 25-26 Strategic Plan that address environmental justice, tribal engagement, and 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).
- 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

- Provided staff with opportunities to gain knowledge and training on relevant Water Board policies related to environmental justice, racial equity, and tribal engagement.
- Implemented hiring and recruitment activities to include assessment of knowledge, skills, and abilities related to being a part of a diverse workforce and interacting with a diverse group of stakeholders.

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

- Provided access to environmental justice, racial equity, and tribal engagement data and project information on the Central Coast Water Board's website.
- Included a summary of environmental justice, racial equity, and community and tribal engagement relevance for every Board item.
- Facilitated opportunities for staff to meet with community members to discuss community priorities (e.g. San Lucas Water District drinking water project, Hacienda Apartments wastewater consolidation).

Prioritizing the Human Right to Water

The Central Coast Water Board has a long history of prioritizing safe drinking water and implementing the Human Right to Water Resolution R3-2017-0004. In Resolution R3-2017-0004, the Central Coast Water Board affirms their commitment to “promote policies that advance the Human Right to Water and discourage actions that delay or impede opportunities for communities to secure safe, clean, affordable, and accessible water adequate for human consumption, cooking, and sanitary purposes.” The primary ways that the Central Coast Water Board implements Resolution R3-2017-0004 is through testing drinking water wells and sharing data, providing replacement drinking water while long-term solutions are identified, and prioritizing regulatory programs and activities to address discharges that cause or contribute to pollution of sources of drinking water (e.g. Site Cleanup Program, Irrigated Lands Program). The following section provides a summary of activities implemented during FY 25-26 related to drinking water well testing and replacement water.

Drinking Water Well Testing Activities

Resolution R3-2017-0004, paragraph 5, “directs Central Coast Water Board staff to assist the State Water Board and relevant stakeholders to, as resources allow, develop new or enhance existing systems to collect the data needed to identify and track communities that do not have, or are at risk of not having, safe, clean, affordable, and accessible water adequate for human consumption, cooking, and sanitary purposes.” An important method for doing this is to implement drinking water well testing programs which collect data and share information with drinking water well users, water quality agencies and partners, and the public. The Central Coast Water Board conducts drinking water well testing through regulatory requirements and voluntary programs. In addition, we also collaborate with external water quality partners to facilitate drinking water well testing projects and programs.

Site Cleanup Program (SCP) – The SCP routinely requires sampling of drinking water wells impacted by cleanup sites. The well testing is required by orders and directives issued by the Central Coast Water Board. All the data is provided to drinking water well users, uploaded to [GeoTracker](#)⁹, and accessible to the public.

Irrigated Lands Program (ILP) – The ILP requires growers enrolled in the Agricultural Order to sample on-farm domestic drinking water wells for nitrate and the results are available on the [ILP Dashboard](#)¹⁰. In 2024, approximately 1,900 on-farm domestic drinking water wells were sampled region-wide. Of the on-farm domestic drinking water wells sampled, more than 25% exceeded the Primary Maximum Contaminant Level (MCL) for nitrate. In some areas, for example Monterey County, approximately 42% of the on-farm domestic drinking water wells sampled exceeded the MCL for nitrate. Growers are required to share data with drinking water well users and provide drinking

⁹ <https://geotracker.waterboards.ca.gov/>

¹⁰ https://waterboards.ca.gov/centralcoast/water_issues/programs/ilp/dashboard.html

water notifications to inform well users when safe drinking water standards are exceeded. All the data is uploaded to GeoTracker and is accessible to the public.

Central Coast Drinking Water Well Testing Program - In coordination with the Bay Foundation of Morro Bay (Bay Foundation), the Central Coast Ambient Monitoring Program – Groundwater Assessment and Protection (CCAMP-GAP) implements the [Central Coast Drinking Water Well Testing Program](#)¹¹, which is a voluntary program that provides free drinking water well testing for domestic drinking water wells and small water systems. The program is implemented in close coordination with local agencies and community partners and prioritizes drinking water well testing in underrepresented communities. The program samples drinking water wells for eighteen (18) parameters that are commonly detected in domestic drinking water wells. Well sampling test results are uploaded directly to GeoTracker and data is available to local environmental health agencies and the public via [GAMA GIS](#)¹². Additionally, test results are provided to program participants, along with resources (in English and Spanish) related to safe drinking water and proper well maintenance. Program participants with wells that do not meet safe drinking water standards are also referred to drinking water replacement programs (discussed in the following section).

The Central Coast Drinking Water Well Testing Program began in October 2018 and has tested 904 wells throughout the Central Coast Region, as of January 15, 2026. Program results indicate that approximately 36% of the drinking water wells tested have at least one exceedance of an MCL for safe drinking water. In some areas, for example Monterey County, approximately 74% of the drinking water wells tested have at least one exceedance of an MCL for safe drinking water. The most common drinking water contaminants are nitrate as N, chromium VI, and arsenic. The current phase of drinking water well testing is focusing outreach in Santa Cruz and Santa Barbara Counties.

Replacement Drinking Water Activities

Resolution R3-2017-0004, paragraph 11, “directs Central Coast Water Board staff to consider policies that allow for and incentivize local and regional efforts for protecting drinking water and providing replacement water where appropriate while long-term water quality and quantity solutions are developed and implemented, including related to the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act.” An important method for doing this is to implement replacement drinking water programs which provide shorter-term (e.g. bottled water and interim treatment) and longer-term solutions (e.g. well treatment and drinking water consolidation). The Central Coast Water Board facilitates replacement drinking water through regulatory requirements and voluntary programs. In addition, we also collaborate with external water quality partners to facilitate replacement water projects and programs.

Site Cleanup Program (SCP) – In cases where cleanup sites have impacted drinking water, the SCP routinely requires the provision of replacement water using orders and

¹¹ <https://sites.google.com/view/ccgroundwater>

¹² <https://gamagroundwater.waterboards.ca.gov/gama/gamamap/public/Default.asp>

directives issued by the Central Coast Water Board. For example, the Central Coast Water Board is implementing an agreement requiring the San Luis Obispo County Airport and the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) to provide and maintain point-of-use treatment systems to address per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) contamination of drinking water wells in the vicinity of the airport.

Irrigated Lands Program (ILP) – In response to State Water Resources Control Board Order WQ 2023-0081, the ILP is in the process to develop an [Alternative Water Supply \(AWS\) Program](#)¹³ to support the provision of safe drinking water to residents and communities impacted by nitrate from agriculture in groundwater. The AWS Program is a component of the Central Coast Water Board's ongoing efforts to address nitrate contamination in groundwater from agricultural discharges. The program will support the planning, coordination, and funding of interim alternative drinking water supplies and long-term drinking water solutions for residents impacted by unsafe groundwater.

Central Coast Regional Bottled Water Program - The Community Water Center (CWC) implements the [Central Coast Regional Bottled Water Program](#)¹⁴ with grant funds from the State Water Board's [Safe and Affordable Funding for Equity and Resilience Program](#)¹⁵ (SAFER). The program provides an immediate source of safe drinking water through a bottled water delivery service program for eligible low-income households whose drinking water wells do not meet safe drinking water standards. CWC identifies potential program participants through the Central Coast Drinking Water Well Testing Program, as well as through active community outreach and engagement. The program started in October 2019 and as of December 31, 2025, the Community Water Center has enrolled approximately 497 households in the program, primarily in the northern counties of the region, including Monterey, Santa Cruz, and San Benito Counties. The program has delivered approximately 805,771 gallons of safe drinking water. CWC originated in the Central Valley with the broad goal of working towards realizing the Human Right to Water for all communities in California through education, organizing, and advocacy, including developing partnerships with residents and government agencies to identify and implement long term drinking water solutions. CWC opened a Watsonville office in 2018 to serve the drinking water needs of residents in the Central Coast Region.

Santa Cruz County Household Well Assistance Program - The Santa Cruz County Environmental Health Division (SCCEHD) Household Well Assistance Program supports income-qualified households with dry or contaminated wells in Santa Cruz County. The program offers guidance on proper well maintenance, well sounding services, water quality testing, bottled and hauled water delivery, and installation of point-of-use treatment systems. The SCCEHD program collaborates with the Central Coast Drinking Water Well Testing Program and has assisted in domestic well testing for 206 households to date. Additionally, the SCCEHD program has assisted four (4) households with water quality issues to receive approximately 400 gallons of bottled

¹³ https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/centralcoast/water_issues/programs/ilp/alternative-water.html

¹⁴ <https://sites.google.com/communitywatercenter.org/central-coast-regional-bottled>

¹⁵ <https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/safer/>

water and has also assisted four (4) households to install point-of-use drinking water treatment systems. The SCCEHD Household Well Assistance Program is funded in part by a \$600K SAFER grant.

Central Coast Drinking Water Well Testing Program Pilot Project for San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara Counties - Recognizing that replacement water programs are limited in the southern part of the Central Coast Region, the Bay Foundation's Central Coast Drinking Water Well Testing Program is implementing a pilot project for San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara Counties to provide free replacement drinking water to income-qualified participants in the southern portion of the Central Coast Region. The first participant was accepted into this pilot project in late February 2026, and the household received the first bottled water delivery in early March 2026.

Santa Barbara County Point of Entry and Point of Use Pilot Project - Under a settlement agreement recently approved by the Central Coast Water Board, the Goleta West Sanitary District is resolving an enforcement penalty by funding a project that improves drinking water for underrepresented communities in Santa Barbara County. The four-year project will test the water quality of approximately 100 local and state small water systems and domestic drinking water wells and install treatment systems and provide replacement water supplies for households with impaired wells. The project prioritizes providing access to safe drinking water for Underrepresented 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 communities¹⁶ and promotes the Human Right to Water by implementing 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

¹⁶ 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 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.

sanitation purposes.” Additionally, the Central Coast Water Board supports projects that address climate change impacts that may disproportionately impact unrepresented communities and provides residents with the opportunity to participate in the public process and provide meaningful input to decisions that affect water quality in their communities.

CONCLUSION

The Central Coast Water Board is committed to advancing environmental justice, racial equity, and tribal engagement as we implement our mission, including efforts to prioritize safe drinking water and implement the Human Right to Water. The Central Coast Water Board will continue to utilize the Action Plan to identify 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.