

# Colorado River Basin Strategic Plan



Creative Commons Photo Credit: Kevin Key

Adopted March 14, 2023

# Contents

---

The Colorado River Basin Water Board .....	3
The Strategic Plan .....	3
Mission Statement, Vision Statement and Values .....	4
Mission Statement .....	4
External Vision .....	4
Internal Vision .....	4
Regional Water Board Programs and Prioritization .....	5
NPDES .....	5
Waste Discharge to Land Program .....	6
Water Quality Certifications .....	5
Stormwater .....	6
Planning .....	6
SWAMP .....	6
Nonpoint Source .....	7
Irrigated Lands .....	7
Land Disposal .....	7
Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations .....	7
Site Cleanup .....	8
Underground Storage Tanks .....	8
Enforcement .....	8
Salt and Nutrient Management .....	8
Administrative Staff .....	8
Strategic Objectives .....	9
Strategic Objective 1 .....	9
Tailoring permits, enforcement and planning based on threat to water quality ...	9
Strategic Objective 2 .....	9
Strategic engagement with underserved and underrepresented communities ...	9
Strategic Objective 3 .....	9
Internal process improvements to achieve greater efficiency, higher employee engagement and racial equity .....	9

## The Colorado River Basin Water Board

---

The Colorado River Basin Water Board (Regional Water Board) covers approximately 13,000,000 acres (20,000 square miles) in the southeastern portion of California. It includes all of Imperial County and portions of San Bernardino, Riverside and San Diego Counties. The Regional Water Board is in the most arid area of California. Despite the relatively dry climate, the Regional Water Board contains some substantial surface water bodies, including the Colorado River and the Salton Sea. Many of the alluvial valleys in the region are underlain by groundwater aquifers that in many cases are the sole source of water for local areas.

The Regional Water Board regulates activities and industries that can impact groundwater and surface water quality. Some of the primary challenges facing the Regional Water Board include pollution from Mexico, increasing salinity, selenium and eutrophication in the Salton Sea, silt, nutrient, and pesticide pollution from the agricultural drains in Imperial Valley and the New and Alamo Rivers.

## The Strategic Plan

---

The Regional Water Board faces unique challenges. Although the board is the smallest (with approximately 40 staff) of the water boards, it encompasses a large area which is primarily arid. The focus of the Regional Water Board is to ensure that the fundamental programs of the board are addressed with the limited staff resources. Recent efforts at updating the Water Quality Control Plan for the Colorado River Basin (Basin Plan) have focused on establishing priorities for water quality control plans, with a priority given to tributaries to the Salton Sea.

Implementation of the water quality control plans through permits is conducted, with a priority given to ensuring that permits are updated to incorporate current standards. Irrigated lands general orders have been adopted, allowing for monitoring and implementation of best management practices where there are impacts to surface waters.

A priority has been placed on protection of the groundwater resources, as this is the source of drinking water for most of the region. Monitoring of groundwater at permitted facilities has been increased, and permittees which discharge waste to land are now being required to include groundwater monitoring.

Salt and nutrient management is an active programmatic area, with the Coachella Valley Salt and Nutrient Management Plan under development. The cleanup programs have focused on ensuring that pathways to closure are being developed for contaminated sites and leaking underground storage tank sites.

This strategic plan discusses the key programmatic activities within the region and specifies key strategic objectives for the board and staff to focus on during the upcoming year.

# Mission Statement, Vision Statement and Values

---

The Regional Water Board mission and vision statements will inform all stakeholders, internal and external, of its core beliefs.

## Mission Statement

The Regional Water Boards mission statement expresses the Regional Water Boards' primary objectives. All the Regional Water Board's efforts are in service to this mission. The Regional Water Board's mission statement, based on the greater mission of the State Water Board, is:

To preserve, enhance, and restore the quality of the Regional Water Board's water resources for the protection of the environment, public health, and all beneficial uses for the benefit of present and future generations.

## External Vision

The external vision defines a future state that all its stakeholders can experience if the Regional Water Board is successful at implementing its mission. The Regional Water Board's external vision is:

A region where aquifers and surface waters meet or exceed water quality necessary to support all beneficial uses, where all communities have access to safe, affordable, and resilient water supplies and where all people have a shared responsibility for water quality.

## Internal Vision

In conjunction with the external vision, the internal vision helps define a future that would be experienced by internal stakeholders, staff, and management. The Regional Water Board's internal vision is:

*A well-run organization with strong and dutiful executive leadership, where technical, supervisory, and administrative staff know that their work is highly valued and where a culture of public engagement, collaborative problem-solving, transparency and outreach is fostered.*

The following is a list of values that the Regional Water Board considers core to its mission.

### We value...

Integrity	Water quality protection	Community
Professionalism	Public Health	Adaptability
Ethics	Environmentalism	Conservation
Collaboration	Transparency	Commitment to do better for the environment
Diversity, inclusion, and anti-racism	Economic fairness	

## Regional Water Board Programs and Prioritization

---

The Regional Water Board has responsibility for addressing a wide variety of water quality issues throughout the region. Central to implementing the Regional Water Board's mission and vision are the Regional Water Board's supervisors who are the key personnel tasked with developing and implementing annual work plans. The annual work plans are operations plans that provide a picture of how a water quality program will contribute to the achievement of the organization's goals over the next year.

### NPDES

The federal Clean Water Act's National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) program is a federal program that US EPA has delegated to the State of California for implementation. This program protects beneficial uses by regulating point source discharges of pollutants to surface waters. Point sources include wastewater treatment facilities, fish hatcheries and industrial facilities that discharge through discrete conveyances (pipes). NPDES permits are issued to individual facilities defined by USEPA as major or minor depending on a facility's treatment capacity. NPDES permits are updated every five years per federal regulations. Permitting issues include reduced US EPA funding to support the program, pretreatment oversight requirements, and the time-consuming permit process which requires Board approval.

### Waste Discharge to Land Program

The waste discharge to land program primarily regulates waste discharges that may affect groundwater quality. The program regulates wastewater treatment facilities, food processors and other industries that discharge non-hazardous wastes to land. The program currently regulates over 370 facilities. Several State Water Board general orders and Regional Water Board actions have helped streamline requirements for types of similar discharges. Challenges include the unique nature of many of the discharges as well as resource limitations, which can result in a permitting backlog.

### Water Quality Certifications

The water quality certifications program protects wetlands and riparian areas by regulating the removal or placement of materials in wetlands and waterways impacting aquatic resources. Examples of such projects include dredging, flood control channelization, fill of wetlands, bridge piers, etc. These types of projects generally require a Clean Water Act Section 404 permit from the US Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) and the States' Water Quality Certification is issued pursuant to Section 401 of the Clean Water Act. The Water Quality Certifications program is responsible for implementing the State and Federal Wetlands No Net Loss Policies and the State Water Board's Dredge and Fill Procedures. Challenges include implementing the Dredge

and Fill Procedures and procedural application requirements, as well as the increased workload required to issue Waste Discharge Requirements for impacts to non-federal aquatic resources.

## Stormwater

The stormwater program implements construction, industrial and municipal stormwater permits to regulate the discharge of pollutants to waters of the US. The permits require implementation of Best Management Practices (BMPs) and other program elements to minimize the discharge of pollutants. Pollutants frequently associated with storm water discharges include sediment, petroleum products, pesticides/herbicides, metals, bacteria, trash, and other debris. Program staff review individual projects, make site-specific recommendations, and ensure compliance with permitting requirements through inspections and enforcement. Challenges include implementation of revised construction; industrial and Caltrans stormwater permits which are expected to be adopted by the State Water Board. Development and oversight of the municipal permits is complex and time-consuming.

## Planning

The Water Quality Control Plan or “Basin Plan” provides the foundation for all Regional Water Board regulatory actions. The Basin Plan identifies beneficial uses of surface and groundwater, water quality objectives to protect those uses, implementation actions to achieve objectives and monitoring and surveillance programs to ensure implementation actions are effective. Major focuses of the program are developing Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs) for impaired waters and performing Triennial Reviews of the Basin Plan. Challenges to the program are related to the nature of water quality planning. Projects undertaken by the planning program are generally complex projects which require a large investment of resources and often take years to complete. Furthermore, these projects influence other water quality programs, which requires a high degree of inter-program coordination. Planning efforts require extensive public engagement, which takes time.

## SWAMP

The California Surface Water Ambient Monitoring Program (SWAMP) was created to fulfill the legislative mandate for a unifying program that would coordinate all surface water quality monitoring conducted by the State and Regional Water Boards. SWAMP conducts water quality monitoring directly and through collaborative partnerships and provides reports, fact sheets and tools, all designed to support water resource management in California. SWAMP monitoring projects assess overall water quality status and trends, identify water quality problems and potential sources, and evaluate program effectiveness. The Regional Water Board goals for its SWAMP efforts are:

- To evaluate ambient water quality, beneficial use protection, and potential sources of impairment
- Evaluate effectiveness of the Regional Water Board water quality improvement policies
- Coordinate internal and external monitoring efforts to leverage limited resources
- Ensure timely availability of monitoring results

## Nonpoint Source

Primary nonpoint sources of pollution include runoff and percolation from land use activities related to agriculture, recreation, and urban and rural development. The nonpoint source program has been operational for over 20 years. Leveraging limited federal grant funds, the program works to restore waters impacted by nonpoint source pollution and to protect unimpaired water bodies by assessing problem sources and implementing management programs. Over time the administration of funds has become less flexible, and a large portion of the funds are used to administer the program. With limited resources, it is challenging for staff to provide any one project with the required amount of time and energy to effectively implement the project. The high volume of reporting compared to volume of work is a challenge, impairing the ability of project funds to effectively address water quality issues.

## Irrigated Lands

In the region there are approximately 6,000 irrigated agricultural operations on over 600,000 acres of lands. The irrigated lands regulatory program regulates these operations to protect beneficial uses of surface and groundwater. The majority of growers are part of a third-party group (coalitions) and are regulated under General Orders specific to the four main agricultural areas. Coalitions monitor receiving waters and develop management plans to address water quality problems, while growers implement practices to protect water quality.

The goal of the irrigated lands program is to prevent discharges from irrigated lands from causing adverse impacts to beneficial uses in surface and groundwater through Order implementation, compliance, outreach, enforcement, and coordination with all stakeholders.

## Land Disposal

The land disposal program regulates the land discharge of solid and liquid wastes to prevent water quality impacts. These wastes include municipal solid waste, hazardous wastes, designated wastes, and nonhazardous inert solid wastes. In general, these wastes cannot be discharged directly to the ground surface without impacting groundwater or surface water and therefore, they must be contained in facilities designed to prohibit the wastes from migrating to groundwater. The land disposal program regulates over 60 facilities in the region. The primary goal of the program is to protect groundwater and surface water quality from contaminants associated with landfills, liquid waste surface impoundments and other waste containment units. The program achieves this goal by ensuring permits contain current applicable regulations and by implementing timely enforcement where necessary.

## Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations

Concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs) are ranches where livestock are held and provided food for a significant part of the time. Discharges from CAFOs include manure, wastewater and stormwater runoff that may contain waste constituents. These discharges are regulated with NPDES permits.

## Site Cleanup

The site cleanup program regulates and oversees the investigation and cleanup of contaminated sites. Staff oversee investigation and cleanup actions at sites that have been impacted by releases of pollutants to soil, soil gas, groundwater, surface water, sediments, and indoor air. Sites include industrial facilities, military bases, and dry cleaners. Properties are in urban areas and environmental justice communities and cleanup often results in contaminant removal, reduced impact to water and economic growth. The types of pollutants include fertilizers, heavy metals, and solvents.

## Underground Storage Tanks

The Underground Storage Tank (UST) program addresses leak prevention, oversight of leaking underground tank cleanups for petroleum products and reimbursement to responsible parties conducting cleanups. Regional Water Board staff are primarily involved with the oversight of cleanups. The highest priority for the UST Program is to protect the public and environment from the effect of unauthorized releases from USTs through the investigation and mitigation of released constituents.

## Enforcement

The state and regional water boards have authority under the Water Code to pursue enforcement actions against any person unlawfully impacting the quality of the waters of the state. The water boards compliance and enforcement actions are guided by the State Water Board's 2017 Enforcement Policy. The compliance and enforcement program aims to protect water quality by regulating facilities which have the potential to adversely impact water quality and by enforcing state and federal laws and policies. When violations occur, staff are responsible for taking swift and fair enforcement actions. Lack of dedicated resources for enforcement hinders timely actions in the region.

## Salt and Nutrient Management

The Recycled Water Policy includes guidance on developing groundwater basin-wide or subbasin-wide Salt and Nutrient Management Plans (SNMPs) to ensure that water quality objectives are met and beneficial uses are protected. An important part of regional salt and nutrient management is the participation and collaboration of stakeholders to develop and implement SNMPs for their area, with guidance from State and Regional Water Boards. There are three SNMPs in development in the Colorado River Basin Region. They are the Mojave SNMP, Twentynine Palms SNMP and the Coachella Valley SNMP.

## Administrative Staff

Administrative program staff play a key role in accomplishing the Board's mission, from day-to-day operations to working with the regulatory program areas. The administrative support team is responsible for activities that are related to personnel, physical distribution of mail, vehicle fleet and logistics. They track Public Records Act requests and responses, support board meeting planning and execution, manage the complaint database and are responsible for records management.



# Strategic Objectives

---

The following three strategic objectives shall guide the Board's programmatic work to achieve long-term objectives. All managers and supervisors will consult these objectives during the development of annual work plans and will integrate them as they develop resource allocations and prioritize the work of the staff within their programs.

## Strategic Objective 1

### ***Tailoring permits, enforcement and planning based on threat to water quality***

Prioritize planning and permitting projects related to the Salton Sea and its tributaries

Prioritize permitting projects and water quality monitoring at the New River

Enhance groundwater monitoring to meet or exceed established regional objectives

Enforce mandatory minimum penalties in a timely manner to avoid any backlog greater than three years

Release a draft revised Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) Phase 1 permit

Implement actions identified in California's Water Supply Strategy (such as identification of water recycling projects and implementation of direct potable reuse regulations when adopted by the State Board)

## Strategic Objective 2

### ***Strategic engagement with underserved and underrepresented communities***

Enhance capabilities for remote and hybrid meetings

Utilize tools and methods developed by the state water board racial equity action plan

Increase tribal engagement

Prioritize projects impacting disadvantaged communities

## Strategic Objective 3

### ***Internal process improvements to achieve greater efficiency, higher employee engagement and racial equity***

Develop upward mobility capacities with existing staff

Foster staff professional development and critical thinking skills

Support effective workplace communication, between units, among different disciplines, and across all levels of staff and management

Reduce vacancies to 5%

Develop templates for frequently used business documents