

SECTION 2.3

NORTH COAST RIVERS WATERSHED MANAGEMENT AREA

North coast rivers not specifically included in other WMAs are included in this grouping. The major watersheds from the Oregon border south include the following. Those in **bold** have information in this section:

- 2.3.1 Smith River
- 2.3.2 Bear River
- 2.3. **Mattole River**
- 2.3.4 **Ten Mile River**
- 2.3.5 **Noyo River**
- 2.3.6 **Big River**
- 2.3.7 **Albion River**
- 2.3.8 **Navarro River**
- 2.3.9 **Greenwood, Elk, and Alder creeks**
- 2.3.11 **Garcia River**
- 2.3.12 **Gualala River**



A citizen's lawsuit in 1997 against US Environmental Protection Agency produced a consent decree scheduling a number of north coast rivers for development of Clean Water Act section 303(d) "TMDLs" or Total Maximum Daily Loads, primarily for sediment and temperature. . Since that time, additional water bodies in this WMA have been listed as impaired. Water bodies listed as impaired under Section 303(d) in this WMA include the Albion River (for sediment impairment), Big River (sediment and temperature), Garcia River (sediment and temperature), Gualala River (sediment and temperature), Mattole River (sediment and temperature), Navarro River (sediment and temperature), Noyo River (sediment), and the Ten Mile River (sediment and temperature). See <http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/northcoast/programs/tmdl/Status.html> for TMDL schedules. Activities to date have targeted the Albion, Garcia, Navarro, Mattole, Gualala, Ten Mile, Big, and Noyo Rivers, as well as an Assessment of Aquatic Conditions in the Mendocino Coast Hydrologic Unit that included information on the Ten Mile, Gualala, Big and Albion Rivers and Capser Creek. Descriptions of those activities appear in this section, developed to varying degrees depending on the level of activity completed.

Under the federal Endangered Species Act, all of the rivers in this WMA fall within Ecological Significant Units (ESUs) in which coho salmon are listed as a threatened species. Under the State Endangered Species Act, the California Fish and Game Commission has found that coho salmon are endangered species in all of the rivers in this WMA except the Bear, Mattole, and Smith Rivers. Additionally, both chinook salmon and steelhead trout are listed as threatened species under the federal Endangered Species Act in all of the rivers in this WMA except the Smith River. The Smith River is one of the most "pristine" in the North Coast Region. There are currently three permanent SWAMP monitoring stations established on the Smith River.

The Critical Coastal Areas in the North Coast WMA are: 1) Mattole River, 2) King Range National Conservation Area, 3) Pudding Creek, 4) Noyo River, 5) Pigmy Forest Ecological Staircase, 6) Big River, 7) Albion River, 8) Navarro River, 9) Garcia River, 10)

Kelpbeds at Saunders Reef, 11) Del Mar Landing Ecological Reserve, and 12) Gerstle Cove. See Appendix C for more information on these Critical Coastal Areas.

Approximately 25% of the timber harvest in the Region occurs in Mendocino County that comprises the majority of this hydrologic area. The primary water quality issues associated with timber harvesting activities include are recovery of threatened and endangered species of coho salmon, chinook salmon, and steelhead trout. There are also potential impacts of timber harvesting on the water supply for the coastal communities of Elk, Gualala, and Fort Bragg. Reports of all forest herbicide application are a requirement of the WDRs or waivers of WDRs associated with timber harvest plans.

Institutional Framework

The *Water Quality Control Plan for the North Coast Region* (Basin Plan) contains specific water quality objectives and implementation programs to protect and enhance identified beneficial uses of water. The over-arching regulatory provisions of the Basin Plan are the Action Plan for Logging, Construction and Associated Activities and the Nonpoint Source Action Plan.

The North Coastal Watershed Assessment Program (NCWAP) focused on assessment in the following watersheds in this WMA: FY 2000-01—Gualala, Albion, and Big Rivers; and FY 2001-02—Mattole River. This multi-agency effort gathered existing data and collected new data to provide assessments of the watersheds. Those data and the assessments will be made available on an interactive computer database. Significant outreach to local landowners and agencies was an element of the program and has added to our understanding of issues in these watersheds.

Additionally, the Surface Water Ambient Monitoring Program (SWAMP) monitored sites in the WMA in FY 2000-01, establishing permanent stations to be sampled for long term trend analysis. The actual station locations and timing are detailed in the individual watershed sections.

The overall emphasis in the watersheds is the inspection of timber harvest plans for compliance with Basin Plan standards, implementation of the Forest Practice Rules and best management practices to ensure protection of water quality and beneficial uses. The Regional Water Board is expanding the timber harvest program activities in concert with California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection.

The Regional Water Board has adopted a new Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) Implementation Policy Statement for Sediment Impaired Receiving Waters in the North Coast Region, which is applicable to all sediment impaired watersheds in the Region. The goals of the proposed TMDL Implementation Policy are to control sediment waste discharges so that TMDLs are met, sediment water quality objectives are attained, and beneficial uses are no longer adversely affected by sediment.

The Sediment TMDL Implementation Policy Statement takes the form of a Resolution from the Regional Water Board. Through the Resolution, the Regional Water Board gave direction to the Executive Officer to develop a workplan describing how and when actions will be taken to address sediment waste discharges. Such actions include the development of a monitoring strategy and a sediment control guidance, the use of available authorities and tools to more effectively address sediment waste discharges,

memoranda of understanding with other agencies, and cooperation with landowners, stakeholders, and organizations in a non-enforcement and/or regulatory manner. The Sediment TMDL Implementation Policy Statement basically sets out commitments for staff, including using available regulatory tools to control sediment discharges.

The Regional Water Board staff is currently developing a Regional Sediment Amendment to the Basin Plan with prohibitions and an Action Plan associated with timber harvesting activities include more enforcement tools to the Sediment TMDL Implementation Policy Statement for controlling sediment.

