

**California Regional Water Quality Control Board,  
San Diego Region**

**Preliminary List of Potential Basin Planning Projects  
for the  
2024 Triennial Review of the  
Water Quality Control Plan for the  
San Diego Basin  
(Basin Plan)**

December 2, 2024



STATE OF CALIFORNIA  
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## **2024 Triennial Review**

### **Introduction**

The *Water Quality Control Plan for the San Diego Basin* (Basin Plan) designates beneficial uses for water bodies in the San Diego Region and establishes water quality objectives and implementation plans to protect those beneficial uses. State and federal laws require periodic review of the Basin Plan.<sup>1</sup> Because federal law requires review every three years, the Basin Plan review is also referred to as the “triennial review.”

The California Regional Water Quality Control Board, San Diego Region (San Diego Water Board) is initiating its 2024 triennial review of the Basin Plan (Triennial Review). The purpose of the review is to identify necessary updates and revisions to water quality standards and other elements of the Basin Plan. The triennial review assists the San Diego Water Board in identifying potential priority issues to address through subsequent Basin Plan amendment projects.

In this document, San Diego Water Board staff identifies a preliminary list of basin planning projects (preliminary projects) for consideration in the 2024 Triennial Review. The preliminary projects represent the important basin planning items that also support the goals of the San Diego Water Board’s [Practical Vision](#). The purpose of identifying these preliminary projects is to solicit input from interested persons that will help the San Diego Water Board prioritize Basin Plan amendment projects needed to address new or changing water quality issues. Therefore, additional projects for the Board’s consideration may be identified during the public process.

### **San Diego Water Board Practical Vision – Healthy Waters, Healthy People**

The Practical Vision is a strategy that focuses the San Diego Water Board’s limited resources to achieve our region’s highest goals for healthy waters. The Practical Vision furthers our agency’s mission to protect, enhance, and restore the quality of California waters in the San Diego Region so that our communities can use and enjoy these waters. It sets a plan to achieve healthy waters through collaboration, reliance on the latest science, prioritization of issues and actions, and prudent use of our authorities in service to the people of California.

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<sup>1</sup> State law requires basin plans to be periodically reviewed [Water Code §13240]. Federal law requires water quality standards to be reviewed every three years [Clean Water Act §303(c)(1)].

## **2024 Triennial Review**

The Practical Vision identifies critical factors necessary to achieve healthy waters throughout the San Diego Region using our core values of leadership, stewardship, communication, and transparency. The San Diego Water Board will prioritize Basin Plan amendment projects that align with our values and the Practical Vision.

Additional information on the San Diego Water Board's Practical Vision can be found at: [http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/sandiego/water\\_issues/Practical\\_Vision](http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/sandiego/water_issues/Practical_Vision).

## **Key Beneficial Uses and Key Areas**

In 2017, the San Diego Water Board adopted Resolution [R9-2017-0030](#) endorsing [Key Beneficial Uses and Key Areas – Focusing on What Is Most Important](#). The resolution identified key beneficial uses and many key areas for those uses, and suggests how this concept can help the Board achieve relevant sections of the Practical Vision.

Key beneficial uses are the individual beneficial uses and categories “that are most critical to protecting human and environmental health.” Accordingly, key beneficial uses are the beneficial uses for which protection and restoration of the integrity, or health, of waters is most important. Key beneficial uses of waters in the San Diego Region are:

- Drinking water supply
- Fish and shellfish consumption
- Recreation
- Habitats and ecosystems

Key areas are the waters and places where protection and restoration of the integrity, or health, of waters is most important for a key beneficial use. For example, waters and places with a high intensity of recreational use are key areas for the key beneficial use of recreation.

## **Basin Plan Triennial Review Process**

Federal law requires a review of water quality standards at least once every three years. Water quality standards consist of beneficial use designations, water quality criteria (referred to as water quality objectives in California) necessary to protect those uses, and an anti-degradation policy. In addition, state law requires Basin Plans be periodically reviewed and revised if necessary. The last Basin Plan Triennial Review was conducted in 2021.

## **2024 Triennial Review**

The 2024 Basin Plan Triennial Review process will include a preliminary list of priority projects, two public workshops during a comment period, and a public Board hearing. To formally conclude its Basin Plan review, the San Diego Water Board adopts a resolution approving the review and a prioritized list of suggested Basin Plan projects. Placing a project on the priority list will prompt San Diego Water Board staff to further investigate the project. Depending on the outcome of the investigation, a Basin Plan amendment may or may not be developed and adopted.

The San Diego Water Board is allocated limited resources annually to manage amendments to the Basin Plan. This preliminary list is based on an expectation that resources from the General Fund will remain consistent for the next three years.

### **Public Participation and Basin Plan Review Schedule**

Public participation is an important part of each Basin Plan Triennial Review. The Board and staff are committed to transparency and communication. Interested persons will have an opportunity to participate during a public workshop, written comment period, and a public hearing. The purpose of the workshops is to inform participants about the triennial review process, facilitate discussion and obtain feedback on the preliminary list of projects, and identify additional potential projects.

Interested persons also have an opportunity to submit written comments. Staff will assess written comments and incorporate them, where appropriate, into the final report prepared for San Diego Water Board consideration at a subsequent public hearing.

**Written comments on this document must be submitted by 5:00 PM on February 14, 2025 to [sandiego@waterboards.ca.gov](mailto:sandiego@waterboards.ca.gov) with “2024 Triennial Review Comment: 458332” in the subject line.**

The schedule for the 2024 Basin Plan Triennial Review is as follows:

Public Comment Period Begins	December 2, 2024
Public Workshop (in-person) with virtual option	January 29, 2025
Public Comment Period Ends	February 14, 2025
Public Hearing on Final Priority List	Spring 2025

The San Diego Water Board encourages input from interested parties. Persons interested in receiving announcements about the Basin Plan triennial review may

## **2024 Triennial Review**

subscribe to the “Basin Planning Issues” electronic mailing list at: [California Water Boards \(govdelivery.com\)](https://www.californiawaterboards.govdelivery.com)

You do not need to re-subscribe to the electronic mailing list if you already are subscribed to the previous triennial review e-mail list for the San Diego Region.

## **Preliminary Project Descriptions for 2024 Basin Plan Review**

San Diego Water Board staff have prepared the following preliminary list of projects for consideration in the 2024 Triennial Review. Given that the number of potential Basin Plan amendments identified exceeds expected available personnel resources, the preliminary project list is divided into priority categories (High and Medium). Resource allocations are based on a project’s priority status, with High Priority projects receiving the highest ranking. Medium Priority are considered for project development if resources and readiness allow. In developing this list, staff considered projects identified in the Practical Vision, the key beneficial uses and key areas concept of [Resolution R9-2017-0030](#), projects identified as priority projects for the 2021 Basin Plan Triennial Review, and projects that address challenges, obstacles, or opportunities arising since the 2021 review. In addition, the following criteria were also taken into consideration when evaluating proposed projects:

- Protection and Restoration – The project advances the mission of protecting and restoring healthy waters in the San Diego Region.
- Reasonable and Efficient – The San Diego Water Board has or can leverage resources (e.g., expertise, technology, and data) that are able to achieve the project goals within a reasonable timeframe. The project advances the San Diego Water Board’s goal of ensuring limited resources are put to the best possible use.
- Community Involvement – The project is of high public interest and is appropriately addressed through a Basin Plan amendment.

## Project: Biological Objectives for Water Bodies in the San Diego Region

**Priority:** High

**Status:** Ongoing project

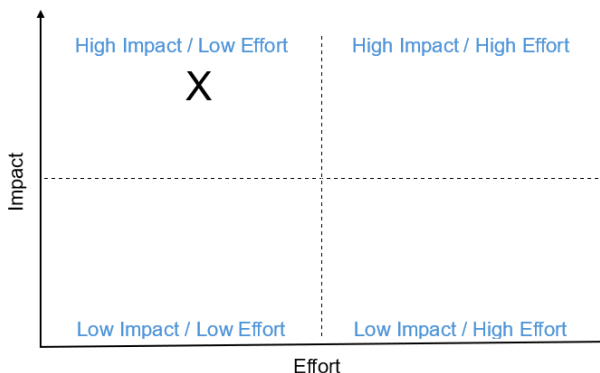
**Goal:**

Incorporate biological water quality objectives into the Basin Plan

**Discussion:**

The San Diego Water Board 2014 triennial review identified the amendment of the Basin Plan to incorporate biological water quality objectives as a high priority project to protect and restore beneficial uses associated with aquatic and aquatic dependent wildlife for the region’s streams. On May 13, 2015, the San Diego Water Board adopted Resolution R9-2015-0043, which directed staff to begin working on the project to amend the Basin Plan to incorporate biological water quality objectives. In December 2020, the San Diego Water Board adopted Resolution No. R9-2020-0234 which amended the Basin Plan to incorporate general narrative guidance for the development of biological objectives and to incorporate a numerical biological water quality objective for perennial and seasonal streams, where applicable, using benthic macroinvertebrates and the California Stream Condition Index (CSCI).

The amendment was submitted to the State Water Board for approval in the summer of 2021. The State Water Board initiated the public comment period for the proposed amendment in winter 2021. The State Water Board is expected to consider the amendment in 2025. During this phase of the project, staff will work on finalizing the amendment for State Water Board approval. If adopted by the State Board, staff would then work on the subsequent approval processes by the Office of Administrative Law and USEPA.



**Project: Designation of Tribal Tradition and Culture (CUL) Use and Tribal Subsistence Fishing (T-SUB) Beneficial Uses to Surface Waters in the San Diego Region**

**Priority:** High

**Status:** Ongoing project

**Goal:**

Establish new tribal beneficial use designations, where appropriate

**Discussion:**

This project would designate surface water bodies, where appropriate, with the CUL and T-SUB beneficial uses.

This is the second phase of the project. Phase one was completed with the adoption of Resolution No. [R9-2020-0254](#) which incorporated tribal beneficial uses into the San Diego Region Basin Plan. During Phase two of the project, the San Diego Water Board has and will continue to work with tribes within the region to identify water bodies appropriate to designate with the CUL and T-SUB beneficial uses. Additional work will identify exposure pathways and evaluate whether existing water quality objectives are protective of tribal beneficial uses.



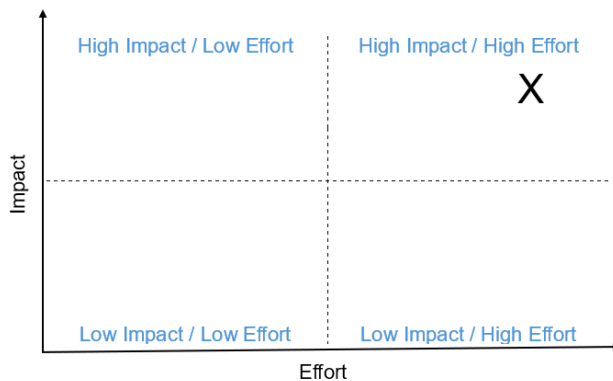
**Project: Contact Water Recreation (REC-1) Water Quality Objectives**

**Priority:** High

**Status:** Ongoing project

**Goal:**

Initiate updates to regions bacteria TMDLs and focus implementation on human sources of fecal contamination



## 2024 TRIENNIAL REVIEW PRELIMINARY LIST

### Discussion:

This project was first introduced during the 2014 Triennial Review. At the time, the focus of the project was to determine whether and to what extent data supported amending the objectives, implementation provisions for applicable bacteria TMDLs, or the TMDLs themselves. [Bacteria TMDLs](#) were adopted in June 2008 and February 2020. In July 2018, San Diego Water Board staff prepared a summary report of the 2014 REC-1 Triennial Review Project that made recommendations on next steps. Recommendations were based on discussions and feedback from external and internal workgroups as well as the various technical studies that had been completed to date. During the 2018 Triennial Review, the focus for the project shifted towards implementation of actions that were identified in the [2018 recommendations report](#). The short-term actions included updates to the existing storm water permit, audits of illicit discharge detection and elimination programs, updates to waste discharge requirements for sanitary sewer systems, and updates to Chapter 3 in the Basin Plan.

During the 2021 Triennial Review the focus shifted towards the development of a narrative risk-based objective that would be protective of the REC-1 beneficial use; this work also intended to include the development of a numeric translator for HF183 (a human specific bacteria indicator) to implement the narrative objective. Furthermore, the project indicated the Board would initiate revisions to the bacteria TMDLs. San Diego Water Board staff investigated the development of a numeric translator for HF-183 and determined that, given the state of the science, it was not appropriate to establish a translator at this time. Updates to the bacteria TMDLs were pending results of various special studies in the region, such as the work required in the [San Diego River Investigative Order](#) R9-2019-0014; as part of the 2024 project, the results of these studies will be used to inform updates to the TMDLs and implementation plan.

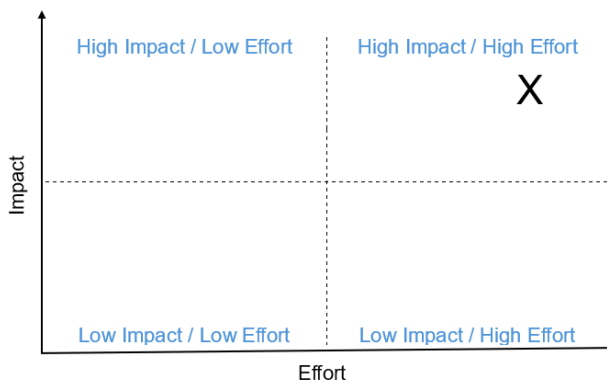
### Project: Consider an Implementation Program to Protect Coastal Wetlands and Ensure their Resiliency to Climate Change

**Priority:** High

**Status:** New project

**Goal:**

Protection of beneficial uses associated with intertidal habitats



## 2024 TRIENNIAL REVIEW PRELIMINARY LIST

### Discussion:

Climate change impacts are anticipated to have significant impacts to coastal environments and communities. For example, many intertidal wetland habitats may become subtidal due to sea level rise and the boundaries of certain coastal wetlands may naturally migrate upslope in response to changing hydrology patterns. Because of sea level rise, coastal wetlands, such as intertidal zones, salt marshes, and estuaries, are at particular risk of being lost due to the inability to migrate inland where natural landforms, existing development, and community adaptation measures restrict their movement. Coastal development for example, that has stunted natural accretion or altered physical shape of landforms, can lead to a loss of wetlands. Such losses also pose a risk to threatened and endangered species that rely on that habitat for survival. Ensuring sufficient room for wetlands to migrate will be a challenging technical question, with potentially controversial solutions, and will take considerable time to fully develop. Therefore, in order to protect the Key Beneficial Uses of coastal wetlands, the San Diego Water Board should evaluate whether the Basin Plan sufficiently protects the use into the future.

### Project: Update Implementation Chapter of the Basin Plan (Chapter 4)

**Priority:** Medium

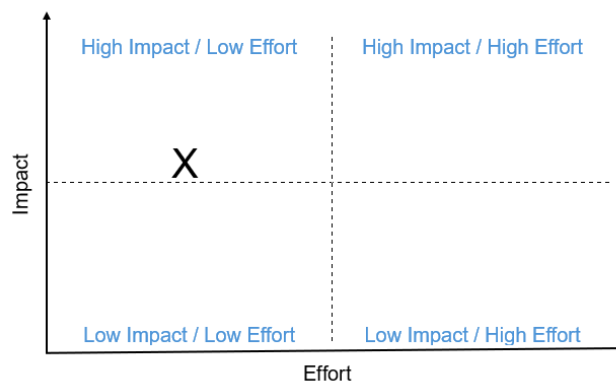
**Status:** New Project

**Goal:** Add or update information

### Discussion:

Two major themes of the Practical Vision are communication and learning. In addition to being a regulatory tool, the Basin Plan serves as an educational document for staff, the public, and regulated community. As such, it is important to periodically update the information contained in it to ensure it is user-friendly, helpful and accurate. Adding information to the Basin Plan highlights its importance and raises awareness of a topic or issue. Further, the Basin Plan can document the Board's perspective, build a framework for staff and provide guidance to staff, the public and the regulated community.

Topics to be considered for addition or updates include, but are not limited to: adding a section on vernal pools, adding a section in invasive species, and updating sections related to water reclamation.



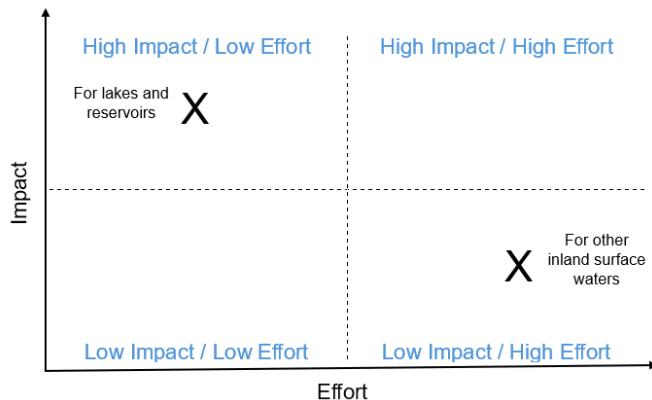
## Project: Designation of Commercial and Sports Fishing (COMM) Beneficial Use

**Priority:** Medium

**Status:** New project

**Goal:**  
Designate COMM beneficial use to inland surface waters as appropriate

**Discussion:**  
The COMM beneficial use was updated in 1993 to include all waters rather than just ocean, bays, estuaries and similar non-freshwater areas that had been previously designated. However, when the definition was updated, the Basin Plan was not updated to designate any inland surface waters in the region. The COMM beneficial use includes both commercial and recreational collection of fish, shellfish, or other aquatic organisms. Recreational fishing occurs in many of the lakes and reservoirs in the San Diego Region; surveys would need to be conducted to ensure appropriate designation of freshwater areas.



## Project: Santa Margarita River Water Quality Restoration Plan

**Priority:** Medium

**Status:** Ongoing project

**Goal:** Adoption of a Restoration Plan

**Project Description:**  
The Santa Margarita River was added to the 303(d) list for nutrients (nitrogen and phosphorus) in 2012. Excessive nutrient loading to the Santa Margarita River and its tributaries cause and/or contribute to exceedances of Water Quality Objectives and adversely impact the Cold Freshwater Habitat (COLD), Warm Freshwater



## **2024 TRIENNIAL REVIEW PRELIMINARY LIST**

Habitat (WARM), and Rare, Threatened, or Endangered Species (RARE) beneficial uses designated to the Santa Margarita River. Excessive discharge of nutrients also has the potential to adversely impact the Municipal and Domestic Supply (MUN) beneficial use through impact to large groundwater basins in the Santa Margarita watershed. Furthermore, nutrients discharged to the surface waters and groundwater in the Santa Margarita watershed have been shown to contribute to the impairment of the Santa Margarita River Estuary.

To address the impairment for nutrients and eutrophication, the San Diego Water Board staff developed a draft Water Quality Restoration Plan (Restoration Plan) for the Santa Margarita River with numerous stakeholders to ensure that discharges to the river would not exceed the capacity (or maximum daily load) the river can assimilate while still providing its designated beneficial uses. The next phase would be to refine the Restoration Plan with the stakeholders and prepare it for the Board's consideration. This project follows an earlier Basin Plan review project for the Santa Margarita River Estuary which led to Investigative Order No. R9-2019-0007.<sup>2</sup> Major sources of nutrients to the River and Estuary include Municipal Separate Storm Sewer Systems (MS4s) located in San Diego and Riverside counties and U.S. Marine Corps Camp Pendleton, leaking septic systems, and irrigated lands.

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<sup>2</sup> [Investigative Order](#) for the cities of Murrieta, Temecula, and Wildomar, the counties of San Diego and Riverside, the Riverside Flood Control and Water Conservation District, and the United States Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton to Design and Implement a Water Quality Improvement Monitoring and Assessment Program for Eutrophic Conditions in the Santa Margarita River Estuary and Watershed, California.

## Project: Update Shelter Island Yacht Basin (SIYB) Copper TMDL

**Priority:** Medium

**Status:** New project

**Goal:**

Update implementation plan with local stakeholders to better focus efforts on restoring the biological integrity of the Basin

**Discussion**

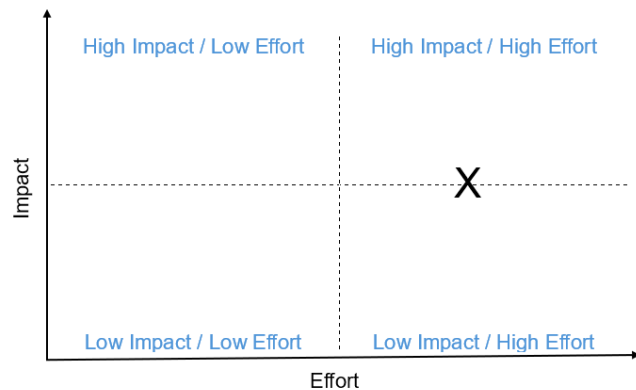
SIYB is a popular recreational marina located in north San Diego Bay. In

2017, the Board recognized San Diego Bay as a key area for habitats and ecosystems. Key areas are waters and places where protection and restoration of the chemical, physical, and biological integrity of waters is most important for a key beneficial use. Key beneficial uses are the individual beneficial uses and categories that are most critical to protecting human and environmental health.

The Shelter Island Yacht Basin Dissolved Copper TMDL was adopted by the San Diego Water Board in 2004 because copper from anti-fouling boat coatings created conditions that exceeded water quality objectives for aquatic life uses. The TMDL established a target date to achieve the WQO at the end of 2022, but the WQO has not been achieved. Therefore, the Water Board has a responsibility to evaluate whether the implementation plan requires revisions.

The Board's implementation has relied primarily on supporting the Unified Port of San Diego (Port District) Copper Reduction Program and updated hull paint regulations from the Department of Pesticide Regulation (DPR) In 2017, DPR adopted new regulations to limit the amount of copper in recreational hull paints in order to protect water quality. However, DPR recognized the new copper levels were likely set too high to achieve the water quality objective in the Shelter Island Yacht Basin because of the basin's hydrologic characteristics and boat density.

This project would follow Water Board guidance in Resolutions [R9-2012-0071](#) and [R9-2022-0019](#) to investigate with a stakeholder group alternative implementation actions and the feasibility of establishing a target based on biological conditions.



## Review of 304(a) Criteria

### Priority: Medium

#### Goal:

Adopt 304(a) criteria, as appropriate

#### Discussion:

Federal regulations at 40 CFR 131.20(a) require states to consider, as part of their triennial review process, the adoption of new or revised Clean Water Act section 304(a) water quality criteria recommendations, for aquatic and human health, as water quality standards (WQS) into their state plans. Criteria published by the United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) since May 30, 2000, are required to be evaluated during the triennial review.

Criteria published by USEPA since the 2021 triennial review includes, but is not limited to, ambient nutrient criteria for lakes and reservoirs and aquatic life criteria for perfluorooctane sulfonate and perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOS and PFOA). Summaries of USEPA criteria are available at: [Water Quality Criteria | US EPA](#)

