

## **Practical Vision and Program Accomplishments for Fiscal Year 2024-2025**

The Practical Vision is a tool used to focus limited resources on the region's highest priorities. Twenty-one projects were undertaken during Fiscal Year 2024-2025 (FY 24-25) to implement the Practical Vision. The Board's adoption of the FY 24-25 Operational Plan in August 2024 allocated budget resources and allowed for project implementation, assignment of project teams, and establishment of project milestones and schedules.

Along with the work of the Practical Vision, San Diego Water Board staff attend to day-to-day programmatic work. This work falls into four broad categories: planning, permitting, compliance assessment, and enforcement. Every year, San Diego Water Board staff prepare programmatic work plans that include performance measure commitments tracked by the State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board) and reported to the legislature. Although some Practical Vision projects overlap with program performance measure commitments, there is a large body of work beyond the Practical Vision priorities that staff must complete each year to meet the Board's programmatic responsibilities.

This report describes important Practical Vision projects and core program accomplishments undertaken FY 24-25. The projects and accomplishments are categorized into Practical Vision chapters or core program work.

### **Chapter 1. Healthy Waters**

#### **Tijuana River Border Pollution Control Efforts**

A significant accomplishment of the San Diego Water Board during FY 24-25 was the adoption of the Lower Tijuana River Advance Restoration Plan (ARP) in December 2024 (Resolution R9-2024-0155). After many years of working with the public to develop a plan for addressing public health and environmental harm caused by trash and sewage in flows from Mexico, the ARP provides clear direction to staff and expectations for regulated parties to achieve substantial improvements to chronic pollution in the Tijuana River, its estuary, and the related Pacific Ocean shoreline. The ARP outlines a detailed implementation plan to advance pollution control and meet water quality standards. It was accepted by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) in March 2025 and relies on substantial federal investments. The ARP underscores the Water Board's commitment to working with the USEPA and the U.S. Section of the International Boundary and Water Commission (USIBWC) to carry out the core and supplemental projects identified in the June 9, 2023 USIBWC-USEPA Joint Record of Decision.

The San Diego Water Board issued a [time schedule order \(TSO\)](#) to USIBWC during FY 23-24 due to ongoing noncompliance with USIBWC's 2021 National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit and cease and desist order for the South Bay International Wastewater Treatment Plant (SBIWTP). The TSO establishes interim reporting requirements and a deadline of August 15, 2024, for return to compliance with

secondary treatment standards. USIBWC has not completed all the interim milestones in the TSO and did not meet the August 15, 2024, deadline. However, USIBWC did regain compliance with secondary treatment standards in November 2024 and has maintained compliance since that time except for one minor violation of minimum percent removal for total suspended solids in April 2025.

### **San Diego River Investigative Order Complete**

Responsible Parties have completed their final responses to [Investigative Order R9-2019-0014](#), an investigation that required quantification and identification of the sources and pathways of human fecal material to the Lower San Diego River. Study findings indicate sewage collection systems as the largest source of human fecal waste to the environment through Sanitary Sewer Overflows (SSOs) and exfiltration. This source alone accounts for over 85 percent of the loading to the Lower San Diego River. Onsite Waste Treatment Systems were the next largest source but are estimated to contribute only around 5 percent of the loading. Private sewer SSOs, private laterals and unhoused populations were also found to contribute but at very low volumes. The final report suggests the need for further investigation to understand the subsurface transport mechanism of exfiltrated sewage to receiving waters and additional leak tests of pipe sections in the sanitary sewer system. None of the management response plans prepared by the Responsible Parties include such additional studies.

Staff met with the San Diego River Conservancy in October 2024 to share results and discuss opportunities to collaboratively address these sources. An Informational Item was held during the November Board meeting and formal presentations were given by staff, Responsible Parties, San Diego Coastkeeper, the San Diego River Foundation, and academic researchers from San Diego State University. Final revised [reports](#) were submitted in January 2025. Responsible Parties have organized quarterly meetings to discuss follow-on actions to the study. Board staff are invited to attend, but NGO members of the project Steering Committee are excluded. Board staff met with Clean Water SoCal (formerly the Southern California Alliance of Publicly Owned Treatment Works) to discuss their doubts regarding the exfiltration findings. Board staff are currently considering updates to Regional Waste Discharge Requirements for the Sanitary Sewer Collection System and exploring additional enforcement actions. The Stormwater Monitoring Council is also planning to monitor for exfiltrated sewage throughout southern California.

### **National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System Wastewater Permit Plume Tracking Workshops and Program Implementation**

The San Diego Water Board completed its NPDES Wastewater Permit Plume Tracking Operational Plan Project (Project). As NPDES permits were renewed, the San Diego Water Board required the owners of publicly owned treatment works (POTWs) that dispose of wastewater to the Pacific Ocean to determine where their plumes are and how they behave in typical and atypical oceanographic conditions. NPDES permits were amended to include Plume tracking studies which were designed to answer, with some variation between permits, the following questions:

1. Are current monitoring location and methods adequate to determine whether wastewater plumes are encroaching on recreational areas including, but not limited to, swimming, scuba diving, surfing, and fishing?
2. Does the wastewater plume have the potential to interact with wastewater plumes from other ocean outfalls or other sources of pollution?
3. How is the addition of future facilities or brine discharges expected to affect plume behavior in the Pacific Ocean?
4. What is the fate of wastewater plume in typical and atypical oceanographic conditions?
5. When is the plume no longer distinguishable from ambient receiving water?

The seven ocean outfalls within the San Diego Water Board's jurisdiction are called the Aliso Creek, Encina, Oceanside, Point Loma, San Elijo, San Juan Creek, and South Bay ocean outfalls. All facilities have either submitted their plume tracking study report or are providing regular status updates. All facilities are now implementing regular plume tracking studies and staff performing focused reviews to ensure plume tracking studies are compliant with permit requirements.

#### **Enforcement actions led to habitat improvement and community engagement**

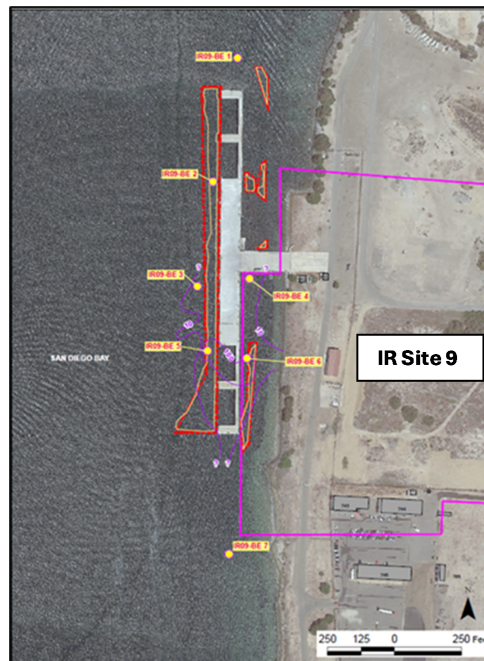
While most violations are resolved in early stages of progressive enforcement through improved management practices, some require formal enforcement actions that compel monetary penalties or other actions to improve beneficial uses for people or wildlife. Although monetary penalties can be paid in a short amount of time, habitat or community improvement projects require up to 4 years of staff oversight to ensure success. In FY24-25 staff were able to verify the following projects met their final success criteria as Supplemental Environmental Projects outlined in settlements of Administrative Civil Liability:

- Restoration and enhancement of 51 acres of stream, wetland, and riparian habitat, in Oceanside and Mission Bay.
- Community engagement through volunteer activities and installation of fencing and interpretive signs in Oceanside and Mission Bay including areas adjacent to and/or serving underserved communities.

In a separate case adopted in FY 24/25, prosecution staff opted for an enforcement response that will result in 6 acres of riparian habitat improvements. This was possible because violations involving discharges of dredged or fill material to waters without permits may be addressed with an "after-the-fact" approval if it is contingent upon aquatic habitat restoration that is of greater value than ordinary compensatory mitigation requirements would have been if the project received proper permitting. In such cases, like other enforcement actions, the higher level of restoration is intended to deter harmful conduct, protect the public, and achieve maximum water quality benefits.

### **Installation Restoration Site 9 (“Fiery Marsh”), San Diego Bay Benthic Community Study, Naval Air Station North Island**

In April of 2022, the San Diego Water Board, Department of Toxic Substances Control, and United States Department of the Navy (collectively the Parties), began an Informal Dispute Resolution (IDR) process to come to an agreement on the details of a benthic community assessment at Installation Restoration (IR) Site 9 at Naval Air Station North Island, also known as the “Fiery Marsh.” The IDR expresses the Parties’ intent to collaborate in conducting a benthic community assessment in San Diego Bay sediments near IR Site 9 which will be used to evaluate if a discharge of legacy chemicals from shallow groundwater to the Bay is affecting beneficial uses of San Diego Bay. The Navy conducted a benthic community evaluation of the biodiversity and environmental conditions present in the benthic zones. The benthic community evaluation was conducted in accordance with requirements of the State Water Board’s Water Quality Control Plan for Enclosed Bays and Estuaries of California, Sediment Quality Objectives. From September through November 2023, sediment samples were collected and analyzed for benthic invertebrate community composition (taxonomy), toxicity bioassays, sediment chemistry, and grain size analysis. The outcomes for these multiple lines of evidence were combined into a final integrated station assessment which indicated that the benthic community is not being impacted by the IR Site 9 shallow groundwater chemicals discharging into San Diego Bay and beneficial uses of marine/estuarine habitat are protected. The Navy submitted a Draft Remedial Investigation Report in May 2025 that evaluated the extent and nature of the environmental contamination at IR Site 9 to determine risk to human health and the environment. The Parties are scheduled to meet in 2025, to discuss the Draft Remedial Investigation Report for IR Site 9.



## **Chapter 6. Strategize to Achieve Local Resilient Local Water Supply**

### **Adoption of Resolutions Accepting Salt and Nutrient Management Plans**

The San Diego Water Board adopted Resolution No. R9-2024-0131 on November 13, 2024, which accepted South Orange County Wastewater Authority's (SOCWA) *San Juan Creek Groundwater Basin Salt and Nutrient Management Plan*. The San Diego Water Board also adopted Resolution No. R9-2025-0004 on February 12, 2025, which accepted Rancho California Water District's (RCWD) *Temecula Valley Groundwater Basin Salt and Nutrient Management Plan*. The salt and nutrient management plans are consistent with the State Water Board *Water Quality Control Policy for Recycled Water* (Recycled Water Policy). The plans will allow for basin wide management of all sources of salts and nutrients and allow for the continued use of recycled water in a manner that prevents adverse impacts to water quality and beneficial uses. SOCWA and RCWD worked collaboratively with local stakeholders in development of their respective salt and nutrient management plans.

## **Chapter 7. Mitigate Climate Change Impacts**

### **Work to address Climate Change**

During FY 24-25 staff continued participation in several groups working to mitigate the impacts of climate change. These efforts include:

- Monthly meetings with the San Diego Regional Climate Collaborative (Climate Collaborative) and contributions to their Sea Level Rise and Policy and Adaptation Working Groups. The Climate Collaborative was established in 2011 as a network for public agencies to advance climate change solutions that mitigate greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to the effects of climate change. The San Diego Water Board hosted the October 2024 quarterly meeting of the Adaptation and Policy Workgroup.
- Providing input and perspective to multiple Climate Change adaptation plans. This included the Ramona Municipal Water District and Barona Band of Mission Indians Climate Adaptation and Action Plan, the City of San Diego's Coastal Resilience Master Plan, the Port of San Diego and the U.S. Navy's San Diego Bay Sustainable Shoreline Atlas, and Caltrans District 11 Adaptation Planning efforts for State Route 75.
- Continued participation in the [Wetland Recovery Project](#) Wetland Managers Group and the Directors Group which together consists of directors and staff of eighteen public agencies coordinating the protection, restoration, and enhancement of California's coastal wetlands and watersheds between Point Conception and the Mexican border; and the [Integrated Regional Water Management Regional Advisory Committee in San Diego County](#) which is a collaborative effort aimed at developing long-term water supply reliability, improving water quality, and protecting natural resources.

- Initiating drafting implementation plans for four projects identified as high priority efforts to adapt to expected Climate Change impacts. These projects include Wetland Enhancement and Protection, developing a Position on Sea Level Rise, Best Management Practices, and better understanding Storm Dynamics. These projects will be integrated into existing programs.

## **Chapter 8. Provide Effective Community Engagement and Communication**

### **Public Engagement**

During FY 24-25 San Diego Water Board staff increased efforts to provide meaningful public engagement opportunities and ensure our outreach efforts are timely and meet the needs of our constituency.

Our Surface Waters Branch hosted an Informational Item at the November Board meeting on Population Surveys of Unhoused Individuals, Associated Water Quality Impacts and Management Efforts along the San Diego River. Sarah Hutmacher, Chief Operating Officer of the San Diego River Park Foundation, discussed the latest population counts, trash surveys and implementation progress of a \$17M Encampment Resolution Fund aimed at relocating persons into more permanent housing. The City of San Diego discussed trash removal efforts and CalTrans covered their policies aimed at the humane removal of encampments for safety and environmental reasons. Dr. Hilary McMillian of San Diego State University presented research findings showing most trash impacts come from human encampments adjacent to the river.

Surface Water Branch Water Resource Control Engineer (WRCE), Mireille Lecourtois organized a community event hosted by the San Diego Water Board in-partnership with the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) San Diego Younger Member Forum (YMF) to celebrate the 2024 International Women in Engineering Day. The celebratory event occurred on June 25, 2024, in the Board Hearing room and included a panel discussion led by successful women engineers who shared their experiences and success stories in their professions. Mireille Lecourtois was the moderator for the panel discussion and brought together five panel members, including San Diego Water Board WRCE, Erica Ryan. The event was attended by more than 30 attendees including college students, ASCE members, and other professionals from diverse backgrounds. Mireille Lecourtois served on the organizing committee for the April 19, 2025, ASCE San Diego YMF Earth and Engineering Day event where she and Michelle Santillan, San Diego Water board WRCE, attended to represent San Diego Water Board engineers and to engage with members of the public and students.

In addition to the representing the San Diego Water Board at the 2024 International Women in Engineering Day, Mireille Lecourtois represented the Board at the 2024 Latina Engineer Conference on October 5, 2024; the San Diego Community College “Pláticas in STEM” professional discussion on October 28, 2024; the ASCE San Diego YMF Engineers Week Classroom Visit at Patrick Henry High School on February 18, 2025; and the ASCE San Diego YMF Earth and Engineering Day community event at Mission Valley mall on April 19, 2025. Mireille also is an active mentor for the Latina



Engineer x Ingeniera Foundation Mentoring Program and provides advice and support to a college student in Chicago studying Civil Engineering.

On June 25, 2025, Site Restoration and Groundwater Protection staff co-presented with County of San Diego Department of Agriculture, Weights, and Measures (AWM) staff at an agricultural water quality seminar organized by AWM. Seminar attendees included representatives from commercial agricultural operations, local regulatory agencies, and other agricultural entities. Representatives from the University of California Extension and from the Natural Resource Conservation Service also attended and presented at the seminar.

Site Restoration and Groundwater Protection staff presented on the following during the seminar:

- Applicability of the San Diego Water Board's general waste discharge requirements for discharges from commercial agricultural operations (Order No. R9-2016-0004 and Order No. R9-2016-0005);
- Similarities and differences between the San Diego Water Board's and AWM's regulatory programs for commercial agriculture;
- Core elements of San Diego Water Board inspections; and
- Common areas of concern observed during inspections at commercial agricultural operations.

The seminar is an example of San Diego Water Board's continuing outreach efforts to growers in the San Diego Region. Site Restoration and Groundwater Protection staff plan to continue to collaborate with AWM in regulating commercial agricultural operations.

Agriculture and Waste Management Unit staff engaged with community groups and residents to identify unpermitted discharges and nuisance conditions at industrial and construction sites and took responsive actions to maintain public health and the enjoyment of property. Staff ensured public transparency and awareness of our enrollment and enforcement actions undertaken to maintain water quality and discharger accountability through direct contact by phone and email, as well as uploading documents to public databases. Staff continue to work closely with Dischargers to provide information regarding applicable regulations, next steps expected by Staff to promote timely and complete report submittals. Staff also respond to public inquiries in a timely manner and assist in accessing documents in GeoTracker and responding to public records requests. Additionally, public comment periods for Land Disposal Waste Discharge Requirement addendums and enforcement orders provide adequate time for the public to submit comments or questions to the Board for consideration. One member of the Land Disposal team also participates during their personal time in a pen pal program that connects STEM professionals with underserved middle school students across the nation to foster their interest in STEM and continuing their education after high school.

Petroleum and Military Site Restoration Unit staff engaged in outreach efforts related to sites that involve an unauthorized leaking underground storage tank which included mailing unauthorized release information factsheets, corrective action implementation letters, and proposed closure notification letters to individual property owners, water districts, and city engineers that fall within the area impacted by the unauthorized release. Outreach efforts also included contacting individual property owners via telephone to request property access for private well water quality and/or soil and groundwater investigations and supporting military staff by attending public outreach meetings.

### **Core Program Accomplishments**

#### **South Bay International Wastewater Treatment Plant (SBIWTP) Compliance**

USIBWC's SBIWTP had been out of compliance with secondary treatment effluent standards since February 2022 due to deferred maintenance and further setbacks caused by Tropical Storm Hilary in August 2023. In December 2023, the San Diego Water Board Executive Officer directed the Source Control Regulation Unit (SCRU) to assign one staff person to focus exclusively on the SBIWTP issues and its return to compliance. After significant San Diego Water Board-USIBWC coordination, San Diego Water Board enforcement of a December 2023 TSO, and plant rehabilitation by USIBWC, the SBIWTP regained compliance with secondary treatment effluent standards in November 2024.

#### **Resolution Approving an Update to the County of San Diego's Local Agency Management Program**

The San Diego Water Board adopted Resolution No. R9-2024-0130 on November 13, 2024, which approved an update to the County of San Diego's Local Agency Management Program (LAMP) for regulating onsite wastewater treatment systems (OWTS). OWTS are used for treating and disposing of domestic wastewater from residences and from commercial establishments in areas that are not connected to centralized sanitary sewer systems and wastewater treatment plants. OWTS allow for continued development in areas not connected to centralized sewage collection and treatment facilities, while still protecting water quality and public health. The vast majority of OWTS consist of septic tanks and subsurface disposal systems (e.g., leach fields, seepage pits, etc.). In specific instances, supplemental/advanced treatment systems are used in addition to septic tanks in areas where soil conditions, site constraints, or environmental concerns make standard septic tanks and subsurface disposal systems inadequate.



Pursuant to the State Water Board *Water Quality Control Policy for Siting, Design, Operation, and Maintenance of Onsite Wastewater Treatment Systems* (OWTS Policy), the LAMP establishes minimum standards for the design, siting, and management of OWTS. Approval of the LAMP update allows the San Diego Water Board to continue to defer regulation of qualifying OWTS to the County of San Diego Department of Environmental Health and Quality, ensuring OWTS are efficiently regulated in a manner that prevents adverse impacts to water quality and public health.