

**REGIONAL WATER QUALITY CONTROL BOARD
SAN DIEGO REGION**

**EXECUTIVE OFFICER SUMMARY REPORT
October 14, 2026**

ITEM 6

SUBJECT

San Mateo Creek Invasive Species TMDL Update (Chad Loflen)

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Informational item only; no recommendation.

KEY ISSUE

California Trout (CalTrout) will update the Board on efforts in the San Mateo Creek watershed to restore habitat conditions for the Southern California Steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*). Much of the work is funded by USEPA Clean Water Act (CWA) section 319 nonpoint source pollution funds that were accessible to CalTrout because the San Diego Water Board's Executive Officer adopted a San Mateo Creek invasive species [Total Maximum Daily Load \(TMDL\)](#) via Resolution [R9-2024-0012](#).

PRACTICAL VISION

The recovery of Southern California steelhead supports the Practical Vision to achieve healthy waters through collaboration, reliance on the latest science, and using meaningful environmental indicators to measure water quality outcomes. Because of the presence of endangered species, San Mateo Creek is a high-priority waterbody (Chapter 1), and the TMDL provided opportunities for community-based partnerships (Chapter 8) to restore healthy stream conditions (Chapter 2).

DISCUSSION

San Mateo Creek, in northern San Diego County, is home to the federally endangered Southern California Steelhead, with approximately 15 miles of creek designated as critical habitat.¹ Southern California steelhead in the San Diego Region were federally listed as an endangered species in 2002, and critical habitat was identified in the San Juan Creek and San Mateo Creek watersheds in January 2006.

With a documented decline in steelhead numbers, the Water Board placed San Mateo Creek on the 2014/16 CWA section 303(d) list of impaired water bodies for the RARE² beneficial use. The impairment is the result of the release and introduction of invasive species from upstream areas during wet weather events and the continued propagation and dispersal of these species, once released, within San Mateo Creek. Aquatic invasive species consume, compete with, and lower water quality for steelhead.

¹ Note that there is no designated critical habitat within the boundaries of Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton.

² Rare, Threatened, or Endangered Species (RARE) - Includes uses of water that support habitats necessary, at least in part, for the survival and successful maintenance of plant or animal species established under state or federal law as rare, threatened or endangered.

About Southern California Steelhead

The Southern California steelhead is an anadromous species of salmon native to the Pacific Coast. Salmon are anadromous as they are born in freshwater, migrate to saltwater as juveniles, and return to freshwater as adults to reproduce. Unlike almost all other species of salmon, adult steelhead do not die after traveling from the ocean into freshwater rivers and streams to spawn.

The life cycle of steelhead generally involves rearing in freshwater for one to three years before migrating to the ocean and spending from one to four years maturing in the marine environment before returning to spawn in freshwater. The ocean phase provides a reproductive advantage because individuals that feed and mature in the ocean grow substantially larger than native freshwater residents, and larger females produce proportionately more eggs. The freshwater phase is also important because it provides a protected rearing environment, historically relatively free of competition and predators.

Because San Mateo Creek often stops flowing by early to late summer, steelhead will spend the dry summer period in a series of disconnected perennial pools or in the estuary, all of which are fed by groundwater.

Recovery plan efforts focus on exotic species control

In January 2012 the National Marine Fisheries Service released a [Southern California Steelhead Recovery Plan](#) covering coastal watersheds from the Santa Maria River in Central California to the Tijuana River. The Recovery Plan acknowledges many threats to steelhead across Southern California, including poor water quality, loss of spawning and rearing habitat, flow diversions, stream channelization and barriers, fires, and non-native invasive species such as bullhead, sunfishes, bass, crayfish, and bullfrogs. The Recovery Plan provides a watershed-by-watershed habitat assessment of threats to the species, and a set of recovery actions to address these threats.

For the San Mateo Creek watershed, the Recovery Plan identifies the initiation of an aquatic exotic species assessment and control program as a priority recovery action because the creek lacks most other major stressors affecting streams in the Recovery Plan area. For that reason, the San Mateo Creek Invasive Species TMDL identifies clear goals towards reducing invasive species populations.

In this case, establishing a TMDL opened federal and State funding pathways to address the impairment. Specifically, CalTrout was awarded approximately \$200,000 in CWA section 319 funding to develop a [watershed management plan for TMDL implementation](#) in consultation with a technical advisory committee. With the completion of the watershed management plan, any nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization, Federally Recognized Tribe, or federal, State, local, or other public agency or public college can apply for funding from the State Water Board's [Nonpoint Source Grant Program](#). Funding can be used for implementation projects that directly address aquatic invasive species in San Mateo Creek and tributaries. The State Water Board manages the program and typically awards about \$4 million per year to eligible planning and implementation projects.

PUBLIC NOTICE

The agenda notice for today's meeting was posted on the San Diego Water Board's

website and sent to subscribers to the email list for Board meetings. This satisfies the Bagley-Keene Open Meeting Act requirements to publish the meeting notice and agenda.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

None.