



Media Release

San Diego Water Board Adopts Innovative Approach to Control Pollution in Loma Alta Slough, Oceanside

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San Diego --- The San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board (San Diego Water Board) took action to eliminate the excessive algal growth in Loma Alta Slough in Oceanside by using an existing regional stormwater permit designed to provide safe, cleaner water for the region.

With this action, the Water Board chose a practical, measureable, and timely approach for directing actions to remedy the Slough through a productive collaboration with the community to address an important water quality challenge.

Unightly, summertime algal growth in Loma Alta Slough, located upstream of Buccaneer Beach, reduces the public's enjoyment, harms wildlife, and can kill fish. The pollution is caused by excess nutrients, primarily from landscape irrigation, delivered to Loma Alta Creek and the Slough by storm drains throughout the watershed.

Since 2006, a dedicated, local stakeholder team has paved the way for today's important and innovative decisions. For instance, the stakeholder group chose to establish biological indicators, rather than traditional water chemistry, as the ultimate measure of environmental health in Loma Alta Slough. The biological indicators are the amount of algae on and below the surface of the water.

"Biological indicators provide the most reliable and precise measure of ecosystem health because organisms integrate conditions of over time," said David Gibson, Executive Officer of the San Diego Water Board. "It took courage for the stakeholder group and our Board to commit to biological indicators because this is a case where the science is ahead of State and Federal Policy."

The San Diego Water Board also chose to rely on the regional municipal storm water permit it adopted in 2013, rather than to pursue another multi-year rulemaking process to enact a traditional Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) to guide actions for restoring Loma Alta Slough. Relying on existing permit provisions will save the Water Board and the City of Oceanside both time and money in their collaborative efforts to eliminate excessive algal growth in the slough.

Elimination of the flow of excess irrigation water, which is a requirement of the regional storm water discharge permit, will cut off the fertilizers entering Loma Alta Slough and stop nuisance algal growths. The Water Board and the stakeholder group acknowledge this will not happen overnight. In December, the City of Oceanside will submit a draft Water Quality Improvement Plan, and the Water Board will approve a final plan in 2015.

San Diego Water Board Chair Dr. Henry Abarbanel praised the efforts of the stakeholder group. "The Loma Alta Slough Stakeholder Team used sound science and practical judgment to demonstrate the Slough can be restored without an additional regulatory burden on the City of Oceanside," said Abarbanel. "This great effort is the type of creative, effective, and public process that can restore the health of our region's waters."

Since 2006, the Loma Alta Slough Stakeholder Team, representing the San Diego Water Board, the cities of Oceanside and Vista, the County of San Diego, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Coastkeeper and the Friends of Loma Alta Creek, have worked to evaluate the sources and causes of the pollution and the potential for Loma Alta Slough's restoration. Scientific support has come from the Southern California Coastal Water Research Project, Tetra Tech, Inc., and Coastal Management Associates, Inc.

The San Diego Water Board is comprised of seven members appointed by the Governor of California and confirmed by the State Senate. The Water Board's mission is to protect and restore water quality in the southwest portion of the state, including parts of San Diego, Riverside, and Orange counties. For more information visit the regional water board [homepage](#).

For information about the Loma Alta Slough stakeholder effort visit [here](#).