

**STATE OF CALIFORNIA
REGIONAL WATER QUALITY CONTROL BOARD
SAN FRANCISCO BAY REGION**

**STAFF SUMMARY REPORT: Xavier Fernandez
MEETING DATE: February 11, 2026**

ITEM: 9

The State of Our Estuary: Reporting on the Health of the San Francisco Estuary

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DISCUSSION:

The San Francisco Estuary (Estuary) is the largest estuary on the west coast of the United States. Serving as the only drainage outlet for waters of the Central Valley, it is where fresh waters from Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers mix with the saline waters of the Pacific Ocean. Because of its highly dynamic and complex environmental conditions, the Estuary supports extraordinarily diverse and productive ecosystems. The Estuary's deepwater channels, tidelands, marshlands, freshwater streams, and rivers provide a wide variety of habitats that have become increasingly vital to the survival of several plant and animal species as other estuaries are reduced in size or lost to development. These areas sustain rich communities of crabs, clams, fish, birds, and other aquatic life and serve both as important wintering sites for migrating waterfowl and as spawning areas for anadromous fish.

However, since the 1800s, the Estuary has suffered severe degradation: natural processes like floods and sediment movement disrupted, water polluted, wetland habitats lost, and wildlife in decline. With natural resources diminished, the Estuary furnishes fewer benefits to people. The 1960s marked a turning point, beginning with regulations to limit filling the Estuary, followed by landmark laws, such as the Clean Water Act and Endangered Species Act, to restore and protect the vital natural resources provided by the Estuary.

In recognition of the Estuary's importance, state and regional government agencies developed common goals to improve its health in 1993 and updated these goals in 2007 and 2016. The [State of Our Estuary](#) website (formerly the *State of the Estuary Report*) provides information on progress towards these goals by summarizing the status and trends for 24 indicators grouped into five categories representing ecosystem health: [Clean Water](#), [Quality Habitat](#), [Resilient Processes](#), [Flourishing Wildlife](#), and [Thriving Communities](#).

Laura Feinstein, Resilient Landscapes Program Director for the San Francisco Estuary Institute, and Natasha Daniels, Senior Environmental Planner for San Francisco Estuary Partnership, will present information on the health of the Estuary for the [State of Our Estuary](#) website.