

Monitoring Monday – Tribal Beneficial Uses of Water

Join us each Monday as the Clean Water Team shares information and resources on water quality monitoring. This Monday we will look at Tribal Beneficial Uses of Water.

Since time immemorial, California Native American Tribes have used, and in some cases continue to use, water to support their cultural, spiritual, ceremonial, and/or traditional rights. Tribal Beneficial Uses provide a water quality safety measure that considers these specific uses of water by individuals, households, or communities of California Tribes.

Beneficial uses are goals the California Water Boards designate to ensure Californians have access to the highest water quality and can use it for maximum benefit. There are an array of beneficial uses including, but not limited to: recreation; navigation; and preservation and enhancement of fish, wildlife, and other aquatic resources or preserves.

Tribal Beneficial Uses are a group of beneficial uses that can help protect activities specific to Native American cultures and their uses of California waters, including the consumption of non-commercial fish or shellfish. Tribal Beneficial Uses can also be referred to as cultural uses of water.

The Tribal Traditional Culture beneficial use helps protect activities specific to Native American Cultures and their historic uses of California's waters, including practices not covered by existing beneficial uses. The functions of the consumption of fish and shellfish components of the Tribal Tradition and Culture, Tribal Subsistence Fishing, and Subsistence Fishing beneficial uses, relate to the risks to human health from the consumption of noncommercial fish or shellfish.

The functions of these new beneficial uses are not to protect or enhance fish populations or aquatic habitats. Fish populations and aquatic habitats are protected and enhanced by other beneficial uses, that are designed to support aquatic habitats for the reproduction or development of fish, such as Fish Spawning and Warm Freshwater Habitat beneficial uses.

California Native American Tribes use California's surface waters in a manner unique to tribal culture, tradition, ceremonies, and lifeways. Tribal Beneficial Uses provide a way to adequately protect certain uses of water that directly relate to Native American cultures. In some cases, the levels of waste allowed to be released into California waters (discharge requirements) or existing water quality standards may not adequately protect Tribal Beneficial Uses. To account for this, in 2017 the State Water Board identified and described beneficial uses unique to California Native American Tribes, in addition to subsistence fishing by other cultures or individuals.

Water quality standards provide the regulatory and scientific foundation for protecting water quality goals under state and federal laws. Protection and enhancement of existing and probable future beneficial uses are primary goals in water quality planning.

In some cases, current discharge requirements may not adequately protect the new beneficial uses. Examples include the timing of the application of aquatic herbicides so that they do not interfere with

cultural practices and reducing bioaccumulative pollutants to levels that are protective of a high rate of fish consumption.

The beneficial uses definitions established by the State Water Board in 2017 are the following:

Tribal Tradition and Culture (CUL): Uses of water that support the cultural, spiritual, ceremonial, or traditional rights or lifeways of California Native American Tribes, including, but not limited to: navigation, ceremonies, or fishing, gathering, or consumption of natural aquatic resources, including fish, shellfish, vegetation, and materials.

Tribal Subsistence Fishing (T-SUB): Uses of water involving the non-commercial catching or gathering of natural aquatic resources, including fish and shellfish, for consumption by individuals, households, or communities of California Native American Tribes to meet needs for sustenance.

Subsistence Fishing (SUB): Uses of water involving the non-commercial catching or gathering of natural aquatic resources, including fish and shellfish, for consumption by individuals, households, or communities, to meet needs for sustenance.

To learn how Tribal Beneficial Uses are memorialized in each region, how water bodies are designated for beneficial uses, and more, please visit the Water Boards' Tribal Affairs webpage (www.waterboards.ca.gov/tribal_affairs/) and other Water Board weblinks.

Water Board Tribal Affairs Contacts www.waterboards.ca.gov/tribal_affairs/tribal_contacts.html

Tribals Consultations www.waterboards.ca.gov/tribal_affairs/tribal_consultations.html

Regional Water Board Progress Updates on Tribal Beneficial Uses
www.waterboards.ca.gov/tribal_affairs/regional_tbu_updates.html

Water Rights & Water Quality Training for Tribes (2014) - [Part 1](#) | [Part 2](#)
Part 1 www.youtube.com/embed/9bMMb5tBHCM?modestbranding=1&rel=0&autoplay=1
Part 2 www.youtube.com/embed/WdOYcZwAZho?modestbranding=1&rel=0&autoplay=1

Bioaccumulation Monitoring Program Realignment Effort
www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/swamp/bioaccumulation_monitoring/program_realignment.html

Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs) <https://mywaterquality.ca.gov/habs/>

Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA) Fish Advisory Warnings
<https://oehha.ca.gov/fish/advisories>

Digital Atlas of California Native Americans www.waterboards.ca.gov/tribal_affairs/

Related Videos:

[Paya: The Water Story of the Paiute - Film Screening & Panel Discussion - Jun 28, 2021](#)

[Anna Holder: California's Bioaccumulation Monitoring Program and Safe to Eat Workgroup \(STEW\)](#)

[Staff Workshop to present Tribal Consultation Policy \(2018\)](#)

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