

Monitoring Monday - Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board (Region 3)

Join us each Monday as the Clean Water Team shares information and resources on water quality monitoring. This Monday we will look at the Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board.

The Central Coast Regional Board's jurisdiction over a 300-mile long by 40-mile wide section of the State's central coast. Its geographic area encompasses all of Santa Cruz, San Benito, Monterey, San Luis Obispo, and Santa Barbara Counties as well as the southern one-third of Santa Clara County, and small portions of San Mateo, Kern, and Ventura Counties. Included in the region are urban areas such as the Monterey Peninsula and the Santa Barbara coastal plain; prime agricultural lands as the Salinas, Santa Maria, and Lompoc Valleys; National Forest lands, extremely wet areas like the Santa Cruz mountains; and arid areas like the Carrizo Plain.

This coastal area includes urbanized and agricultural areas along Monterey Bay, the rugged Big Sur Coast, Morro Bay with its famous rock, the sandy clam beds of Pismo Beach, and a varied coastline south to Point Conception and eastward along the terraces and recreational beaches which line the Santa Barbara Channel. The inland valleys and cities reflect an agricultural, oil, and tourism economy, as well as the early history of California expressed in the architectural styles of the famous Spanish missions which are found throughout this region.

Topographic features are dominated by a rugged seacoast and three parallel ranges of the Southern Coast Mountains. Ridges and peaks of these mountains, the Diablo, Gabilan, and Santa Lucia Ranges, reach to 5,800 feet. Between these ranges are the broad valleys of the San Benito and Salinas Rivers. These Southern Coast Ranges abut the west to east trending Santa Ynez Mountains of the Transverse Ranges that parallel the southern exposed terraces of the Santa Barbara Coast. The trend of the mountain ranges, relative to onshore air mass movement, imparts a marked climatic contrast between seacoast, exposed summits, and interior basins. Variations in terrain, climate, and vegetation account for a multitude of different landscapes. Seacliffs, sea stacks, white beaches, cypress groves, and redwood forests along the coastal strand contrast with the dry interior landscape of small sagebrush, short grass, and low chaparral.

In times past, the beaches and ocean waters offshore have been prolific producers of clams, crustaceans, and important sport and commercial fish. Past fishing practices and disruption of habitat have reduced fishery resources; protective controls are now in effect. Terrestrial wildlife includes a wide range of valley and upland species including the more common raccoon, quail, bear, and deer. Rare, endangered, or unique species include various shore birds, the Morro Bay

Kangaroo rat, the European boar, and the California condor. The Sespe Condor Range serves as a sanctuary for this impressive bird.

Historically, the economic and cultural activities in the basin have been agrarian. Livestock grazing persists, but it has been combined with hay cultivation in the valleys. Irrigation, with pumped local groundwater, is very significant in intermountain valleys throughout the basin. Mild winters result in long growing seasons and continuous cultivation of many vegetable crops in parts of this basin.

While agriculture and related food processing activities are major industries in the region, oil production, tourism, and manufacturing contribute heavily to its economy. The northern part of the region has experienced a significant influx of electronic manufacturing industry, and the southern part is being heavily influenced by expanded offshore oil exploration and production.

The total population of the region is estimated to be 1.22 million people. San Luis Obispo County continues to grow more rapidly than other large counties in the region. The population of San Luis Obispo County has doubled since 1970.

Adequate quality water for many beneficial uses in the Central Coastal Basin is in short supply. Water rationing for domestic purposes is seriously considered and sometimes implemented during water shortages. The use of water by the human population and its activities is increasing in the basin. Water mining and seawater intrusion have resulted in some locations. Consequently, the competition for waters of adequate quality will become more intense in the future.

Water quality problems most frequently encountered in the Central Coastal Basin pertain to excessive salinity or hardness of local groundwaters. Groundwater basins containing 1000 mg/L Total Dissolved Solids (TDS) or higher are found near Hollister, the Lower Forebay of the Salinas Valley Basin, the Carrizo Plain, the Santa Maria and Cuyama Valleys, San Antonio Creek Valley, Lompoc and Santa Rita Basins of the Santa Ynez River Valley, and Goleta and Santa Barbara. The Carrizo Plain groundwaters are most highly mineralized averaging over 5,000 mg/L TDS. Increasing nitrate concentrations is a growing problem in the Salinas Groundwater Basin, the Los Osos Valley Basin, the Santa Maria Valley Basin, and near Arroyo Grande. Surface water problems are less frequently evident, although bacteriological contamination of coastal waters has been a problem in Morro Bay and South Santa Barbara County. Eutrophication occurs in Pajaro River and Llagas Creek, Salinas River below Spreckels, and in the lower reaches of San Luis Obispo Creek. Some streams in the basin are naturally highly mineralized and contribute to the excessive salinity of local groundwaters; examples include Pancho Rico Creek in the Salinas River Hydrologic Unit, and the Cuyama River in the Santa Maria Hydrologic Unit. Both surface waters contain in excess of 1000 mg/L TDS.

The Vision for the Central Coast Water Board is Healthy Watersheds. The Vision represents a framework for how the Central Coast Water Board implements the California Water Code and the Basin Plan and is intended to achieve measurable results in water quality and watershed

improvement over time. The Vision creates a structure to focus the Central Coast Water Board on the highest priorities for beneficial use protection and more strategically aligns the Central Coast Water Board with current and future challenges and opportunities in watershed protection.

Consistent with the Vision, the Central Coast Water Board established the following measurable goals:

- Healthy Aquatic Habitat – By 2025, 80 percent of aquatic habitat is healthy, and the remaining 20 percent exhibits positive trends in key parameters.
- Sustainable Land Management – By 2025, 80 percent of lands within a watershed will be managed to maintain healthy watershed functions, and the remaining 20 percent will exhibit positive trends in key watershed parameters.
- Clean Groundwater – By 2025, 80 percent of groundwater will be clean, and the remaining 20 percent will exhibit positive trends in key parameters.

The Central Coast Water Board will prioritize its actions to protect watersheds and beneficial uses by meeting the Measurable Goals through measuring tangible water quality and watershed improvements. Central Coast Water Board staff will track success toward meeting the Vision of Healthy Watersheds and Measurable Goals by developing and implementing a “report card” based on integrating and assessing key indicators that will provide the information necessary to determine whether the above three Measurable Goals are being attained in watersheds in the Central Coast Region. Further, Central Coast Water Board staff will establish data management and assessment infrastructures so that this process can be successfully maintained and repeated in future years.

IMPORTANT WATER ISSUES:

- [Diablo Canyon Power Plant](#)
- [Water Quality and Homelessness](#)
- [Duke Energy - Morro Bay Power Plant](#)
- [Los Osos Enforcement Action and Other Information](#)
- [Moss Landing Power Plant](#)
- [Supplemental Environmental Projects](#)

RESOURCES:

Central Coastal Regional Water Quality Control Board (Region 3) Website
www.waterboards.ca.gov/rwqcb3/

- **Questions, Comments, or Concerns:**

General questions, comments, or concerns (including Ombudsman) for the Central Coast Regional Board
centralcoast@waterboards.ca.gov

- **Press Releases**

www.waterboards.ca.gov/centralcoast/press_room/press_releases/

Central Coast Ambient Monitoring Program (CCAMP)

<http://www.ccamp.org/>

Central Coast Long-Term Environmental Assessment Network (CCLEAN)

<https://www.cclean.org/>

Central Coast Water Quality Preservation, Inc.

<https://ccwqp.org/>

Healthy Watersheds – A Vision for the Future

www.waterboards.ca.gov/centralcoast/publications_forms/publications/vision/

SWAMP - Region 3 (Central Coast) Monitoring Program

www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/swamp/monitoring/regional_monitoring_programs/region_3.html

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