



Frequently Asked Questions

Update and Implementation of the Water Quality Control Plan for the San Francisco Bay/Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta Watershed (Bay-Delta Plan)

Updated July 2025

What is the Bay-Delta watershed and why is it important?

The Bay-Delta watershed includes the Sacramento and San Joaquin River systems, the Delta, Suisun Marsh and San Francisco Bay. The Sacramento and San Joaquin River systems, including their tributaries, drain water from about 40% of California's land area, supporting a variety of beneficial uses. The Bay-Delta is one of the most important ecosystems and the hub of the state's water supply network. As one of the largest tidal estuaries on the west coast of the Americas, it provides habitat to a vast array of aquatic, terrestrial, and avian wildlife in the Delta, San Francisco Bay, and near-shore ocean, as well as diverse species upstream of the watershed. The Bay-Delta watershed is of significant importance to numerous California Native American Tribes whose way of life, culture, religion, and sustenance are intricately interwoven and interdependent. The Sacramento and San Joaquin Rivers and the Delta provide a significant portion of the water supply for two-thirds of Californians and millions of acres of farmland, as well as for a variety of industrial purposes and commercial and recreational fishing and boating businesses.

What is the State Water Resources Control Board?

The State Water Resources Control Board, commonly referred to as the State Water Board, was formed in 1967 when the State Water Rights Board and the State Water Quality Control Board were merged by the Legislature based on the principle that water rights and water quality are interrelated and should be regulated in an integrated manner.

Composed of five full-time Governor appointees, the State Water Board allocates rights to the use of surface water, protects water quality by establishing statewide policy, regulates public drinking water systems, and, in coordination with the nine regional water quality control boards, takes actions to ensure the highest reasonable quality for waters of the state through administration of the Porter-Cologne Water Quality Control Act and portions of the federal Clean Water Act.



The board is responsible for the protection of water resources, such as fisheries, wildlife, aesthetics, and navigation, which are held in trust for the public, and must consider these responsibilities when planning and allocating water resources. Public trust uses also must be protected whenever feasible.

In addition to its regulatory work, the board also [administers state and federal funding sources](#) through its financial assistance programs. These programs include loan and grant funding for construction of drinking water treatment and distribution systems, municipal sewage conveyance and treatment systems; water recycling facilities; remediation for underground storage tank releases and groundwater contamination; technical assistance for small communities; nonpoint source pollution control projects; interim water, and operation and maintenance/Administrator support for small, disadvantaged community water systems; and drought support for individual households.

The board is [committed](#) to advancing racial equity and environmental justice in all its regulatory and financial assistance programs. It is [institutionalizing](#) racial equity in its policies, programs and service to communities while fostering greater workforce diversity, equity and inclusion within the agency.

How do water rights relate to the Bay-Delta Plan?

The board is the only agency authorized to [administer water rights](#) and shares enforcement authority over water rights with the state courts. Its Division of Water Rights, which supervises water rights law, strives to establish and maintain a stable water rights system to best develop, conserve, and utilize the state's water resources while protecting vested rights, water quality, and the environment. The division's responsibilities include: (1) processing applications for new water rights and changes to existing water rights; (2) issuing Clean Water Act Section 401 Water Quality Certifications for hydropower relicensing and other water right-related projects; (3) maintaining records for all water rights; and (4) enforcing water rights rules and regulations (state courts share some enforcement authority).

Within the Bay-Delta watershed, the division is involved with processing water rights requests for many high-profile projects. Specifically, these include applications for new water storage and diversion projects and changes to water rights to modify existing projects, both of which require board approval. The public can provide input related to any new water right application or petition to change existing water rights when they are noticed for public review. If there are unresolved protests on major projects, a hearing will be conducted in which the public may participate.

Additionally, the division oversees the Water Quality Control Plan for the San Francisco Bay/Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta (Bay-Delta Plan) because the plan is largely flow dependent and as such is primarily implemented through requiring water right holders to take various actions.

What is water quality control planning?

Under the [Porter-Cologne Act](#), the state and regional water boards regulate activities and factors that may affect the quality of the waters of the state by developing water quality control plans, or basin plans, that specify beneficial uses of the state's waters, water quality objectives, and a program of implementation to achieve the objectives. In doing so, the State Water Board implements comparable provisions of the Clean Water Act. The goal of Porter-Cologne, which was enacted in 1969 prior to the Clean Water Act, is "to attain the highest water quality, which is reasonable, considering all demands being made and to be made on those waters and the total values involved, beneficial and detrimental, economic and social, tangible and intangible." Because the water quality control planning programs are certified by the Secretary of the California Natural Resources Agency as regulatory programs for the protection of the environment, they are exempt from certain procedural requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act because the water quality control planning processes are determined to be functionally equivalent processes.

What is the Bay-Delta Water Quality Control Plan?

The board fulfills its responsibilities to protect water quality and beneficial uses of waterways in the Bay-Delta, in part, through adoption and implementation of the Bay-Delta Water Quality Control Plan, or Bay-Delta Plan for short. The plan establishes beneficial uses of water in the watershed, water quality and flow objectives to reasonably protect those uses, and a program of implementation to achieve the objectives.

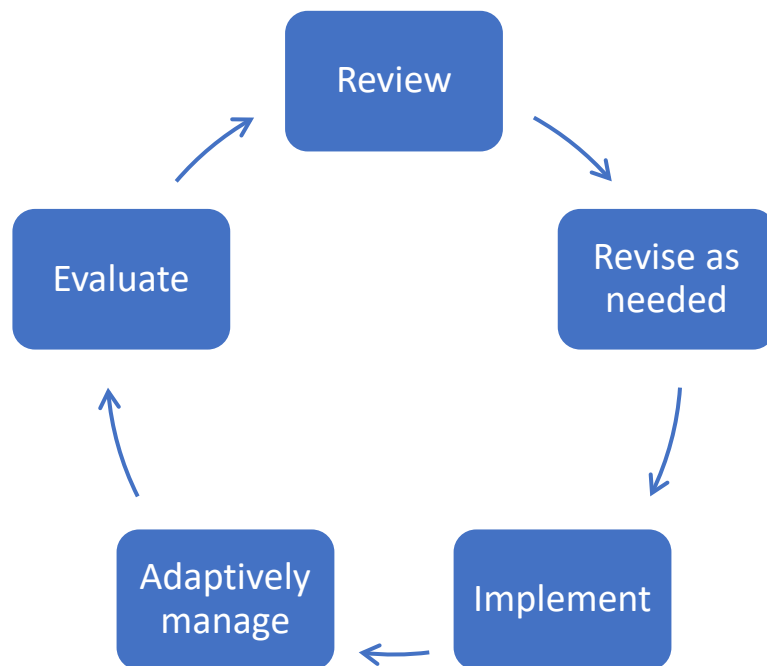
The Bay-Delta Plan is complementary to the other water quality control plans adopted by the state and regional boards and state policies for water quality control adopted by the State Water Board. The plan provides reasonable protection for the Bay-Delta watershed's beneficial uses that require control of salinity (caused by saltwater intrusion, municipal discharges, and agricultural drainage), instream flows and Delta outflows, and water project operations (limits on diversions and associated operations and management). The Bay-Delta Plan supersedes the regional water quality control plans to the extent of any conflict between the plan and the regional water quality control plans. The other plans and policies establish water quality objectives and requirements for parameters, such as toxic chemicals, bacterial contamination, and other parameters which have the potential to impair beneficial uses or cause nuisance.

The Bay-Delta Plan, like other water quality control plans, is required to be reviewed periodically and updated as needed to provide for the reasonable protection of beneficial uses of water. The plan was most recently updated in 2018 to revise the plan's Lower San Joaquin River flow provisions for the reasonable protection of fish and wildlife and the southern Delta salinity provisions for the reasonable protection of agriculture. Based on precipitous declines in native fish and other aquatic species in the Bay-Delta watershed (that were also at issue in the 2018 updates to the Bay-Delta Plan), the State Water Board began a process to update the Sacramento River and Delta portions of the plan that were last updated in 1995.

The plan contains flow-related water quality objectives that are both narrative and numeric. Narrative objectives describe the general water quality and flow conditions that must be attained through watershed management. They also serve as the basis for specific numeric objectives, for example, the amount of flow that must remain in the stream defined by a specific value in cubic feet per second (cfs) of flow.

The board develops updates to the plan, as appropriate, through a public process that includes consideration of alternatives and evaluates the environmental and economic effects of the proposed changes as part of a staff report. The board implements updates to the plan through water right or water quality actions such as adoption of regulations, conditioning of water rights, and conditioning of Clean Water Act Section 401 Water Quality Certifications for hydropower relicensing. The board also works with state and federal agencies and others to conduct activities to protect beneficial uses of water (e.g., physical habitat restoration to restore riparian vegetation, channel conditions, and other physical aspects of the environment for the benefit of fish and wildlife).

What actions are being taken to update and implement the Bay-Delta Plan?



- **Review:** The state and regional water boards are required to regularly review each plan and determine if changes should be considered.
- **Revise as Needed:** The board develops updates to the plan, as appropriate, through a public process that includes considering alternatives and evaluating the environmental and economic effects of the proposed changes as part of a staff report/substitute environmental document (staff report). The process also involves public review and comment on various draft documents, including the staff report, the scientific basis report describing the science upon which proposed revisions are based, and the proposed updates to the plan itself. Public

input informs the development of final plan amendments that are proposed for consideration and adoption by the board. The plan identifies actions the board will take and actions other entities should implement to protect beneficial uses of water and meet water quality objectives.

- **Implement:** The board takes actions under its relevant authorities and coordinates with other agencies and parties on additional measures.
- **Adaptively manage:** Adaptive management actions are considered and implemented based on monitoring and special studies to improve effectiveness of the implementation actions.
- **Evaluate:** The board continuously evaluates the plan and considers whether changes are needed to the plan itself or its implementation, which initiates the review process again.

Why is the Bay-Delta Plan being updated?

It is widely recognized that the Bay-Delta ecosystem is in a state of prolonged decline that has brought some species to the brink of extinction. Changes in land use due to agricultural practices, urbanization, discharges of contaminants, flood control, and climate change – combined with substantial and widespread water development and infrastructure projects – were accompanied by precipitous population declines in an array of species that depend on the ecosystem. This trend has continued in recent years. In the early 2000s, scientists noted the steep reduction of several native estuarine fish populations and estuarine species have continued to decline up to present day. Simultaneously, natural production of all runs of Central Valley salmon and steelhead remains near all-time low levels.

In response to deteriorating conditions, the board initiated two processes to revise, adopt, and implement flow-dependent water quality objectives for the reasonable protection of fish and wildlife. These processes are progressing in different stages. In December 2018, the board adopted updated flow objectives and an implementation program for the reasonable protection of fish and wildlife in the Lower San Joaquin River and its three eastside tributaries: the Stanislaus, Tuolumne and Merced Rivers. The board also revised the southern Delta salinity objective for the reasonable protection of agricultural beneficial uses based on best available science regarding salt tolerance of Delta crops. This process is referred to as the Lower San Joaquin River/Southern Delta update, which the board is taking steps to implement.

The board also is developing and considering revisions to the Bay-Delta Plan for the reasonable protection of fish and wildlife in the Sacramento River and Delta. Referred to as the Sacramento/Delta update. Potential Sacramento/Delta updates involve inflows to the Sacramento River and its tributaries and the Delta eastside tributaries (including the Calaveras, Cosumnes and Mokelumne Rivers); cold-water habitat protections in these watersheds; Delta outflows; interior Delta flows; and other possible changes.

Why is the Bay-Delta Plan being updated in two separate geographic regions?

Two vast and distinct river systems join to form the Bay-Delta: the Sacramento River in the north and the San Joaquin River in the south. Both systems are fed by snowmelt from differing geographic regions and can vary significantly in terms of precipitation, topography, and the native fish and wildlife species at-risk. The Sacramento River and its tributaries support four distinct runs of Chinook salmon, including endangered winter-run Chinook. The San Joaquin River only supports fall-run Chinook, though efforts are underway to reintroduce spring-run that were destroyed due to prolonged degraded conditions. In addition, the voluntary agreement that implemented the 1995 flow objectives on the Lower San Joaquin River expired in 2011, resulting in compliance issues combined with decreasing salmon numbers.

What is the status and timeline of the Sacramento/Delta update?

The board initiated the [Sacramento/Delta update](#) in 2012. In 2017, the board finalized the “Scientific Basis Report in Support of New and Modified Requirements for Inflows from the Sacramento River and its Tributaries and Eastside Tributaries to the Delta, Delta Outflows, Cold Water Habitat, and Interior Delta Flows” ([2017 Scientific Basis Report](#)), documenting the science supporting possible revisions.

In 2018, the board released a [Framework for possible Sacramento/Delta updates to the Bay-Delta Plan](#) for Sacramento/Delta inflows, cold water habitat, Delta outflows, and interior Delta flows identified by board staff at that time. The framework included the following: new year-round inflow requirements for the Sacramento River, its tributaries, and eastside tributaries to the Delta (the Mokelumne, Calaveras and Cosumnes Rivers) of 55% of unimpaired flows, adaptively implemented within a range of 45–65%; tributary inflows protected as Delta outflows; new requirements for cold-water habitat in the Sacramento River and Delta eastside tributaries; new and modified interior Delta flow requirements for Delta exports; recommendations for complementary ecosystem protection actions that others should take; and adaptive management, monitoring, evaluation, special study, and reporting provisions.

In 2022, the board received proposed voluntary agreements (VAs) from water users and state and federal agencies that would serve as an alternative to the 2018 framework, referred to as the Healthy Rivers and Landscapes proposal. The VAs propose to be in effect for eight years and include voluntary water contributions and habitat improvements in the Delta and certain tributaries. In September 2023, the board released a [draft Staff Report](#) that analyzes the potential benefits and impacts associated with different possible alternatives for Sacramento/Delta updates to the Bay-Delta Plan.

In October 2024, the board released [draft](#) Bay-Delta Plan amendments (2024 draft) that included possible options for incorporating regulatory provisions based on the draft Staff Report, as well as provisions based on VAs. The 2024 draft identified several options under consideration that the Board was seeking input on for updating the Bay-Delta

Plan, including incorporating either a regulatory pathway that would not include VAs, or a pathway that would include VAs with the regulatory provisions applying to water rights not covered by an approved VA.

What was released in July 2025?

In July 2025, the board released for public review and comment a revised draft of updates to the Bay-Delta Plan (2025 revised draft) that includes proposed Sacramento/Delta updates and other minor updates and edits to improve clarity and readability. The 2025 revised draft includes changes to the 2024 draft informed by public comments, including input from multi-day public workshops, as well as 11 topic-specific working meetings. The 2025 revised draft includes the voluntary agreement pathway for water rights included in approved VAs and the regulatory pathway for water rights not included as part of approved VAs. The 2025 revised draft retains, with modifications, the tributary inflow, cold-water habitat, and Delta outflow requirements of the regulatory pathway with new water supply adjustments intended to reduce water supply and reservoir storage and associated temperature impacts. The 2025 revised draft also retains, with modifications, the VA pathway that includes flow and non-flow habitat commitments that would be implemented during the term of the VAs. Additionally, the 2025 revised draft proposes to designate Tribal Tradition and Culture (CUL) beneficial use as part of the Bay-Delta Plan update. The 2025 revised draft updates to the Bay-Delta Plan are available for review on the [Board's website](#). For information on opportunities for public input, please see the [notice](#).

What is the status and implementation timeline for the 2018 Lower San Joaquin River and southern Delta update?

In 2018, the State Water Board adopted Lower San Joaquin River flow and southern Delta salinity (LSJR/SD) amendments to the Bay-Delta Plan. The amendments include a new narrative objective, a new numeric objective that applies to each of the Lower San Joaquin River salmon-bearing tributaries (Stanislaus, Tuolumne and Merced Rivers) and a modified minimum flow objective on the Lower San Joaquin River at Vernalis.

The tributary numeric objective requires 40% of unimpaired flow within an adaptive range of 30%–50% from February through June at the confluence of the tributary with the Lower San Joaquin River. The objective is intended to increase flows that are required to remain instream during the critical salmon rearing and migratory period from February through June, and increase flow variability and access to floodplain, food, and suitable temperatures that promote survival of native juvenile migratory fish.

The revised flow objective at Vernalis establishes that required tributary flows must remain in the mainstem Lower San Joaquin River and provide a minimum level of protection during critically dry years to support and maintain survival of juvenile fish migrating through the Delta. The tributary and Lower San Joaquin River flow requirements also include adaptive implementation provisions to better achieve a suite of ecological functions and adjust to future conditions.

The southern Delta salinity amendment allows for salinity levels in the Delta from April through August that are similar to historical conditions but slightly higher than the prior objectives. The change was adopted based on updated scientific information about salt levels that reasonably protect agriculture. Monitoring and compliance locations were changed from channel locations to channel segments to better reflect overall salinity levels.

The board is developing a regulation and taking other actions to implement the LSJR/SD update to the Bay-Delta Plan. Separately, the board is considering incorporating a VA for the Tuolumne River.

What are Voluntary Agreements in the context of the update and implementation of the Bay-Delta Plan?

The board currently is considering voluntary agreements, or VAs, as part of the public process to update the Bay-Delta Plan. The VAs set forth in a [Memorandum of Understanding](#) (MOU) include proposals for flow and habitat measures on the Sacramento, Feather, American, Yuba, Mokelumne, and Tuolumne Rivers, Putah Creek, and the Delta, as well as water purchases. Since the release of the draft Bay-Delta Plan in October 2024, the State Water Board received two additional VA proposals from Nevada Irrigation District (NID) and South Sutter Water District (SSWD) proposing flow and habitat measures on the Yuba and Bear Rivers and Auburn Ravine.

The 2025 revised draft plan provides a pathway for the Sacramento/Delta VAs (those listed above with the exception of the Tuolumne River). Because the Tuolumne River VA is not fully consistent with the 2018 amendments to the Bay-Delta Plan, it would require changes to the existing plan that are being evaluated separately.

The VAs would contribute toward achieving the new narrative objectives in the plan through implementation of flow, non-flow habitat restoration and other required VA commitments to improve spawning and rearing capacity for salmonids, estuarine species, and other native fishes. The VAs would have governance and science programs to guide implementation of VA commitments and provide other functions described in the MOU.

Following the proposed eight-year term, the VAs could be extended or modified to make any needed improvements. If the VAs are not effective, the regulatory pathway described above could apply after the board takes certain steps.

What is the status of the proposed Sacramento/Delta VAs?

In January 2023, board staff, in collaboration with the California Department of Water Resources and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, developed a “Draft Scientific Basis Report Supplement in Support of Proposed Voluntary Agreements for the Sacramento River, Delta, and Tributaries Update to the Water Quality Control Plan for the San Francisco Bay/Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta” (draft Scientific Basis Report Supplement) for public review and comment. This report is supplemental to the board’s 2017 Scientific Basis Report.

Board staff revised the draft Scientific Basis Report Supplement in response to public comment and released a final draft Scientific Basis Report Supplement in September 2023 as [Appendix G2](#) of the draft Staff Report. The final draft Scientific Basis Report Supplement was submitted for independent, external scientific peer review in October 2023 and the [peer review reports](#) were transmitted to the board in February 2024. Staff from the board, California Department of Water Resources, and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife are working on revising the report in response to the peer reviewer comments and subsequent VA documents. The Scientific Basis Report Supplement will inform the board's consideration of the VAs and its efforts to update the Sacramento/Delta portions of the Bay-Delta Plan.

The Sacramento/Delta VAs were evaluated in the September 2023 draft Staff Report. Additional components of the VA proposal were appended to the draft Staff Report as [Appendix G1](#) and released in advance of an April 2024 workshop on the VAs. These components included a draft strategic plan, draft science plan, draft accounting protocols, and other documents. Revised drafts and additional documents were subsequently released in October of 2024. In addition, the two new VA proposals received in July of 2025 are also planned to be made available on the board's website.

The October 2024 draft Bay-Delta Plan included the VAs as an option for inclusion in the Bay-Delta Plan. The July 2025 revised draft Bay-Delta Plan includes a pathway for the VAs with a new draft appendix for VA flow accounting for each VA tributary and VA commitment type (including purchases, export reductions, and Delta outflow). The Board is soliciting further public input on the July 2025 revised draft before the Bay-Delta Plan amendments are brought to the board for consideration at a future board meeting.

What is the status of the proposed Tuolumne River VA?

In April 2023, the board issued a notice of preparation of an environmental document and held a scoping meeting to receive input on issues that should be addressed during the environmental review of the VA proposed on the Tuolumne River. The board plans to prepare and release for public review a draft scientific basis report evaluating the science supporting the proposed VA. Thereafter, a draft staff report assessing the potential environmental and economic effects, as well as possible changes to the Bay-Delta Plan, would be released for public comment before the board considers incorporating the VA into the Bay Delta Plan.

What are upcoming opportunities for public engagement in the board's consideration of Sacramento/Delta updates?

Revised Draft Sacramento/Delta Bay-Delta Plan Updates (July 2025): Board staff have released a revised draft of the Bay-Delta Plan that includes updates focused on the Sacramento/Delta components of the Bay-Delta Plan for public review and comment. The board will hold a workshop on September 8 and 9, 2025, to receive public feedback and is soliciting written comments by September 10, 2025. Please see the [notice](#) for more information on opportunities for public engagement.

What opportunities are upcoming for public engagement regarding implementation of Lower San Joaquin River flows?

Draft Scientific Basis Report for Tuolumne River VA: The board is preparing a draft Scientific Basis Report for the potential incorporation of the Tuolumne River VA in the Bay-Delta Plan that is planned to be released for public review and comment in summer 2025.

Draft Regulation and Draft Environmental Impact Report: The board is currently developing a draft regulation and associated draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for implementation of the 2018 updates to the Bay-Delta Plan.

What is unimpaired flow and how is it used in the Bay-Delta Plan?

Unimpaired flow is an estimate of the total water available within a watershed to be stored or put to beneficial use under current physical conditions and land uses. It is defined as the natural water production of a river basin, unaltered by upstream diversions, storage, or by export or import of water to or from other watersheds. The board has historically relied on unimpaired flow for regulatory purposes, including to calculate hydrologic index volumes, identify water year type, and other purposes to determine flow-dependent objectives in the existing Bay-Delta Plan that are currently implemented through State Water Board Water Right Decision 1641 (D-1641). Water year type is used to adjust flow requirements in response to California's varying hydrology. Higher flows are required in wet years, lower flows in dry years.

The 2018 Bay-Delta Plan Lower San Joaquin River tributary flow objectives are described as a percent of unimpaired flow, within an adaptive range, instead of as fixed flow levels based on water year type or unimpaired flows from the prior month. Describing a flow requirement this way – as a portion of what would be present naturally – allows the requirement to adjust continuously to precipitation patterns and the overall hydrology specific to a tributary (precipitation and runoff in that watershed). The adaptive range, or the acceptable amount of flow above or below the requirement in certain conditions, provides flexibility for management decisions to improve fish and wildlife benefits and ecological functions within an established water budget and to adjust to future conditions such as benefits from physical habitat restoration.

How is the State Water Board considering environmental justice in Bay-Delta Plan processes?

Black, indigenous and people of color (BIPOC) and economically disadvantaged communities have sought greater inclusion in the Bay-Delta Plan update and implementation processes. In response to their feedback, the board hosted a public listening session in March 2023 focused on the possible inclusion of environmental justice issues in the plan update. The board received questions and comments about the update process and heard concerns about the impact of flow and water quality changes on subsistence fishing and harmful algal blooms (HABs) in the Delta, among

other important issues. In response, staff held a second public listening session June 7, 2023, and received further input from representatives of economically disadvantaged communities, BIPOC and environmental justice organizations.

The board is actively working to address concerns regarding declines of native fish species that have impacted subsistence fishing opportunities in the proposed Sacramento/Delta updates to the Bay-Delta Plan and LSJR implementation efforts, and the proposed Tuolumne River VA. In addition, the board is investing in new monitoring strategies to identify management and mitigation actions to reduce the impacts of HABs, and the July 2025 revised draft Bay-Delta Plan proposes requirements for HAB monitoring in the Delta. The board encourages members of environmental justice organizations and BIPOC and economically disadvantaged communities to provide input on future actions the board could undertake to address these and other issues.

How is the State Water Board incorporating tribal input and perspectives?

The board has been engaging with California Native American Tribes through listening sessions, meetings, and one-on-one discussions to incorporate their perspectives and interests into the plan update and implementation. In summer 2022, the board sent an invitation for tribal consultation for the regulation to implement the 2018 LSJR/SD revisions. In early 2023, the board also requested consultation on the Sacramento/Delta update with tribes located in the Bay-Delta and Trinity River watersheds. Government-to-government consultations are arranged at the request of tribal leadership.

Board staff is working to incorporate traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) into the Bay-Delta Plan to help inform technical and policy considerations, among them: improving adaptive management decisions; monitoring; evaluating plan effectiveness for protecting fish and wildlife and tribal beneficial uses; and future updates and implementation. The July 2025 revised draft Bay-Delta Plan retains a section on tribal engagement and traditional ecological knowledge that proposes that board staff will develop a tribal engagement plan and provide regular, formal and informal meeting opportunities with tribes to hear feedback on the Bay-Delta Plan. The 2025 revised draft also proposes that the State Water Board will form a Bay-Delta Tribal Advisory Group and work to incorporate TEK into the Board's Bay-Delta planning and implementation processes. Any use of TEK would follow the Collective benefit, Authority to control, Responsibility, Ethics principles for Indigenous Data Governance (CARE principles).

What are tribal beneficial uses?

The board established definitions for tribal and subsistence beneficial uses in 2017 in collaboration with California Native American Tribes and the public. Tribal beneficial uses are unique to tribes and defined as follows:

- **Tribal Tradition and Culture (CUL):** the 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):** the uses of water involving the non-commercial catching or gathering of natural aquatic resources for consumption by individuals, households, or tribal communities to meet needs for sustenance.

A third beneficial use established for subsistence fishing by other individuals or cultures is defined as follows:

- **Subsistence Fishing (SUB):** the 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.

Board staff held listening sessions in March and May 2023 to gather input from tribal leaders on its efforts to update and implement the Bay-Delta Plan. Through that outreach, tribal representatives requested specific recognition of tribal beneficial uses in the plan.

At its June 7, 2023, meeting, the board included an informational item in its meeting agenda and received input on the possible addition of these three beneficial uses. The draft Staff Report for the Sacramento/Delta update evaluated incorporation of the definitions of tribal and subsistence fishing beneficial uses into the Bay-Delta Plan. The draft revised Bay-Delta Plan released in October 2024 included the definitions of TBUs and identified an option for the board to consider formal designation of CUL in the Bay-Delta watershed as part of the Sacramento/Delta update process.

The revised draft updates to the Bay-Delta Plan propose designating the Tribal Tradition and Culture (CUL) beneficial use in the Bay-Delta watershed. The CUL beneficial use designation is based on input provided through the State Water Board's tribal outreach and engagement efforts and substantial evidence that the watershed has supported, and continues to support, traditional tribal uses of water, specifically related to aquatic life beneficial uses. The CUL designation is proposed for the watershed covered by the Bay-Delta Plan due to the cultural importance of water and native fish and wildlife, particularly salmon, to California Native American Tribes and the reliance salmon have upon the entire watershed through the various stages of their life cycle.

What is the State Water Board doing to address harmful algal blooms in the watershed?

Delta communities and others have expressed significant concerns about harmful algal blooms (HABs). In response, the board is investigating ways to reduce the duration and severity of HABs and is investing in monitoring strategies to improve its understanding of the environmental conditions such as flow, nutrients, and water temperature that contribute to algal bloom formation. Staff are working with the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board and other state and federal agencies to coordinate monitoring and leverage the latest science and mitigation measures. In addition, the

draft Staff Report evaluated the effects of possible alternatives for the Sacramento/Delta update on HABs formation. The 2024 draft Bay-Delta Plan proposed requirements for HAB monitoring in the Delta, including at six HAB “hotspot” locations where HABs regularly form. The July 2025 revised draft retains these HAB monitoring requirements.

Additional Resources

More information about the Bay-Delta Plan can be found on the following webpages:

- [Bay-Delta Watershed Efforts](#)
- [Sacramento/Delta Update](#)
- [Lower San Joaquin River Flows and Southern Delta Salinity Update and Implementation](#)
- [Voluntary Agreements](#) (State Water Board)
- [Voluntary Agreements](#) (California Natural Resources Agency)

For additional questions, contact staff at the following email addresses depending on the subject:

- Lower San Joaquin River/Southern Delta: LSJR-SD-Comments@waterboards.ca.gov
- Sacramento/Delta: SacDeltaComments@waterboards.ca.gov
- Other Bay-Delta matters: Bay-Delta@waterboards.ca.gov

The State Water Board’s mission is to preserve, enhance and restore the quality of California’s water resources and drinking water for the protection of the environment, public health and all beneficial uses, and to ensure proper resource allocation and efficient use for the benefit of present and future generations.

(This FAQ was last updated on July 24, 2025.)