



Media Release

State Water Board approves funding to address Tijuana River Valley, New River water quality issues

Projects accelerate trash collection, erosion control

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SACRAMENTO – In ongoing efforts to address water quality issues in the Tijuana and New Rivers, the State Water Resources Control Board approved \$34 million in funding for six projects designed to improve conditions along the U.S.-Mexico border.

Five of the projects will take place in the U.S. and a sixth, the Sonoran Institute's Fluye Project, will take place across the border in Mexicali, Mexico. Recipients of the funding are county and city governments, and two non-profit organizations, all based in the U.S.

"The water quality in our border watersheds have been degraded by sewage, trash and other pollutants for decades, posing a constant threat to the health of people, wildlife, and our economies," said Joaquin Esquivel, chair of the State Water Board. "This funding comes at a critical time, as these challenges are exacerbated by extreme weather patterns in our changed climate. These projects will help improve water quality for our border communities while we continue our collaboration at the local, state and federal levels, and with our Mexican partners, to protect our water resources."

The [New River is a severely polluted inland waterway](#) that flows north across the United States-Mexico border, through the city of Calexico, and continues to the Salton Sea, some 60 miles away. Though discharges from U.S. sources are treated and disinfected to meet state and federal standards, the water entering the country contains raw sewage, industrial, domestic and agricultural wastes, trash and other solid pollutants, owing mostly to Mexicali's overburdened and deteriorating infrastructure.

The [Tijuana River](#), the other major Southern California watershed that shares a border with Mexico, is increasingly degraded by sewage, trash and sediment from the hills just south of the border. These pollutants accumulate in Smuggler's Gulch, which is a collection system that includes gates to intercept and divert trash from reaching the Pacific Ocean.

Of the six funded projects, three benefit the Tijuana River and three will help improve conditions in the New River. One project secured co-funding from the Mexican government. Funds are being awarded to city and county governments and non-governmental organizations.



CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

STATE WATER RESOURCES CONTROL BOARD

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The following are the six projects awarded assistance:

New River

- The New River Improvement Project will expand the ability to remove trash, control erosion and treat polluted river water. Plans include installation of the following: a trash screen and water diversion structure downstream from the border; an underground bypass pipe to convey polluted river water from the diversion structure; a 350 square-foot energy dissipater with adjacent riprap at the outlet of the bypass pipe to control erosion; and a pump-back system to return water to the river after it is treated at the Calexico Wastewater Treatment Plant. This is an ongoing project; over \$18 million will be provided to the City of Calexico and the Department of Water Resources to supplement current funding.
- The Sonoran Institute Fluye Project involves restoration actions such as the removal of trash and other solid waste, modification of channel morphology, along with infrastructure (check dams, gates, spillways, etc.) and the replanting of native vegetation. The board will contribute more than \$4 million to carry out this project; the institute has also secured co-funding from the Mexicali municipal and Baja California state governments.
- The New River Preliminary Engineering Report Project will evaluate options for a Wastewater Treatment Plant in Imperial County to treat pollution from Mexico and ensure the river meets California water quality standards. The board will give \$167,000 to Imperial County to conduct the evaluation.

Tijuana River

- The Smuggler's Gulch Improvement Project features construction of a full-scale sediment and trash control basin and dredging to remove accumulated sediment, trash, and debris in Smuggler's Gulch and the Tijuana River Pilot Channel that contributes to flooding in the river valley. The structure is a key component of the [Tijuana River Valley Recovery Strategy](#) that coordinates local, state, and federal efforts to manage cross-border flows and protect downstream public and private properties, including critical habitats. The board will grant the County of San Diego more than \$4 million to complete this project.
- The Tijuana River Trash Booms Project involves the design, construction and operation and maintenance of a floating trash boom system for two consecutive storm seasons in the concrete-lined portion of the main Tijuana River Channel immediately downstream of the border. This is a demonstration project; the information gathered will be used to develop permanent trash control infrastructure. Over \$4.7 million will be directed to this project, which will be carried out by the Rural Community Assistance Corporation.

- The Brown Property Habitat and Hydrology Restoration Project will remediate a contaminated property adjacent to and within the Tijuana River and restore floodplain and habitat. The property is a historic illegal dumping ground of such magnitude that it has altered the river's natural flow. The disruption to the river channel impounds waterborne trash, which decomposes in pools of stagnant water year-round and degrades water quality. The board will give the County of San Diego \$2 million to facilitate the demolition and removal of on-site structures containing hazardous materials, such as asbestos and lead.

The Division of Financial Assistance administers the board's financial assistance programs that include loan and grant funding for construction of municipal sewage and water recycling facilities, remediation for underground storage tank releases, watershed protection projects and nonpoint source pollution control projects. More information is available on the board [website](#).

The State Water Board is responsible for preserving, enhancing, and restoring 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 water resource allocation and efficient use, for the benefit of present and future generations.