

Russian River Pathogen Indicator Bacteria Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) Fact Sheet

BACKGROUND

Water quality monitoring from the Russian River and its tributary creeks reflect widespread contamination with bacteria and other indicators of human waste, which pose a threat to the health of the river ecosystem and the people who visit it. Bacteria can indicate the presence of pathogenic organisms that are found in warm-blooded animal waste. The North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board is developing the Russian River Pathogen Indicator Bacteria TMDL to address the pathogen indicator bacteria impairment in the Russian River Watershed.

EVIDENCE & SCOPE OF IMPAIRMENT

Data assessed by Regional Water Board staff for the TMDL reflect the presence of pathogens from human and domestic animal sources throughout the watershed. This violates the narrative Bacteria Water Quality objective which states that water “shall not be degraded beyond natural background levels.” In addition, some locations within the watershed have bacteria concentrations that are higher than is safe for water contact recreation.

SOURCES OF IMPAIRMENT

The primary sources of FIB in the Watershed include, in no particular order, municipal wastewater treatment facilities, sanitary sewer systems, municipal separate storm sewer systems, septic systems, homeless and itinerant farmworker encampments, dairy livestock, non-dairy livestock operations, and recreational water users. Controllable sources identified as probable contributors to the bacteria problem will be required to meet the proposed concentration-based targets under conditions of the TMDL Action Plan, by taking specific actions to reduce bacterial contributions.

TMDL TARGETS & ACTION PLAN

The TMDL will likely establish a target condition for *E. coli* bacteria and *Bacteroides* bacteria or other indicators of human contamination. The target concentration for *E. coli* will be based on the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s 2012 Recreational Water Quality Criteria. The target threshold for indicators of human and domestic animal contamination will be set at a level that is expected to ensure that pathogens are not present in recreational waters above natural background levels.

The TMDL Action Plan will be specific to each source category, and will likely require each responsible party to develop a bacteria load reduction plan that describes how bacteria loads will be reduced to meet the *E. coli* and *Bacteroides* bacteria concentration targets. The Action Plan will be designed to provide flexibility for the responsible parties to meet the standards with strategies that fit the local community. The TMDL Action Plan will provide time for responsible parties to consider alternatives, further investigate the extent and nature of their contribution, obtain funding assistance, and develop a compliance program.

The TMDL Action Plan and substitute environmental documentation will be presented before the Regional Water Board at a public hearing for the purpose of adopting the Action

Plan as an amendment to the *Water Quality Control Plan for the North Coast Region* (Basin Plan). The Regional Water Board hearing is planned for the fall of 2015. By adoption, the Action Plan will be used to inform modifications to the Regional Water Board's existing regulatory framework, including future revisions to point source permits and additional nonpoint source control requirements.

AB 885 AND THE TMDL PROCESS

Assembly Bill 885 (AB 885) was signed into law in September 2000 and requires the State Water Resources Control Board to adopt regulations or standards for new, replacement, and failing septic systems and septic systems adjacent to Section 303(d) listed waters. The State Water Board adopted the statewide *Water Quality Control Policy for Siting, Design, Operation, and Maintenance of Onsite Wastewater Treatment Systems* (Policy), which became effective in May 2013 and sets out responsibilities of septic system owners, local regulatory agencies, regional water boards, and the State Water Board to meet the conditions of the Policy.

The statewide Policy includes requirements for septic systems near impaired waterbodies. However, once the Russian River Pathogen Indicator Bacteria TMDL is adopted, the requirements that are developed for septic systems in the TMDL become the governing regulations for the watershed.

CEQA SCOPING

As part of the Basin Plan amendment process, the Regional Water Board is required by the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) to hold a public meeting on January 30, 2015, to seek input from members of the public about ideas for any reasonably foreseeable measures that may be implemented to address the pathogen indicator bacteria impairment and the possible environmental impacts of the measures. At the public meeting staff will present the list of probable sources of pathogen indicator bacteria impairment throughout the Russian River Watershed and give members of the public an opportunity to help identify potential implementation measures to address the impairments and to help provide input on the potential environmental impacts from the implementation of the measures.

HOW TO STAY INVOLVED

Information on the Russian River Pathogen Indicator Bacteria TMDL can be found at: http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/northcoast/water_issues/programs/tmdls/russian_river

Persons wishing to receive notices related to the Russian River Pathogen Indicator Bacteria TMDL should subscribe to the email list, under Resources, Email Subscription on the left side of the Regional Water Board's main web page at <http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/northcoast>.

Questions regarding this meeting or general questions regarding the Russian River Pathogen Indicator Bacteria TMDL should be directed to Charles Reed, by phone at 707-576-2752 or email at Charles.Reed@waterboards.ca.gov or Rebecca Fitzgerald, by phone at 707-576-2650 or email at Rebecca.Fitzgerald@waterboards.ca.gov.

