



**STAFF REPORT ON THE
DRAFT RACIAL EQUITY RESOLUTION
FOR THE LAHONTAN REGION**



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1 Summary

Lahontan Water Board staff have prepared the Draft Resolution No. R6-2024-0010 Condemning Racism, Xenophobia, Bigotry, and Racial Injustice and Strengthening Commitment to Racial Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, Access, and Anti-Racism in the Lahontan Region (Draft RE Resolution) for the Lahontan Water Board to consider for adoption. In summary, the purpose of the Draft RE Resolution is to accept responsibility for confronting structural institutional racism and advancing racial equity within the Lahontan Water Board’s purview, and to align with the State Water Resources Control Board’s (State Water Board) ongoing efforts. The vision is that race should not predict a person’s access to or quality of water resources.

Staff are also in the early phases of developing a Racial Equity and Environmental Justice Action Plan (Action Plan). The purpose of the Draft RE Resolution and Action Plan is to formalize the Lahontan Region’s commitment and efforts to advance racial equity. The Action Plan will contain proposed actions, supporting ideas and measurements of success including metrics, milestones, data, and other indicators that can be used to indicate successful completion of actions or to track progress toward actions over time. Efforts toward development of the Action Plan are anticipated to increase after adoption of the Draft RE Resolution.

2 Discussion

2.1 Background

In California, race is a predictor of access to, and the quality of, the governmental services a person receives, including access to safe, clean water for drinking and affordable services to support sanitation as well as wastewater collection, treatment, and reuse. In fact, race is the strongest predictor of water and sanitation access. The [California Environmental Protection Agency’s 2021 Pollution and Prejudice StoryMap](#)¹ and the Office of Environmental Health Hazard and Assessment (OEHHA) [CalEnviroScreen](#)² data analyses demonstrate that historically redlined neighborhoods are “generally associated with worse environmental conditions and greater population vulnerability to the effects of pollution today.” In addition, Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) communities are overrepresented in the neighborhoods that are the most environmentally degraded.

In 2018, the California Environmental Protection Agency developed a Plan of Action for Racial Equity (PARE). The three main PARE Goals include the following: 1) increase workforce equity in recruitment, hiring, retention, and promotion, 2) enhance workforce capacity in formal and informal training, and 3) expand language access to services and resources.

In fall 2020, the State Water Board convened a Water Boards Racial Equity Team to advance racial equity for the communities that the Water Boards serve, and internally within the organization. The State Water Boards’ Racial Equity Team was comprised

¹ <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/f167b251809c43778a2f9f040f43d2f5>

² <https://oehha.ca.gov/calenviroscreen/report/calenviroscreen-40>

of staff representing various divisions, offices, and regions from all levels of the organization. The team was tasked with three major priorities: 1) establish a foundation of internal and external engagement that values listening and collaboration to drive action; 2) draft a resolution on racial equity to be considered for adoption by the State Water Board and leveraged by the nine Regional Water Quality Control Boards (Regional Water Boards) to adopt their own resolutions; and 3) develop racial equity strategies and action plans to drive efforts for the coming years.

On November 16, 2021, the State Water Board adopted Resolution No. 2021-0050, Condemning Racism, Xenophobia, Bigotry, and Racial Injustice and Strengthening Commitment to Racial Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, Access, and Anti-Racism (State Water Board Resolution). The State Water Board Resolution acknowledged the role racism has played in creating inequities in affordability and access to clean and safe water; committed to advancing racial equity within the State Water Board and the communities it serves; directed its staff to develop a racial equity action plan; and encouraged the nine Regional Water Quality Control Boards to adopt similar resolutions.

On January 18, 2023, State Water Board staff presented an informational item to the State Water Board on their Racial Equity Action Plan. The State Water Board's Racial Equity Action Plan does not expand or modify the Water Boards' existing authorities, but rather it is a compilation of actions intended to advance the State Water Board's efforts to create a future where we equitably preserve, enhance, and restore California's water resources and drinking water for all Californians, regardless of race, and where race is not a predictor of professional outcomes for Water Boards employees. The Racial Equity Action Plan sets goals for the State Water Board to address racial inequities and identifies metrics to measure progress. The State Water Board's webpage on [Racial Equity Information and Resources](#) includes links to the State Water Board's Racial Equity Resolution and Racial Equity Action Plan, as well as racial equity-related definitions, frequently asked questions, and references.³

Lahontan Water Board Racial Equity Working Group

In fall 2022, the Lahontan Water Board Executive Officer convened a staff led Racial Equity Working Group (REWG) to identify and prioritize opportunities to integrate racial equity into Lahontan Water Board programs and practices. The REWG is staff-led, and members have all volunteered to participate in the group. REWG members have completed tasks through a discretionary resource effort above and beyond their normal assignments and responsibilities.

The REWG's focus is to increase employee awareness, conduct internal and external engagement to identify and prioritize opportunities to advance racial equity, and to develop a Draft RE Resolution (Attachment 1) and a Racial Equity and Environmental Justice Action Plan (Action Plan). The purpose of the Draft RE Resolution and future

³ https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/racial_equity/information-and-resources.html

Action Plan is to formalize the Lahontan Region’s commitment and efforts to advance racial equity and environmental justice for our Region.

From March 2023 through February 2024, the REWG sought internal engagement through All-Staff meeting presentations, anonymous surveys, and program-specific discussions. An update on REWG efforts was provided as an Executive Officer’s Report at the August 2023 Lahontan Water Board Meeting. In October 2023, an initial draft of the Draft RE Resolution was shared internally with all Region 6 staff and the REWG worked to address concerns and make changes to the draft through a transparent process. The goal of this effort was to provide a variety of opportunities for all employees to give meaningful input regarding racial equity at the Lahontan Water Board.

2.2 Human Right to Water

The Draft RE Resolution affirms our commitment to uphold California Water Code section 106.3, California’s human right to water law, which establishes a state policy that every human being has the right to safe, clean, affordable, and accessible water adequate for human consumption, cooking, and sanitary purposes and directs state agencies to consider this policy when adopting regulations pertinent to those uses of water. California Water Code section 106.3, subdivision (a) states that it is the policy of the State of California “that every human being has the right to safe, clean, affordable, and accessible water adequate for human consumption, cooking, and sanitation purposes.” The Draft RE Resolution recognizes that individuals from BIPOC communities are disproportionately affected by lack of safe, clean, and affordable drinking water, and reaffirms our commitment to prioritize and uphold California’s human right to water for every human being in California.

2.3 Environmental Justice

Racial equity and environmental justice are closely connected, and the Water Boards’ mission is strengthened by a commitment to racial equity and environmental justice. Environmental Justice principles call for the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income in the development, adoption, implementation, and enforcement of all environmental laws, regulations, and policies that affect every community’s natural resources and the places people live, work, play, and learn. Racial equity occurs when race can no longer be used to predict life outcomes, and outcomes for all groups are improved. The Lahontan Water Board’s Draft RE Resolution is in alignment with the Lahontan Water Board’s historical actions focused on environmental justice and engaging with underrepresented communities.

At the Lahontan Water Board’s June 18, 2014 meeting in Bishop, California, an [overview of environmental justice](#) was provided by State and Lahontan Water Board staff that included presentations by two Integrated Regional Water Management Program (IRWMP) groups on their efforts to evaluate the need of and provide assistance to small, disadvantaged communities. Discussions at the June 2014 Board Meeting led to development of a January 2015 [Environmental Justice Implementation](#)

[Staff Report](#) that provided additional details on how the Lahontan Water Board is implementing environmental justice and identified the needs for more complete implementation to ensure *the fair treatment of people of all races, cultures, and incomes with respect to the development, adoption, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws and policies documents*. The January 2015 [Environmental Justice Implementation Staff Report](#) included eleven recommendations for implementation by the Lahontan Water Board:

Recommendation	Status Update
1. Identify an EJ liaison.	Complete. Anna Garcia and Melissa Thaw serve as our Equity and Justice Coordinator and Alternate, respectively, for Region 6.
2. Add an EJ contact and EJ links to website.	Complete. Environmental Justice Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board (ca.gov)
3. Train staff on EJ.	In progress. Several Lahontan staff members have completed courses, including Advancing Racial Equity at the Water Boards and Implicit Bias, offered through the Water Boards Training Services.
4. Identify Lahontan staffing needs to coordinate with disadvantaged communities (DACs) and tribes.	In progress. Lahontan staff implement AB52 consultation and AB2108 to coordinate with DACs. Danny McClure serves as our Tribal Coordinator for Region 6.
5. Identify Lahontan staffing needs to facilitate implementation of Proposition 1 for (1) additional permitting for ecosystem and watershed restoration projects, (2) IRWM support, (3) additional permitting for recycling projects, and (4) technical assistance and project oversight for groundwater cleanup projects.	While disbursement of Prop 1 funding is complete, stakeholders in the Lahontan Region received funding for stormwater, water recycling, and groundwater projects, as well as small community grant funding for drinking water projects.
6. Consider adding a subsistence fishing and cultural use beneficial uses to the Basin Plan.	In progress. At the April 18, 2024, Lahontan Water Board Meeting included a Public Hearing on Draft Substitute Environmental Documentation and Draft Basin Plan Amendment to Designate Tribal Beneficial Uses in the Mono Basin .
7. Continue to hold Board meetings in the areas most affected by Board decisions.	In progress. To reach the greatest number of stakeholders, the Lahontan Water Board holds Board meetings at several locations across the Lahontan Region throughout the year. Meeting locations generally include

Recommendation	Status Update
	Victorville, Barstow, Apple Valley, Bishop, Lee Vining, Truckee, and South Lake Tahoe.
8. Continue to support IRWM groups in their efforts to assist DACs.	In progress. The Lahontan Water Board partners with the Mojave IRWM Group, Tahoe Sierra IRWM Group, Transition Habitat, and the Truckee River Watershed Council. As schedules allow, Lahontan staff attend meetings of the Mojave Water Agency Technical Advisory Committee, Antelope Valley IRWM Group, South Tahoe Public Utilities District Stakeholder Advisory Group, Owens Valley Groundwater Authority, Indian Wells Valley Groundwater Authority, and others.
9. Support and approve Supplemental Environmental Projects that benefit DACs.	In progress. Since 2015, more than \$1.6M in funding has been provided for Supplemental Environmental Projects that benefit DACs and severely disadvantaged communities (SDACs) in the Lahontan Region.
10. Continue to host community technical and educational sessions and conduct outreach efforts.	Lahontan staff routinely engage with community members at monthly Hinkley Community Breakfast events, a community with a long history of environmental justice issues. In April 2023, the United States Geological Survey (USGS) completed a multiyear study that estimates naturally occurring chromium-6 concentrations in the groundwater for the environmental justice community of Hinkley, California. Dr. John Izbicki, lead USGS Scientist for the study, provided a question and answers presentation on the findings of the study at the Lahontan Water Board Meeting on August 30, 2023. Dr. Izbicki also presented the study during a Hinkley Community Breakfast Workshop at the Hinkley Community and Senior Center on August 12, 2023. Lahontan staff participated in the Workshop and offered outreach in English and Spanish to encourage Hinkley community members to provide input on the revision of a Cleanup and Abatement Order that will establish chromium-6 background concentrations and targets for the completion of the PG&E remediation project in Hinkley. Lahontan staff

Recommendation	Status Update
	also participate in career fairs hosted by local colleges and universities, including the Cal Poly Pomona Korean American Scientists and Engineers Associations (KSEA) in September 2023 and the California State University San Bernardino (CSUSB) College of Social and Behavioral Sciences Spring 2024 Career Fair. In addition, Lahontan staff participate in the annual Water Conservation Festival hosted at Spring Valley Lake by San Bernardino County Public Works and more recently, Lahontan staff joined in the Wonders of Water and Environmental Education (WOWEE) event hosted by the Lake Tahoe Unified School District.
11. Continue to provide written materials in Spanish and provide translations at public meetings where needed.	In progress. The Lahontan Water Board consistently provides meeting agendas in Spanish and provides Spanish interpretation services during meetings, as appropriate.

The Lahontan Water Board strives to implement regulatory activities and water quality projects in a manner that ensures the fair treatment of all people, including BIPOC, underrepresented and disadvantaged communities. Furthermore, the Lahontan Water Board is committed to providing all stakeholders the opportunity to participate in the public process and provide meaningful input to decisions that affect their communities.

2.4 Climate Change

The Lahontan Region, like the rest of the State of California, faces the threat and the effects of climate change for the foreseeable and distant future. The Lahontan Water Board recognizes that the effects of climate change and associated extreme hydrologic conditions have a disproportionate negative impact on BIPOC and disadvantaged communities. Current and future climate impacts include increasing frequency of extreme weather events, including extended droughts and prolonged fire seasons with larger and more intense fires. Changes in hydrology include more precipitation falling as rain versus snow, more extreme storm events, declining snowpack, and changes in the timing and volume of peak runoff. Vulnerabilities of water resources include, but are not limited to, subsidence from overdrafting of groundwater aquifers, erosion, flooding, related risks to water and wastewater infrastructure and operations, and reduced groundwater availability coupled with the potential for concentrated groundwater pollutants. To proactively prepare and respond to climate change, the Lahontan Water Board is implementing the Lahontan Water Board’s Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation Strategy Resolution No. R6T-2019-0277 (Climate Change Strategy) which supports utilizing regulatory tools (such as policy, permitting, monitoring, and

enforcement) and working with external organizations or communities to improve groundwater supply and quality, protect headwaters, floodplains, and riparian areas, and ensure the reliability of drinking water and wastewater infrastructure in the face of extreme weather events. The Climate Change Strategy is consistent with the [Governor's Executive Order B-30-15](#)⁴ and the State Water Board's [Comprehensive Response to Climate Change Resolution No. 2017-0012](#)⁵. The Draft RE Resolution includes Finding #16 to describe climate change impacts and Resolved #9 that commits to implementation of the Climate Change Strategy to address, in part, the disproportionate effects of extreme hydrologic conditions.

2.5 Next Steps - Racial Equity and Environmental Justice Action Plan

The next step is to develop a Racial Equity and Environmental Justice Action Plan (Action Plan) that sets goals for the Lahontan Water Board to address racial inequities and environmental justice within the Board's regulatory purview with respect to water quality in the Lahontan Region. The Action Plan will contain proposed actions, supporting ideas and measurements of success including metrics, milestones, data, and other indicators that can be used to indicate successful completion of actions or to track progress toward actions over time. We aim to develop the Action Plan in collaboration with tribes, stakeholders, and the communities most impacted by racial inequities and environmental justice issues. Staff intend to consider the State Water Board's Racial Equity Action Plan as a starting point and develop a process to seek out and incorporate community input development of our region-specific Action Plan. In addition, staff will also consider input provided in public comments on the Draft RE Resolution related to the Action Plan. Staff will prioritize and schedule the development of the Action Plan, depending on available resources, and report on progress one year after the Lahontan Water Board adopts the Draft RE Resolution, and will report on implementation progress annually thereafter.

Staff will also continue efforts to implement and achieve the eleven recommendations identified in the January 2015 [Environmental Justice Implementation Staff Report](#). While we have implemented actions to achieve several of the recommendations, there is still more work to do to further Environmental Justice in our Region. We will document and incorporate this work in the Action Plan.

3 Conclusion

Lahontan Water Board staff are committed to furthering racial equity and environmental justice as part of our ongoing activities to implement our water quality mission in coordination with our statewide Water Board counterparts, environmental justice partners, tribes, and the community members and regulated entities we serve. The adoption of the Lahontan Water Board Draft RE Resolution is an important step towards

⁴ <https://www.library.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/GovernmentPublications/executive-order-proclamation/39-B-30-15.pdf>

⁵ https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/board_decisions/adopted_orders/resolutions/2017/rs2017_0012.pdf

demonstrating this commitment, to be followed by an implementable and measurable Action Plan. Moving forward, the Lahontan Water Board will implement a stepwise iterative and transparent approach to ensure racial equity and environmental justice considerations and perspectives are effectively integrated into our organizational mission, goals, values, and culture.

4 Staff Recommendation

Staff recommends the Lahontan Water Board adopt Racial Equity Resolution No. R6-2024-0010, as proposed.