



COLORADO RIVER BASIN REGIONAL WATER QUALITY CONTROL BOARD

WATER QUALITY STANDARDS PROGRAM FACT SHEET

THE COLORADO RIVER BASIN REGIONAL WATER QUALITY CONTROL BOARD

The California State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board) and nine Regional Water Quality Control Boards are responsible for the protection of surface water and groundwater quality across California.

The Colorado River Basin Regional Water Quality Control Board (Regional Board) makes water quality decisions for the Colorado River Basin Region, which covers California's most arid area. Despite its dry climate, the region contains two water bodies of State and national significance: the Colorado River and the Salton Sea. The Colorado River irrigates more than 600,000 acres of productive farmland in Imperial, Coachella, Bard, and Palo Verde Valleys, and provides drinking water for millions of people in Southern California. The Regional Board also prioritizes the following activities:

- Developing policies addressing regional water quality concerns by:
 - Developing water quality objectives to protect the beneficial uses of surface and ground waters
 - Creating pollution control plans, or Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs)
- Implementing statewide programs and policies developed by the State Water Board
- Collaborating with other parties and agencies to address water quality control programs
- Adopting permits that regulate discharges to water and land including Waste Discharge Requirements and National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permits
- Conducting outreach and prioritizing public and tribal input relating to water quality issues



Regional Water Board Staff sampling at the Species Conservation Habitats

WATER QUALITY STANDARDS

Basin Plan: The Water Quality Control Plan for the Colorado River Basin, also known as the Basin Plan, is designed to preserve and enhance water quality in the region and to protect the beneficial uses of all regional waters for the benefit of current and future generations. The Basin Plan outlines the Region's designated beneficial uses for regional waters, water quality objectives to protect beneficial uses, and implementation programs to achieve the objectives. It also includes legislative policies and plans, water quality issues, and water quality monitoring efforts. Changes to the basin plan require scientific peer review and public review. State and federal law require a review of the regional Basin Plan through a Triennial Review every three years.

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Triennial Review: In the Triennial Review, the region identifies areas of the Basin Plan that require changes or where standards may need to be adopted. The Regional Water Board requests public feedback through the public participation process. Staff create a list of basin planning projects based on regional criteria. The highest priority projects from this list establish the workplan for the Basin Planning and TMDL programs for the next three-year period. The list is prioritized using criteria such as protecting Salton Sea water quality, addressing environmental justice or tribal issues, addressing public concerns, time sensitivity, addressing 303(d) listed impairments, and protecting or designating beneficial uses. The 2026 Triennial Review will be adopted during the November 2026 Board Meeting. Please visit <https://bit.ly/r7-tr> for more information.

Basin Plan Amendments (BPAs) Under Development in Fiscal Year 2026 - 2027

- **Beneficial Use Designation for Salton Sea Constructed Aquatic Habitats:** The California Natural Resources Agency is coordinating and building constructed aquatic habitats as part of the Salton Sea Program. This BPA identifies and designates unique beneficial uses for these aquatic habitats, as they have different uses from the Salton Sea, its tributaries, and potentially each other.
- **Use Attainability Analysis to Modify Beneficial Uses in the Salton Sea:** If a beneficial use has changed, the Regional Water Board assesses the water body through several factors through a use attainability analysis. A Use Attainability Analysis is an evidence-based, structured scientific assessment of the physical, chemical, biological, and economic factors affecting the attainment of uses relating to the development and survival of aquatic life, consumption of aquatic life, and recreational uses. This BPA will review ecosystem, wildlife, and water quality data for the Salton Sea to replace the Warm Freshwater Habitat designated beneficial use with the Inland Saline Habitat beneficial use.

Integrated Report: The federal Clean Water Act requires California to report on the quality of its surface waterbodies every two years. The Integrated Report for 2026 includes a list of impaired and threatened waters and a report of the water quality of all assessed waterbody segments in the Colorado River Basin. When a water body is listed as impaired, we can develop restoration projects. The 2026 Integrated Report was finalized in April 2026. For more information, please visit: <https://bit.ly/r7-303d-list>.



Regional Water Board staff sampling on the water at the Salton Sea

Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs): The federal Clean Water Act requires states to identify and list waterbodies that do not meet water quality objectives and are not supporting designated beneficial uses. States must prioritize listed water bodies and develop control plans, called Total Maximum Daily Loads, to improve or protect impaired waters. TMDLs are the means to attain and maintain water quality standards for the impaired water body. This is done by analyzing the sources of pollution and how to address these sources to achieve water quality objectives. These include point sources (i.e., wastewater), nonpoint sources (i.e., agriculture), and natural sources (i.e., wildlife). Please visit <http://bit.ly/r7-tmdl> for more information.

Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) Projects Under Development for Fiscal Year 2026 - 2027

- **Alamo River Chloride and Indicator Bacteria TMDL:** This TMDL addresses chloride, *E. coli*, and enterococcus indicator bacteria in the Alamo River. Some sources include agriculture and wildlife. This TMDL was adopted by the Regional Water Board on May 12, 2026.
- **New River Ammonia TMDL:** This TMDL addresses the ammonia impairment in the New River, which impacts aquatic life and human health. This TMDL will be considered by the Regional Water Board by July 2026.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

If you would like to learn more about any of the proposed activities described above or have any questions concerning surface water policy activities, please contact Emma McCorkle at

Emma.McCorkle@Waterboards.ca.gov. Please visit: <https://bit.ly/r7-basin-planning> for more information.