

**CALIFORNIA REGIONAL WATER QUALITY CONTROL BOARD, LAHONTAN  
REGION  
RESOLUTION NO. R6-2025-0026**

**2025 TRIENNIAL REVIEW OF THE WATER QUALITY CONTROL PLAN FOR  
THE LAHONTAN REGION**

WHEREAS, the California Regional Water Quality Control Board, Lahontan Region (Lahontan Water Board) finds that:

1. The Water Quality Control Plan for the Lahontan Region (Basin Plan) took effect March 31, 1995, and has been amended from time to time since that date.
2. The Basin Plan contains the Lahontan Region's water quality standards, which consist of beneficial uses of waters in the Lahontan Region, water quality objectives, as well as an anti-degradation policy. The Basin Plan also contains a program of implementation, including but not limited to, control measures necessary to protect water quality for the beneficial uses.
3. Consistent with section 303(c) of the federal Clean Water Act, section 131.20 of title 40 of the Code of Federal Regulations, and section 13240 of the California Water Code (Water Code), the Water Board has conducted its triennial review of the Basin Plan, including a review of all applicable water quality standards (Triennial Review).
4. The Water Board prepared a document entitled "Candidate Projects for the 2025 Lahontan Water Quality Control Plan Triennial Review," dated November 2024, describing potential Basin Plan projects.
5. The Water Board created an online survey to collect public input on the 2025 Triennial Review and candidate projects (December 6, 2024 through January 10, 2025) and received a single comment requesting the Water Board prioritize a project to designate Hot Creek as an Outstanding National Resource Water.
6. Water Board staff developed a draft 2025 Triennial Review staff report, April 3, 2025 (Staff Report), describing the 2025 Triennial Review process and the draft 2025 Triennial Review List of Prioritized Basin Planning Projects (Prioritized List) to be pursued over the next three fiscal years (2025/2026, 2026/2027, and 2027/2028). The Staff Report describes Basin Plan projects to protect and enhance water quality, the relative priority of these projects, the projects that can be undertaken with existing resources, and projects that cannot be undertaken with existing resources along with the resources needed to undertake and complete them.

7. On April 3, 2025 the Water Board provided notice of a public hearing on the Triennial Review for July 9, 2025, and provided the public with an opportunity to provide written comments on the Triennial Review. The Water Board received written comment letters during the public comment period (April 3, 2025 through May 5, 2025). The Water Board considered and responded to those comment letters. Based on the comments, the Water Board made revisions to the Staff Report and Prioritized List.
8. The Water Board held a public hearing on July 9, 2025, and heard public comments on the 2025 Triennial Review, including the Prioritized List. Documents relevant to the hearing, including the Staff Report and Prioritized List, proposed Resolution, and Response to Comments document were made public 30 days prior to the hearing. The Water Board has carefully considered all public comments.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT:

1. Consistent with Water Code section 13240, Clean Water Act section 303(c), and 40 C.F.R. part 131.20, and after considering public comments, the Water Board hereby concludes the Triennial Review and adopts the 2025 Triennial Review List of Prioritized Basin Planning Projects;
2. The areas of the Basin Plan not identified as needing investigation and possible revision are hereby affirmed as adequate. However, the Water Board's Triennial Review actions do not preclude other revisions to the Water Quality Control Plan for the Lahontan Region that may become necessary before the next Triennial Review; and
3. The entire Basin Plan shall remain in effect until such time when appropriate and specific amendments are adopted by the Water Board and approved by the appropriate review authorities.

**CERTIFICATION**

I, Ben Letton, Executive Officer, do hereby certify that the foregoing is a full, true, and correct copy of a Resolution duly and regularly adopted at a meeting of the California Regional Water Quality Control Board, Lahontan Region, held on July 9, 2025.



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BEN LETTON  
EXECUTIVE OFFICER

# 2025 Triennial Review List of Prioritized Basin Planning Priorities

The order the issues appear in does not indicate the priority of ranking within each category.

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## List Summary

### Triennial Review Priorities

- Update Total Nitrogen WQO for Hot Creek
- Designation of Tribal Beneficial Uses – Mono Basin
- Designation of Tribal Beneficial Uses – Waterbodies To Be Determined
- Editorial Clean-up and format update of the Basin Plan
- Expand Project Categories in Table 4.1-1

### Regional Issues in Reserve

- Update Aquatic Pesticide Prohibition Exemption
- Explore Designating Hot Creek as an ONRW

### Issues not Recommended for Resource Prioritization

- Update the Regionwide Turbidity WQO
- Setbacks from Wetlands or other Waters
- Update WQOs for Salinity (TDS, chloride)
- Evaluate and Update WQOs for ammonia

## Issue Descriptions

### High Priority

#### **Update Total Nitrogen Site Specific Water Quality Objective at Hot Creek**

**Project underway – 2022 Triennial Review Priority**

**Estimated Personnel-Years: 1.0**

**Estimated duration to Lahontan Water Board consideration: 2 years**

This project would consider modifying the Total Nitrogen site specific water quality objective for Hot Creek. The Hot Creek water quality objective for Total Nitrogen (0.3 mg/L, annual average) is routinely exceeded. The NPDES permit for the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) Hot Creek Hatchery (Board Order No. R6V-2021-0014) contains an effluent limitation for total nitrogen of 0.30 mg/L as an annual average. The Lahontan Water Board issued a Time Schedule Order to the hatchery. Compliance with the Time Schedule Order exempts the Discharger from mandatory minimum penalties (MMPs) for violations of the final effluent limitation found in Board Order No. R6V-2021-0014 for total nitrogen. During the 2022 Triennial Review, the Water Board prioritized creation of an updated TN WQO for Hot Creek. Since being prioritized in the 2022 Triennial Review, basin planning staff began investigations in support of a possible Basin Plan amendment. This includes obtaining data through field work and by requests to CDFW. The site includes a number of complicated factors. Among these, water in the springs, from which the hatchery raceways are fed, fails to meet the Hot Creek WQO. The TN WQO applies to a segment of the river that extends downstream of the Hot Creek Geologic Site, where boiling water bubbling up from the creek bed, fumaroles and periodic geyser eruptions occur, complicating the water chemistry. Additionally, there are potential nitrogen inputs to upgradient groundwaters. For these reasons, basin planning staff are coordinating with multiple regulatory programs.

#### **Designation of Tribal Beneficial Uses – Mono Basin**

**Recurring Issue (2018 Triennial Review and 2022 Triennial Review)**

**Estimated Personnel-Years: 0.5**

**Estimated duration to Lahontan Water Board consideration: 0.5-1 year**

In 2017 the State Water Board adopted definitions for three new beneficial uses and, at the same time, new mercury water quality objectives to protect those beneficial uses and other specified BUs. Two of the uses are Tribal-specific (Tribal Culture and Tradition (CUL); Tribal Subsistence Fishing(T-SUB)); the third (Subsistence Fishing (SUB)) is not Tribal focused but generally protects disadvantaged communities. The Lahontan Water Board prioritized Tribal Beneficial Use designations in the 2018 and 2022 Triennial Reviews. Staff have been developing a Basin Plan amendment to designate Tribal Beneficial Uses in the Mono Basin (Mono TBU Project) for several years. Prioritizing this issue would continue the effort to designate TBU in the Mono

Basin, something staff anticipate bringing to the Lahontan Water Board for consideration in the 2025-2026 fiscal year.

**Designation of Tribal Beneficial Uses – Waterbodies To Be Determined  
Recurring Issue (2018 Triennial Review and 2022 Triennial Review)**

**Estimated Personnel-Years: 1.5-5**

**Estimated duration to Lahontan Water Board consideration: 2-10 years**

The Lahontan Water Board prioritized Tribal Beneficial Use designations in the 2018 and 2022 Triennial Reviews. A number of Tribal governments (e.g. Bridgeport Indian Colony, Bishop Paiute Tribe, Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California, Cedarville Rancheria, etc.) have expressed interest in the Lahontan Water Board designating TBU to waters of importance to their people, with several of the tribes sharing documents identifying specific waterbodies for designation. The basin planning team will consult with tribes towards designating waters with TBU(s), either in a single Basin Plan amendment or multiple amendments. Staff will work with the tribe(s) to identify waters for designation, identify which TBU to designate, identify supporting information for the designation and update the Basin Plan to include the TBU designations. This issue is termed “Waterbodies To Be Determined”, however in future discussions the Basin Plan amendments will be referred to by the waterbody or basin names.

**Editorial Clean-up and format Basin Plan Amendment**

**Recurring Issue**

**Estimated Personnel-Years: 0.5**

**Estimated duration to Lahontan Water Board consideration: 1.5 years**

Update the format of the Basin Plan, update outdated information, and other potential changes to make the Basin Plan more user friendly. The Basin Plan was last updated, wholesale, in 1995 (USEPA approval 2000). It contains outdated information, sometimes about outside programs. In other instances, there are typos or other edits that can be made to clarify the content without changing the meaning or purpose of the text, including formatting changes, or changes to help with ADA accessibility. (Such edits can be termed non-substantive, or not requiring CEQA analysis, while acting to improve the usability of the Basin Plan.) An example of a formatting change already undertaken by several other Water Boards is converting the text from two columns to one. Another suggested improvement is to add the coordinates to go along with the arrows for the maps in Chapter 3 Water Quality Objectives, that accompany site specific objective tables. Such improvements could be made one chapter at a time, in combination with another BPA, or all at once. Improving clarity of requirements is known to help in improving compliance - and this would likely be the case for our Basin Plan.

**Expand Project Categories on Table 4.1-1 - LOW THREAT DISCHARGES THAT  
ARE CONDITIONALLY EXEMPT FROM WASTE DISCHARGE PROHIBITIONS**

**New Issue for 2025 Triennial Review**

**Estimated Personnel-Years: 1.0**

**Estimated duration to Lahontan Water Board consideration: 3 years**

The Lahontan Water Board can grant exemptions from waste discharge prohibitions that allow permitted discharge to surface waters. Table 4.1-1 includes a suite of low-threat discharge categories that are conditionally exempt from waste discharge prohibitions. This issue would consider expanding the project categories in Table 4.1-1, so that more project types could be exempt from prohibitions in this manner, thereby increasing efficiency and reducing resource load dedicated to projects that do not pose a high risk of water quality impact. Examples of categories to consider include low impact restoration projects such as Beaver Dam Analogs that are hand implemented, culvert replacement, reconstructed piers, installation of buoy anchor blocks and fish habitat pyramids, and installation of revetment walls. Limitation on size or type of each category could be included. An update of Table 4.1-1 would employ the expertise of the Dredge and Fill program staff, and possibly other programs, as well.

## Regional Issues in Reserve

### **Update Aquatic Pesticide Prohibition Exemption**

**New Issue for 2025 Triennial Review**

**Estimated Personnel-Years: 2.0**

**Estimated duration to Lahontan Water Board consideration: 4-6 years**

This issue would consider reviewing and revising the Aquatic Pesticide Prohibition and Exemption Criteria. The Basin Plan limits pesticide applications subject to the exemption to those conducted for purposes that serve the public interest. However, the exemption process creates a resource intensive process that adds time and cost to beneficial projects that may protect public health and safety (e.g., algae blooms), or provide ecological preservation (e.g., aquatic invasive species eradication). This project would update the Aquatic Pesticide Prohibition and Exemption Criteria to increase clarity regarding the applicability of the exemptions; further define terms and the scope of the required considerations; and make other changes that would allow the Lahontan Water Board to more efficiently address water quality issues that are accelerating, in part, by factors associated with climate change and warming temperatures.

### **Explore Designating Hot Creek as an Outstanding National Resource Water**

**New Issue for 2025 Triennial Review**

**Estimated Personnel-Years: 2.5**

**Estimated duration to Lahontan Water Board consideration: 3-4 years**

This issue was proposed as a basin planning project by the organization Trout Unlimited (TU) during the Triennial Review public solicitation period ending January 10, 2025. TU requested the Lahontan Water Board prioritize designating Hot Creek (including Little Hot Creek) as an Outstanding National Resource Water (ONRW) due to its exceptional ecological significance and esteemed trout fishery. Hot Creek is located in the Long Valley Caldera and receives water from Mammoth Creek and springs supplying the Hot Creek Fish Hatchery before flowing into Owens River. Other uses of the Hot Creek area include recreation, grazing, and geothermal power generation. States have the ability to designate waterbodies as ONRW, a designation that affords the waterbody the highest level of water quality protection under the antidegradation policy. Where high quality

waters constitute an Outstanding National Resource, that water quality shall be maintained and protected. States may allow discharges which result in temporary and short-term changes in water quality, provided those changes do not permanently degrade water quality or result in water quality lower than that necessary to protect the existing uses in the ONRW. The term “temporary and short-term” is undefined and is dependent on the activity involved. “Temporary” and “short-term” timeframes are generally thought of as weeks or months, not years.

The State of California has two ONRWs, Lake Tahoe and Mono Lake, both in the Lahontan Region. These waters were designated as ONRW by the State Water Resources Control Board, and the designations were done through different processes. While the Lahontan Water Board and the State Water Resources Control Board do not have an established guidance or protocol for ONRW designation, other Regional Boards (North Coast and Central Valley) have prioritized investigating ONRW designations as a result of their own Triennial Review processes.

### Issues Not Recommended for Resource Prioritization

#### **Amend the Turbidity Water Quality Objective to Project or Situation-Specific Tolerances**

**New Issue for 2025 Triennial Review**

**Estimated Personnel-Years: 1.0**

**Estimated duration to Lahontan Water Board consideration: 2 years**

Consider updating the turbidity water quality objectives to account for the episodic nature of turbidity and to improve permitting of restoration projects. The existing regionwide turbidity water quality objective reads, “Waters shall be free of changes in turbidity that cause nuisance or adversely affect the water for beneficial uses. Increases in turbidity shall not exceed natural levels by more than 10 percent.” Natural levels of turbidity vary depending on such factors as precipitation, spring runoff contribution, and flow levels. However, many of the region’s streams and lakes have very low ambient turbidity level in the low single digits Nephelometric turbidity units (NTU). In a permitting context, having a hard limit of an increase of 10 percent over a pre-project measurement severely limits staff’s ability to provide useful permit requirements that both protect beneficial uses, allow for project implementation, and allow for a limited amount of short-duration turbidity to realize the long-term benefit of the restoration project. While the Lahontan Water Board has been able to permit restoration projects, for example, an amendment to the water quality objective could improve staff ability to permit environmentally positive projects, thereby aligning with California’s Cutting the Green Tape initiative. For example, language, see the North Coast Region’s Turbidity WQO (emphasis added), “Turbidity shall not be increased more than 20 percent above naturally occurring background levels. *Allowable zones of dilution within which higher percentages can be tolerated may be defined for specific discharges upon the issuance of discharge permits or waiver thereof.*”

#### **Setbacks from Wetlands or other Waters**

**Issue identified in 2022 Triennial Review as sub-issue of *Riparian, Floodplain, and Wetland Protection Updates***

**Estimated Personnel-Years: 2.5**

**Estimated duration to Lahontan Water Board consideration: 5 years**

Consider developing setbacks from wetlands or other waters, such as groundwater infiltration zones in the more arid parts of the Lahontan Region. This issue was originally proposed to increase protection of sensitive waters and provide source water protection in response to anticipated climate change impacts. Requiring setbacks would likely be in the form of new discharge prohibitions, perhaps using the Tahoe Basin and Truckee River watershed prohibitions as models. Creating new prohibitions could be quite controversial and would be a considerable lift in terms of staff resources and public process. As heard at the October 2 Board meeting agenda item on Climate Change, this issue needs additional work to determine if a Basin Plan amendment is the appropriate path forward, or if these protections are better addressed through other methods.

**Update WQOs for Salinity (TDS, Cl, etc.)**

**Recurring Issue**

**Estimated Personnel-Years: 1.25**

**Estimated duration to Lahontan Water Board consideration: 3 years**

Consider amending water quality objectives for multiple salinity-related constituents to be more realistically attainable, yet still protective of beneficial uses. The Basin Plan has numerous site-specific water quality objectives for total dissolved solids, electrical conductivity, chloride and other naturally occurring salts which are well below (in some cases orders of magnitude below) drinking water, aquatic life, agricultural or other beneficial use protection-based criteria. These objectives are not always attained, resulting in several impairments on the State's 303(d) list of impaired waters. These impairments may not, in many cases, represent a likely threat to beneficial uses, and the water quality objectives can be amended to be more attainable, consistent with the State's Water Quality Control Policy for Addressing Impaired Waters (SWRCB 2005).

Updating salinity-related objectives has been a longstanding request for the Susan River, as discussed in the 2022 Triennial Review. Updating these objectives could be appropriate in multiple other watersheds as well. Addressing salinity objectives in one or more Basin Plan Amendments with a large scope could be the most efficient way to address this issue.

**Evaluate and Update WQOs for ammonia**

**New Issue for 2025 Triennial Review**

**Estimated Personnel-Years: 1.25**

**Estimated duration to Lahontan Water Board consideration: 5 years**

Consider amending water quality objectives for ammonia to Clean Water Act section 304(a) recommended criteria. In 2013 the USEPA updated the 1999 ammonia criteria for the protection of aquatic life from the toxic effects of ammonia in freshwater. The



2013 ammonia criteria vary based on pH and temperature and reflect the latest scientific knowledge on the toxicity of ammonia to freshwater aquatic life, including new data on sensitive freshwater mussels and gill-breathing snails. USEPA recommended a single national acute and a single national chronic criterion be applied to all waters rather than different criteria based on the presence or absence of mussels. However, these freshwater mussel species included in the 2013 ammonia criteria may be different than the freshwater mussel species in the Lahontan Region. The water quality standards regulation at 40 CFR § 131.11(b)(1)(ii) provides states with the opportunity to adopt water quality criteria that are "...modified to reflect site- specific conditions." As with any criteria, site-specific criteria must be based on a sound scientific rationale to protect the designated use and are subject to review and approval or disapproval by USEPA. The 2013 ammonia criteria provide recalculation procedures for site-specific criteria derivation. In the case of ammonia, where a state can demonstrate that mussels are not present on a site-specific basis, the recalculation procedure may be used to remove the mussel species from the national criteria dataset to better represent the species present at the site. This issue would involve evaluating the presence of mussel species in the Lahontan Region and possibly updating water quality objectives for ammonia in the region.