
North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board

Regional Water Quality Control Board North Coast Region

Staff Summary Report February 18-19, 2026

ITEM: 7

SUBJECT: North Coast Water Board Restoration Program Update, Accomplishments, and Outlook (Jake Shannon)

BOARD ACTION: This is an informational item; no action will be taken by the Board.

BACKGROUND: The North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board (North Coast Water Board) is unique among the Water Boards in that we have a Restoration Program, a Restoration Policy, and a dedicated Restoration Specialist, that are all focused on supporting aquatic habitat restoration projects in the North Coast Region. Increasing the pace and scale of restoration actions has been a priority for the North Coast Water Board and its staff for many years. Our approach to restoration is both an integral component and the result of our Vision Statement: “Healthy Watersheds, Effective Regulation, Strong Partnerships”. Maintaining healthy watersheds and the sensitive species that they support requires restoration actions to address legacy impacts, consumptive water use, and the effects of climate change. Effective regulations require balancing efficiency with protectiveness to remove barriers to restoration while avoiding unintended consequences. And finally, strong partnerships with tribes, other agencies, non-governmental organizations, and landowners are vital to achieving our shared goals.

The purpose of this informational item is to provide an update to the Board on the work that the Restoration Program has achieved over the years and what we are working on currently. It will start with a brief dive into the Program’s inception, then a high-level overview of what we do to support restoration in the north coast, followed by several case study projects that showcase how we help our restoration partners do the incredible work that they do, and then finally a brief show-and-tell of a tool that we’ve developed to help cultivate, prioritize, and leverage funding for restoration projects within our region.

The North Coast Water Board has been a progressive leader in the State's efforts to support restoration and has been well ahead of the curve in regard to how and what a regulatory agency can do to remove barriers to restoration. In 2014, the North Coast Water Board undertook a prioritization process to identify blind spots in our regulatory programs. Through that effort, we identified the need for a Restoration Specialist position. Soon after, in 2015, the Board adopted the Policy in Support of Restoration (Resolution No. R1-2015-0001), incorporating it as an amendment to the Water Quality Control Plan for the North Coast Region. The Restoration Policy is primarily a narrative expressing support for restoration and similar type projects. The Policy describes the importance of restoration projects for the protection, enhancement and recovery of beneficial uses; the obstacles that slow or preclude restoration actions; the legal and procedural requirements for permitting restoration projects; the ongoing North Coast Water Board effort to provide support towards the implementation of restoration projects; and direction to staff to continue to support restoration in the future.

Today, the California Natural Resources Agency, CalEPA, the Water Boards, and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife all recognize the hinderance that the regulatory process has created for restoration, and a paradigm shift has been occurring that advances support for these important activities, complementing the North Coast Water Board's approach to supporting restoration.

The Restoration Specialist is the program lead, but the Restoration Program is not a one-person shop. Many North Coast Water Board staff support the program by implementing the Restoration Policy as part of their positions in other programs. For example, our Surface Water Protection Program staff regularly review and issue permits for restoration projects, Forest Activities Program staff engage with U.S. Forest Service partners to prioritize and approve water quality improvement projects on federal land, and staff from the Planning and Stewardship Division provide technical support, cultivate projects in our priority watersheds, and manage 319h grants for restoration projects.

North Coast Water Board staff review and authorize many restoration projects each year. In roughly the past ten years, approximately 270 permits have been issued for restoration projects, providing Clean Water Act section 401 Water Quality Certifications, waste discharge requirements, and CEQA compliance coverage. During this information item, staff will showcase several examples of restoration projects which we have supported.

In 2022, North Coast Water Board staff developed our Water Quality Improvement Projects Catalog. The catalog is a tool to assist staff in cultivating, tracking, prioritizing, and leverage funding for restoration projects within our region. North Coast Water Board staff members have been assigned to engage with restoration partners who are active in specific watersheds. The cultivated projects are prioritized by how well they align with our restoration goals and are directed towards funding opportunities whenever possible, be that the 319h Grant Program, Caltrans TMDL project funding, Supplemental Environmental Project funding, or other outside funding sources.

In summary, the North Coast Water Board has been engaged in supporting restoration for many years and we're still leaders in that arena. We've helped create the regulatory tools that the state needs to facilitate meaningful change, and we're continually steering the paradigm shift required among staff statewide to use those tools to move the needle. We've accomplished a lot within the North Coast Region, but we're busier and more productive than ever, and are showing no signs of slowing down.

RECOMMENDATION: N/A

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS:

[Policy in Support of Restoration in the North Coast Region](https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/northcoast/water_issues/programs/basin_plan/161116/161115_Regional_Board_Resolution.pdf)

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