Introduction/Background

The Regional Water Quality Control Board (Regional Water Board) is responsible for reviewing the *Water Quality Control Plan for the North Coast Region* (Basin Plan), and is required to: 1) identify those portions of the Basin Plan which are in need of modification or new additions; 2) adopt standards as appropriate; and 3) recognize those portions of the Basin Plan which are appropriate as written. The review includes public hearings to allow the public to identify issues for the Regional Water Board to consider for incorporation into its Basin Plan. In response to public requests, the Regional Water Board ranked the *Designation of the Smith River as an Outstanding National Resource Water* a high priority (No. 4) on the 2014 Triennial Review work project priority list. For information on the 2014 Triennial Review and the Triennial Review process visit http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/northcoast/water_issues/programs/basin_plan/triennial_review.shtml

Outstanding National Resource Waters (ONRWs) are high quality waters of the United States that are designated as an outstanding National resource, such as waters of National and State parks and wildlife refuges and waters of exceptional recreational or ecological significance. As an ONRW, such high quality water is afforded the greatest protection under the Clean Water Act through implementation of federal Antidegradation policy, 40CFR131.12., which prohibits the lowering of water quality in an ONRW except to accommodate limited activities that result in temporary and short-term water quality change, only. There are currently two ONRWs in California; Lake Tahoe and Mono Lake.

Draft Project Description

This 2014 Triennial Review project is to designate Outstanding National Resource Waters (ONRW) within the boundaries of the North Coast Region with an initial focus on the Smith River. The original North Coast Region Basin Plan was first adopted by the Regional Water Board in 1975. This draft project is a proposal to amend the Basin Plan by designating the Smith River and its tributaries, within the boundaries of California, as an ONRW. [1] A map of the project area is included as Attachment A. The designation only includes waters of the United States, and as such does not include groundwater. The purpose of the *Designation of the Smith River as an Outstanding National Resource Water* Triennial Review project is to maintain the existing high quality waters of the Smith River and its tributaries in order to protect its exceptional recreational and ecological value.

The Smith River watershed is predominantly (approximately 87%) state and federal lands. The Smith River is a Wild and Scenic River and is of exceptional recreational and ecological

[1] The area of ONRW designation would include Smith River Hydrologic Unit (103.00), South Fork Smith River (103.20), Middle Fork Smith River (103.30), North Fork Smith River (103.40), and Lower Smith River (103.10) with the exclusion of Lake Talawa, Lake Earl, and Crescent City Harbor Drainage Features,

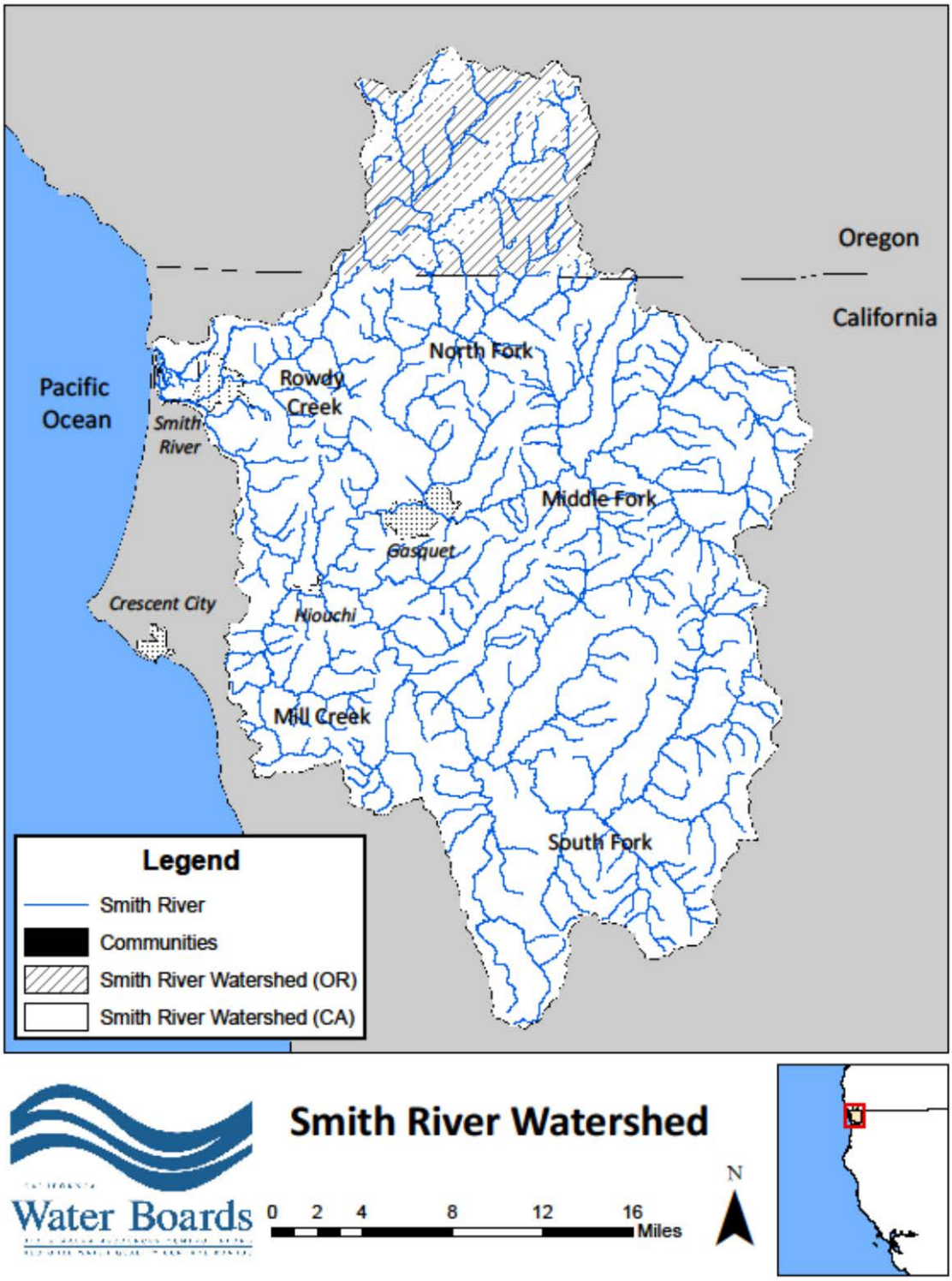
significance (see Attachment B for a list of recreational and ecological values by area.) The water quality of the Smith River is generally described as pristine. The Regional and State Water Boards regularly assess ambient water quality conditions and consistently find most of the Smith River to fully support Applicable California Core Beneficial Uses. The most recent summary report can be found at: http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/tmdl/integrated2012.shtml.

Designation as an ONRW does not supersede the prohibition against the point source discharge of waste to the Smith River and its tributaries that has been in effect since adoption of the original Basin Plan. Nor would the ONRW designation preclude nonpoint source discharges of waste currently occurring in the watershed under various existing or future waste discharge control mechanisms, such as:

- Timber operations;
- Dairy farming;
- Irrigated agriculture (i.e., lily bulb cultivation);
- Storm water discharges for CalTrans, construction, industrial, and municipal facilities; and,
- Water Quality Certifications under section 401 of the Clean Water Act for individual projects.

An ONRW designation could influence future development and management activities in the Smith River Watershed. However, it does not prohibit future activities when effective and responsible management practices adequately prevent water quality degradation. In accordance with other regulatory requirements, the Regional Water Board could permit waste discharges from land management activities when high quality water is maintained and protected.

Attachment A



Attachment B
Smith River Watershed
Recreational and Ecological Significance

RECREATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE

The Smith River has 325.4 miles designated as a National Wild and Scenic River. Eligibility for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System requires at least one outstandingly remarkable value. The Smith River has the following outstandingly remarkable values:

- Anadromous fishery for Chinook salmon, coho salmon, steelhead, and sea-run cutthroat trout, and American shad and green sturgeon habitat
- White water boating values on all three forks, and rafting and canoeing runs on the lower river
- Scenic values on all three forks and the lower river
- Historical/archeological values on the lower river
- Wildlife values on the lower river
- Botanic values on the South Fork

The 450 square mile Smith River National Recreation Area was established to ensure the preservation, protection, enhancement, and interpretation for present and future generations of the Smith River watershed's outstanding wild and scenic rivers, ecological diversity, and recreation opportunities while providing for the wise use and sustained productivity of its natural resources.

There are 75 miles of hiking trails and several hundred miles of roads, including 27 miles of the Smith River Scenic Byway within the Smith River National Recreation Area.

In the Smith River National Recreation Area Act, the United States Congress made the following finding on the recreational significance of the Smith River Watershed.

> *The Smith River watershed's scenic beauty, renowned anadromous fisheries, exceptional water quality, and abundant wildlife combine with its ready accessibility to offer exceptional opportunities for a wide range of recreational activities, including wilderness, water sports, fishing, hunting, camping, and sightseeing.*

ECOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Endangered Species Habitat

All accessible reaches, including estuarine areas and tributaries, of the Smith River are designated critical habitat for the Southern Oregon/Northern California Coast Evolutionarily Significant Unit of Coho Salmon (*Oncorhynchus kisutch*), which is federally and state listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act.

The brackish waters of the lower Smith River and estuary are designated critical habitat for the small tidewater goby (*Eucyclogobius newberryi),* which is federally listed as endangered under the Endangered Species Act.

Areas within the Smith River watershed are designated critical habitat for marbled murrelets (*Brachyramphus marmoratus*) and northern spotted owls (*Strix occidentalis caurina*), which are both federally listed as threatened.

Climate Change Mitigation (Buffer)

The North American Salmon Stronghold Partnership has recognized the Smith River as a salmon stronghold, relative to other populations in the eco-region, for the strong populations of Smith River Fall Coho, Fall Chinook, and Winter Steelhead. The recovery of California's anadromous fishery is dependent on the health of the salmon stronghold watersheds.

The National Marine Fisheries Service considers the Smith River Coho Salmon population to be one of the populations with the highest likelihood of persisting as strongholds in the face of climate change. This buffering is due to the large percentage of the Smith River Watershed that is under Federal and state management, the absence of dams, the unique geology, and the cold water tributaries that originate in the Siskiyou Mountains.

Ecological Diversity

The Smith River is home to 22 species of native fish which includes populations of Chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*), steelhead trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*), cutthroat trout (*Oncorhynchus clarkii*) and the federally listed coho salmon (*Oncorhynchus kisutch*), and tidewater goby (*Eucyclogobius newberryi)*.

The unique and diverse geology of the watershed allows for high botanical diversity which includes plant habitat for one Federally Endangered species, nine Sensitive plants, and an estimated 40 rare plant species.

Redwood National and State Parks is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It was designated for its magnificent forest of Coast redwoods (*Sequoia sempervirens*), the tallest living things and among the most impressive trees in the world; and, for having the largest remaining

contiguous ancient coast redwood forest in the world in their original forest and streamside settings.

In the Smith River National Recreation Area Act, the United States Congress made the following finding on the ecological significance of the Smith River Watershed.

> *the Smith River watershed, from the diverse conifer forests of the Siskiyou Mountains and unique botanical communities of the North Fork serpentine to the ancient redwoods along the river's lower reaches, exhibits a richness of ecological diversity unusual in a basin of its size;*

Existing Designations

- Smith River National Recreation Area
- Siskiyou Wilderness Area
- National Wild and Scenic River
- California Wild and Scenic River

Federal and State Managed Lands

- Six Rivers National Forest
    - Smith River National Recreation Area
    - Siskiyou Wilderness Area
- Redwood National Park
- Jedidiah Smith Redwoods State Park
- Mill Creek State Park
- Del Norte Coast Redwoods State Park

The California Natural Resources Agency and the U.S. Forest Service, Six Rivers National Forest are the managing agencies for National Wild and Scenic River