Gualala River TMDL Action Plan California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Scoping Meeting

June 3rd, 2024

CALIFORNIA
Water Boards

North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board

Meeting Outline

- Staff Presentation
  - Project Goals, History, and Timeline
  - Purpose of CEQA Scoping Meeting
  - Project Location: Gualala River Watershed Overview
  - Gualala River Sediment Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL)
    - What is a TMDL?
    - Problem Statement
    - Water Quality Objectives
    - Source Analysis
    - Load Allocations
  - Existing Programs of Implementation
  - Potential Additional Implementation Actions
- Public Comments: CEQA Scoping of Possible Implementation
  - CEQA Scoping Environmental Factors Checklist
- Next Steps

Project Goals – Big Picture

Two concurrent actions being developed:

- Develop an Action Plan to address sediment sources identified in the U.S. EPA established Gualala River Sediment TMDL
  - Public Review Action Plan and supporting Staff Report by June 2025
  - Consideration for adoption into Basin Plan by March 2026

- Develop order(s) that will require inventory, assessment, and prioritization of the treatment of roads to control sources of sediment
  - Draft order(s) by April 2025
  - Proposed final order(s) will be brought to the Board by April 2026
  - Project updates on order(s) will be provided as available

Project History and Timeline

303(d) List for Sediment (1993)

U.S. EPA Established Sediment Total Maximum Daily (TMDL) (2001)

Initiated TMDL Action Plan (Project) Development (2023)

Project CEQA Scoping (2024)

Public Review TMDL Action Plan and Draft Order(s) (2025)

Board Adoption Considerations (2026)

Purpose of CEQA Scoping Meeting

- To describe staff's preliminary recommendations for the Basin Plan Amendment

- **To get input on potential environmental impacts of the Basin Plan Amendment – Programmatic Level**

CEQA Overview

- What is CEQA for this project?
  - CEQA at programmatic level through basin planning process
  - Using substitute environmental documentation (SED) which is equivalent to Environmental Impact Report (EIR)
  - Includes environmental checklist per Cal. Code Regs., tit.23 § 3777

- What CEQA is NOT?
  - Not evaluating existing programs already CEQA compliant
  - Not evaluating site specific project impacts

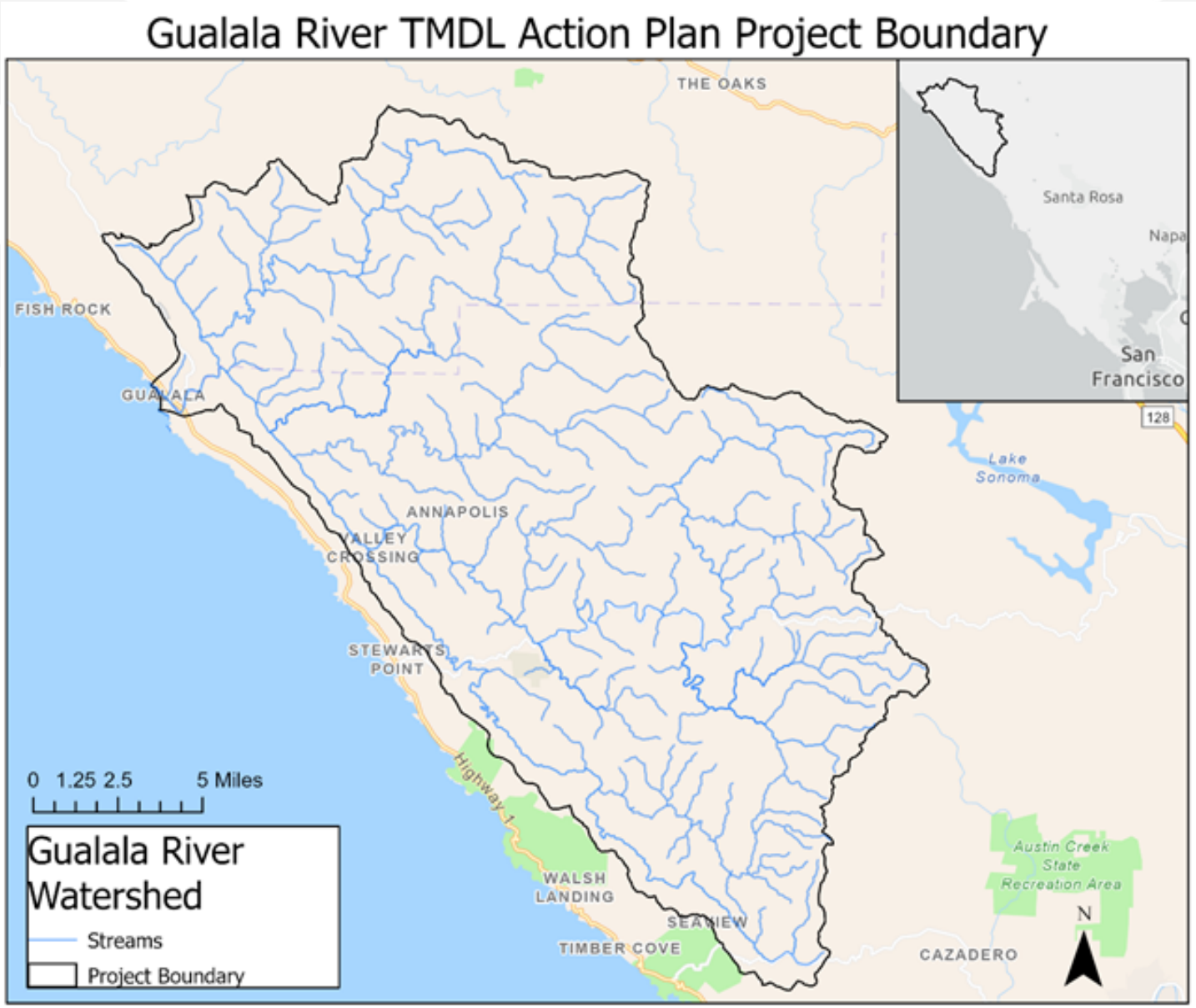
CEQA Beyond Baseline

- Baseline = natural conditions of physical environment + conditions caused by existing permitting actions already CEQA compliant
  - For example: Timber WDR considered under baseline

- CEQA beyond baseline = Environmental impacts from additional actions that would alter baseline through new compliance measures

Project Boundary

- Approximately 299 Square Miles
- Drains to Pacific Ocean
- Mendocino-Sonoma County Line cuts through Rockpile and follows mouth to Ocean
- Main population centers: Gualala, Sea Ranch, Stewarts Point, Annapolis, Plantation.
- Estimated population within boundary <5,000 (2020 U.S. Census)



Watershed Characteristics

- Complex stream network
- Rugged terrain
- Steep slopes
- Unstable geology
- Significant precipitation
- High rates of natural erosion and landslides

Wheatfield Fork: upper watershed

Rockpile Creek: middle/lower watershed

Land Cover and Land Uses

- Land Cover (NLCD, 2022)
  - Forests (75%); herbaceous grass and shrub (22%); developed (2.5%); wetlands (0.3%)

- Land Use
  - Timber:
    - ~39% of watershed owned by timber companies (~75,500 acres)
  - Roads:
    - 1,511 road miles
      - ~5 miles per square miles
    - 1,064 stream miles
      - 1,554 road stream crossing points

Established Gualala River Sediment TMDL (U.S. EPA, 2001)

- What is a TMDL?
- Water Quality Objectives
- Problem Statement
- Source Analysis
- Load Allocations

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Region IX

Gualala River
Total Maximum Daily Load
for Sediment

What is a TMDL?

- Total Maximum Daily Load

- Amount of a pollutant (e.g. sediment) that a waterbody can receive (loading capacity) and still attain and maintain water quality standards (WQS)

- WQS include beneficial uses of water, water quality objectives, and anti-degradation.

Water Quality Objectives – Gualala River Watershed

Parameter	Water Quality Objective
Suspended Material	Waters shall not contain suspended material in concentrations that cause nuisance or adversely affect beneficial uses.
Settleable Material	Waters shall not contain substances in concentrations that result in deposition of material that causes nuisance or adversely affect beneficial uses.
Sediment	The suspended sediment load and suspended sediment discharge rate of surface water shall not be altered in such a manner as to cause nuisance or adversely affect beneficial uses.
Turbidity	Turbidity shall not be increased more than 20 percent above naturally occurring background levels. Allowable zones of dilution with which higher percentages can be tolerated may be defined for specific discharges upon the issuance of discharge permits or waiver thereof.

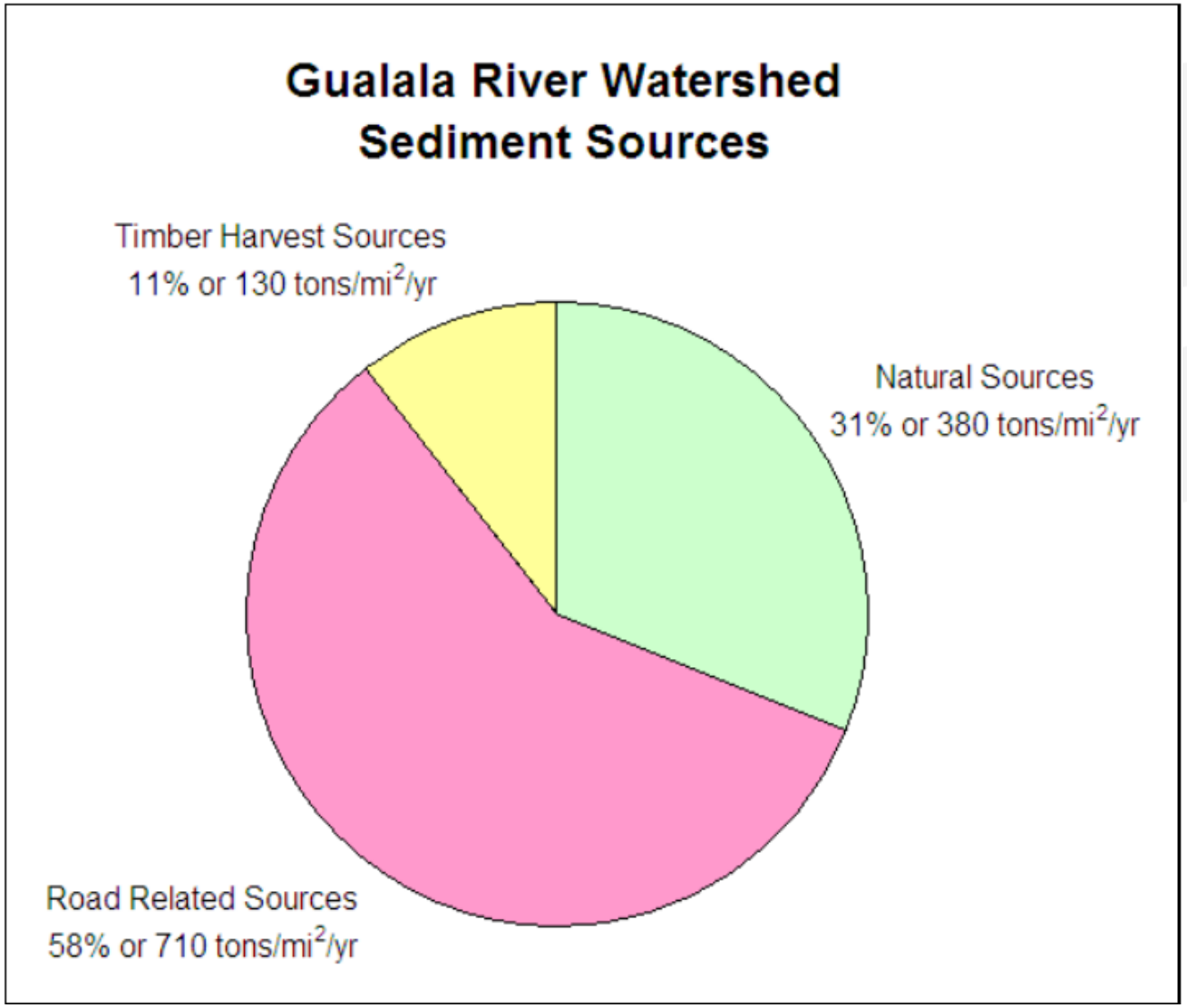
Problem Statement: Impacts of Sedimentation on Salmonids

- Salmonids life cycle:
  - Migration, spawning, reproduction, and early development.
- Aquatic Habitat:
  - Fills and cements gravels and cobbles.
  - Impacts salmonids egg incubation.
  - Slows growth or causes mortality.
- Turbidity in the water column:
  - Avoidance response
  - Reduced feeding rates
  - Reduced growth rates
  - Damage to gills
  - Fatality

Status of Salmonids

- Coho were listed as endangered in 2005 on the Federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) and California Endangered Species Act (CESA)
- Steelhead were listed as threatened in 2006 (ESA and CESA).
- In 2022, the steelhead summer run upgraded to endangered under CESA
- Steelhead species abundance has steadily declined.
- Coho salmon were last recorded in 2004.

TMDL Source Analysis



TMDL Load Allocations

Human-caused sediment sources*

Sediment Source	TMDL Load (tons/mi^2/year)	Load Allocation (tons/mi^2/year)	Percent Load Reduction
Natural Landslides	180	180	0
Natural Streambank Erosion	200	200	0
Road-Related Landslides *	370	56	85
Road-Stream Crossing Failures *	50	5	90
Road-Related Gullies *	150	8	95
Road-Related Surface Erosion *	140	7	95
Skid Trail Surface Erosion *	30	5	83
Other Harvest Related Delivery *	100	14	86
TOTAL	**1220**	**475**	**61**

- *Established loads are used for prioritization efforts*
- *Loads are not expected to be achieved on a project-by-project basis*
- *Reductions expected over an extended period of time.*

Load Reduction and Recovery Activities

- Load reductions are currently under way through existing Regional Board permitting mechanisms for timber and road sources

- Improvement and evolution of management practices
  - California Forest Practice Rules - CalFIRE
  - Rural Roads Handbook – Pacific Watersheds Associates

- Private road projects have been ongoing

- Grant and restoration work has been ongoing
  - Large woody debris projects

Existing Waste Discharge Prohibitions

Action Plan for Logging, Construction, and Associated Activities

1. The discharge of soil, silt, bark, slash, sawdust, or other organic and earthen material from any logging, construction, or associated activity of whatever nature into any stream or watercourse in the basin in quantities deleterious to fish, wildlife, or other beneficial uses is prohibited.
2. The placing or disposal of soil, silt, bark, slash, sawdust, or other organic and earthen material from any logging, construction, or associated activity of whatever nature at locations where such material could pass into any stream or watercourse in the basin in quantities which could be deleterious to fish, wildlife, or other beneficial uses is prohibited.

Existing Regional Permits for Sediment Source Control:

- **Timber WDRs**:
  - *General Waste Discharge Requirements for Discharges Related to Timber Harvest Activities on Non-Federal Lands in the North Coast Region (Timber General WDR)*
    - Order No. R1-2004-0030
  - *General Waste Discharge Requirements for discharges for Timber Operations on Non-Industrial Timber Management Plans (NTMPs) in the North Coast Region (NTMP WDR)*
    - Order No. R1-2013-0005
  - *General Waste Discharge Requirements for Discharges Related to Specific Types of Forest Management Activities on Non-Federal Lands in the North Coast Region (Forest Management WDR)*
    - Order No. R1-2024-0001

- **5C Permit**:
  - *Waiver of Waste discharge Requirements and General Water Quality Certification for Road Management and Activities Conducted Under the Five Counties Salmonid Conservation Program in the North Coast Region*
    - Order No. R1-2018-0011

- **Rural Roads General Order (RRGO):**
  - *General Waste Discharge Requirements and General Water Quality Certification for Rural Road and Watercourse Construction and Reconstruction Activities in the North Coast Region*
    - Order No. R1-2024-0002

Reasonably Foreseeable Measures Identified by Regional Board

- The following actions are already occurring in the watershed, however, Action Plan will increase the frequency and spatial extent of road related projects
- May include but not limited to the following:
  - Installation, repair, and/or replacement of stream channel road crossings;
  - Installation and/or maintenance of trash racks (to catch stream transported debris and thereby prevent it from blocking flow) through road crossing;
  - Installation and/or maintenance of ditch relief culverts and/or cross-drains (to reduce concentrated runoff from roads);
  - Excavation of potentially unstable road fill slopes or road-related landslide deposits (to prevent channel sediment delivery/transport);
  - Construction of rolling dips, out-sloped road segments, and/or water bars on dirt roads to attenuate concentrated runoff;
  - Sediment and/or vegetation removal to maintain conveyance capacity along the inboard ditch;
  - Removal of road berms;
  - Excavation and repaving of paved roads to repair and/or retrofit road drainage infrastructure, as needed to address significant sediment sources.; and/or
  - Streambank stabilization to protect the roadway from erosion.

CEQA Scoping Public Comments

- Goal: Solicit input from tribes, agencies, and members of the public
  - Impacts that may arise from the project
  - Range of project actions and alternatives
  - Reasonably foreseeable methods of compliance
  - Significant or cumulative environmental impacts if any
  - Mitigation measures that will reduce impacts
- Are there other actions to be considered for implementation?
- Do you foresee any potentially significant or potentially adverse environmental impacts from the project?

CEQA Scoping Environmental Factors Categories

Will the project have:

❑ **No Impact**

× **Less than Significant Impact**

× **Less than Significant with Mitigation**

❖ **Potentially Significant**

- ❑ Aesthetics
- ❑ Agriculture Resources
- ☒ Air Quality
- ☒ Biological Resources
- ☒ Cultural Resources
- ☒ Geology & Soils
- ❑ Greenhouse Gas Emissions
- ☒ Hazards & Hazardous Materials
- ☒ Hydrology & Water Quality
- ❑ Land Use & Planning
- ❑ Mineral Resources
- ❑ Noise
- ❑ Population & Housing
- ❑ Public Services
- ❑ Recreation
- ❑ Transportation/Traffic
- ☒ Tribal Cultural Resources
- ❑ Utilities & Service Systems

Checklist Discussion

- Assessment is at programmatic level and not site specific
- No factors identified as potentially significant
- Compliance measures are primarily small-scale earth moving activities in already disturbed areas.
- Potential short-term discharges < long-term sediment control -> self mitigating
- Potentially significant projects would be subject to permitting by Water Board, CDFW, U.S. FWS, NOAA, County, or other.
- If permitted will/have gone through CEQA process; If a project is exempt, they have no significant impact.
- Compliance will benefit native fish and wildlife species through reduced fine sediment pollution.
- For specific impacts and discussion, please review the Initial Draft CEQA Checklist on project webpage.

Next Steps

- CEQA scoping window closes on July 8, 2024, at 5 PM PST

- Submit comments with subject line: Gualala Sediment TMDL CEQA
  - Email to North Coast Regional Water Board at:
    Nicholas.Fetherston@waterboards.ca.gov
  - Written comments may be mailed to:
    North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board
    Attn: Nicholas Fetherston, Environmental Scientist
    5550 Skylane Blvd, Suite A
    Santa Rosa, CA 95403
  - Microsoft Form Survey on Gualala TMDL Webpage:
    - https://forms.office.com/g/g1heq5ZPiL

Opportunity for Oral Comment

- Please use the Raise Hand function to provide comment
  - React -> Raise Hand
- Unmute once called on. Mute when you are done speaking
- Provide name, and affiliation or agency (as applicable)

Closing Reminders

- Project Milestones
  - Public review Action Plan and Staff Report - June 2025.
  - Draft Order(s) – April 2025
  - Action Plan consideration for Board adoption - March 2026.
  - Order(s) consideration for Board adoption – April 2026

- For more information
  - Visit webpage: https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/northcoast/water_issues/programs/tmdls/gualala_river/
  - Sign up for GovDelivery for quarterly updates on project webpage.
  - Contact Nick Fetherston
    - Nicholas.Fetherston@waterboards.ca.gov
    - (707) 570-3761