



Media Release

State Water Board Approves Selenium Discharge Limits for North San Francisco Bay

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The State Water Resources Control Board today approved an amendment to the San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board's Basin Plan that puts a cap on selenium discharges into North San Francisco Bay.

Selenium is an essential beneficial nutrient in very small quantities, but in higher concentrations it can accumulate in tissues of fish and wildlife, and impair reproduction in sensitive species. Current levels of selenium in the North Bay are not posing a threat to fish and wildlife.

The Basin Plan amendment, in the form of a TMDL, or Total Maximum Daily Load, does not call for a reduction of selenium in the North Bay, but caps the amount of selenium that dischargers, such as oil refineries and wastewater treatment plants, can put into the water body. The selenium TMDL is designed to maintain levels of the mineral in order to protect human health and the environment.

Selenium enters the North Bay from a number of sources, including oil refineries and waste water treatment plants, but the primary source of selenium is the Central Valley watershed, and specifically the San Joaquin River. Selenium occurs naturally in the soils in the San Joaquin River basin, and is leached into the river with farm irrigation drainage.

The Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board already has TMDLs in place to control and reduce the amount of selenium entering the San Joaquin River. Changes in flow regimes on the river may affect the selenium loads in the future. The San Francisco Bay Regional Water Board will continue to monitor North Bay water quality to assure that selenium levels don't threaten fish and wildlife.

Of particular concern in north San Francisco Bay are white sturgeon and Sacramento splittail. Sturgeon are bottom-feeders, eating clams that accumulate selenium.. The TMDL is also protective of green sturgeon, a federal-listed endangered species.

The amendment was adopted on Nov. 18 by the San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board, and approved today by the State Water Board. The amendment becomes effective upon approval of the Office of Administrative Law and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

For more information on the San Francisco Bay TMDL, visit [here](#).

For more information on selenium, visit [here](#).

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