Media Release

State, federal agencies celebrate new Tijuana River Channel trash booms pilot project

California provided $4.7M for collection, trash removal efforts

Dec. 17, 2024 **Contact:** Ailene Voisin, Information Officer

SAN DIEGO – California, federal and international representatives today gathered near the border to celebrate a state-funded pilot project to intercept tires, washing machines and other debris that flow from Mexico into the Tijuana River, clogging the channel and contributing to chronic water quality problems.

The State Water Resources Control Board financed the $4.7 million project, which features floating trash booms made partially from recycled material. The project is overseen by the nonprofit Rural Community Assistance Corporation (RCAC).

The pilot, which will run for the next two consecutive storm seasons, began with the deployment of the plastic-and-steel encased booms on Nov. 14. Today's ribbon-cutting event initiates the next phase: the capture and removal of objects that block the untreated wastewater from entering the treatment plant.

"This project demonstrates the importance of deploying innovative solutions to address the challenges caused by transboundary flows impacting Tijuana River Valley communities and the ocean," said Sabine Talaugon, California Environmental Protection Agency (CalEPA) deputy secretary for intergovernmental relations. "In partnership with federal, state and local partners, the state will continue to work to secure critical resources to address cross-border pollution."

"The board is pleased funding for this project allows for two years – and two consecutive storm seasons – to assess whether the floating booms are an effective trash-control method," said Nichole Morgan, member of the State Water Board. "And, while this is the first of many steps, it is a tangible example of how we are committed to financing and exploring strategies to improve the efficiency of the treatment plant and ultimately improve water quality in the estuary."

Although Mexico has primary responsibility for preventing trash-laden wastewater from flowing into the Tijuana River valley, U.S. federal and state agencies assist with equipment, maintenance and resources to contain the discharges through a series of

canyon collectors designed to intercept objects that block untreated sewage from reaching the South Bay International Wastewater Treatment Plant.

With the Budget Acts of 2021 and 2022 allocating $35 million to address the ongoing transboundary flow crisis, the State Water Board, in coordination with CalEPA, identified priority projects to improve water quality in the Tijuana and New rivers. Among those, the pilot trash boom project is the first to be implemented.

Speakers at today's event included Nichole Morgan, State Water Board member; David Gibson, executive officer of the San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board; Dr. Maria Elena Giner, commissioner of the U.S. International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC); and Suzanne Anarde, chief executive officer of RCAC, a nonprofit organization that operates in 13 western states and offers training, technical, environmental and financial assistance for community-improvement efforts.

In addition to installation and operation of the floating booms, the project includes compiling rain data, trash volume and characteristics, and repairing damaged parts. The trash boom project will run for the next two consecutive storm seasons so that it can provide information to help improve trash control management practices and water quality in the Tijuana River.

The IBWC, which owns and operates the treatment plant and helped coordinate the project, will decide in 2026 – when the grant ends – whether to continue or dismantle the system, at which point the river and site would be returned to pre-project conditions.

The State Water Board's mission is to preserve, enhance and restore the quality of California's water resources and drinking water for the protection of the environment, public health and all beneficial uses, and to ensure proper resource allocation and efficient use for present and future generations.