

**STATE OF CALIFORNIA
REGIONAL WATER QUALITY CONTROL BOARD
SAN FRANCISCO BAY REGION**

MEETING DATE: October 14, 2026

ITEM: 4

Executive Officer's Report

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Palo Alto Horizontal Levee Pilot Project (Agnes Farres)

On September 10, 2026, Regional Water Board staff attended the ribbon cutting ceremony to celebrate the completion of the Palo Alto Horizontal Levee Pilot Project (Project). The ceremony was attended by the Palo Alto mayor and city officials and regional partners including the San Francisco Estuary Partnership, Association of Bay Area Governments, California State Coastal Conservancy, and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.



Photo 1: Ribbon cutting ceremony with City of Palo Alto mayor and other city officials.

The Project is adjacent to the city of Palo Alto's Regional Water Quality Control Plant and Byxbee Park and is along the edge of Harbor Marsh. The Project uses a nature-based horizontal levee design that will restore ecological functions along the perimeter of Harbor Marsh by creating transitional habitat on the levee slope to provide upland refugia for federally and state-listed species. The levee is also designed to provide accommodation space for tidal wetlands to adapt to sea level rise, contribute to flood management by attenuating waves, provide polishing treatment for effluent from the City's Regional Water Quality Control Plant, and improve public access. Modeled after the Oro Loma experimental levee, the Project is the first of its kind to be hydrologically connected to the Bay.

The Project was reviewed through the Bay Restoration Regulatory Integration Team (BRRIT) which worked closely with the project team to address the competing goals of maintaining and improving public access while protecting habitat for special status species including salt marsh harvest mouse and California Ridgway's rail. The existing trail along the marsh edge was relocated away from Harbor Marsh to increase the area of contiguous undisturbed habitat for sensitive species and provide the most separation from the public while still maintaining a visual connection to Harbor Marsh. The

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relocated and widened trail connects the public including hikers and bikers to the Baylands Nature Preserve Trail and San Francisco Bay Trail systems.



Photo 2: Horizontal levee slope with the improved public access trail to the left and Harbor Marsh to the right.

We authorized the Project in August 2023 under State Board's General Water Quality Certification for Small Habitat Restoration Projects with all other permits/authorizations issued by April 2024. Construction bids were higher than anticipated and the Project Staff had to obtain additional grant funding for implementation. Project construction began in summer 2025 and had to be extended through the 2026 construction season due to complications with installing a 1,650 linear foot effluent pipeline connecting to the Regional Water Quality Control Plant.

Post-construction, the City will monitor effluent water quality, effluent volumes, slope stability, vegetation establishment, habitat types, evolution of adjacent marsh vegetation, and invasive plant cover. The City will also track and adaptively manage any potential conversion of salt marsh habitat to brackish marsh habitat due to increased freshwater inputs. Research scientists at the U.S. Geological Survey, California State University Channel Islands, and University of California Davis will also study the levee to understand how it changes over time and what habitat benefits it may offer compared to a traditional levee.

WaterReuse Conference (Mary Cousins)

On August 24 to 26, 2026, staff from the NPDES Wastewater Division attended the WaterReuse California Annual Conference in San Francisco, California. [WaterReuse](#) is a trade association that represents utilities that recycle water, businesses that support the development of recycled water projects, and consumers of recycled water. One of the Regional Water Board's goals identified in the [2026 Strategic Plan](#) is to engage in collaborative efforts to promote increased use of recycled water in the region, and participating in WaterReuse-sponsored events is one way to fulfill this goal. This year, WaterReuse encouraged participation from regulatory agency staff by waiving conference registration fees for State regulators. This enabled robust participation from multiple Regional Water Boards as well as State Water Board staff.

Staff from the NPDES Wastewater division oversee Regional Water Board permits for Bay Area recycled water programs, which currently produce approximately 50,000 acre-feet per year of recycled water for non-potable uses such as landscape irrigation, agricultural irrigation, industrial cooling, and toilet flushing. In the future, local water and wastewater utilities plan to increase the amount of recycled water used in the region by expanding non-potable recycled water use and beginning to implement potable reuse for the first time. For reference, the State Water Board finalized statewide regulations for indirect potable reuse in 2018, regulations for direct potable reuse in 2024, and regulations for onsite non-potable reuse in 2026.

At the conference, Regional Water Board staff member Luis Anaya Vasquez participated in a panel discussion regarding recycled water permitting. Other staff attended technical sessions and benefitted from hearing updates about plans for potable reuse projects in the region, including indirect potable reuse and direct potable reuse projects tentatively planned in the San Jose area, Peninsula, and San Francisco. The insights and relationships that staff gained from the conference will support more informed and streamlined regulatory decision-making.



Photo 1: Staff from the NPDES Wastewater Division
at the 2026 WaterReuse California Annual Conference

Cutting Green Tape Hidden Hero (Xavier Fernandez)



Christina Toms, Water Resource Control Engineer in the Planning Division, was one of three state employees selected for this year's Cutting the Green Tape Hidden Heroes award. This award was created in 2022 by the California Natural Resources Agency, State Water Resources Control Board, California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA), and California Landscape Stewardship Network to recognize innovative public employees who are increasing the pace and scale of environmental restoration.

Other recipients this year included Bri Seapy, a Senior Environmental Scientist with California Department of Fish and Wildlife, and Scott Weeks, a Senior Environmental Scientist with CDFA.

Christina is receiving this award to recognize the collaborative, creative, science-driven approach she brings to coastal habitat restoration and climate adaptation projects and programs. Since 2017, she has helped build and lead the San Francisco Estuary Wetlands Regional Monitoring Program, or WRMP, which has grown into a model for collaborative estuarine monitoring programs elsewhere in California and throughout the U.S. She works with local governments, community groups, and NGOs throughout the region to develop innovative nature-based climate adaptation projects and shepherd them through complex permitting processes. Her persistent advocacy for multi-benefit approaches along the Highway 37 corridor in the North Bay has helped to establish a model for how transportation projects elsewhere in the region can integrate landscape-scale environmental improvements into their engineering designs and regulatory compliance strategies. With partners including the US Army Corps of Engineers and California Coastal Conservancy, she helps develop cutting-edge strategies to increase the beneficial reuse of dredged sediment and support shoreline resilience. Christina's passion and expertise are recognized throughout the state, and she serves on numerous regional and statewide climate adaptation, habitat restoration, and policy working groups.

Christina was honored at the [30x30 Partnership Summit](#) on September 29 at the California Academy of Science and was interviewed by Secretary Wade Crowfoot for the California Natural Resources Agency social media.

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Staff Updates (Eileen M. White)



Isabella Mariano has been hired as a Water Resource Control Engineer in the Watershed Management Division. Isabella will work in the Municipal Stormwater Section to support the Municipal Regional Stormwater NPDES Permit (MRP). She comes to us from the Division of Financial Assistance at the State Water Board where she provided technical guidance for the funding of the assessment and cleanup of leaking underground storage tank sites. Isabella was born and raised in the Bay Area and has a Bachelor of Science in Chemical Engineering with an Environmental focus from the University of California Los Angeles. Her undergraduate research projects piqued her interest in stormwater management and quality, and she is excited for new opportunities in this position. In her spare time, Isabella enjoys traveling, reading, and knitting.

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401 Water Quality Certification Applications Received (Joseph Martinez)

The table below lists those applications received for Clean Water Act section 401 water quality certification from July 9 through August 12, 2026. A check mark in the right-hand column indicates a project with work that may be in the San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC) jurisdiction.

Project Name	City/Location	County	May have BCDC Jurisdiction
Alameda Point Pier 2 Fender Systems Repairs Project	Alameda	Alameda	X
UC Berkeley Strawberry Creek Utilities Crossing Project	Berkeley	Alameda	
Offshore Geotechnical Explorations - Proposed Marine Shipping Terminal, Former Oakland Army Base, Berth 7 Area	Oakland	Alameda	X
G-1-1 Repairs Project	Pleasanton	Alameda	
Electric Tower Maintenance Bundle Program – 2026 (Project)	Multiple	Alameda, Santa Clara	X
Moraga Canyon Road Culvert Replacement Project	Moraga	Contra Costa	
Keller Beach Improvement Project	Richmond	Contra Costa	X
Muir Woods Dipsea Bridge Project	Mill Valley	Marin	
Mill Valley Middle School Bank Stabilization Project	Mill Valley	Marin	
Nicasio Reservoir Vegetation Management Project	Nicasio	Marin	
Bayside Acres Beach Sewer Relocation Project – Phase C	San Rafael	Marin	X
Harrold Res _ Seawall Repair	Tiburon	Marin	X

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Project Name	City/Location	County	May have BCDC Jurisdiction
Tiburon Railroad Marsh Aquatic Plant Management Project	Tiburon	Marin	
Calle Del Arroyo Channel Vegetation Management Project	Unincorporated	Marin	
Crest Marin Pump Station Rehabilitation	Unincorporated	Marin	
China Camp Pile Improvements Project		Marin	X
Diamond Creek Vineyards Bridge Repair Project	Calistoga	Napa	
I-1020 DFM-0405-01 MP 6.45 Stuck Pig	Napa	Napa	
SAFER Bay Project	Menlo Park	San Mateo	X
South San Francisco PUC Development Project	South San Francisco	San Mateo	
Culvert Headwall Replacement 52 Woods Lane	Los Altos	Santa Clara	
Shoreline Park Water Control Structures Improvements	Mountain View	Santa Clara	X
Hicks Creek Off-Site Mitigation Project	San Jose	Santa Clara	
VTa Beneficial Reuse of Excavated Material in Tidal Marsh Restoration Project – Geotech Investigations	San Jose	Santa Clara	X
External Corrosion Maintenance on Pipeline L-182 MP 12.44 Over Unnamed Slough	Unincorporated	Solano	