

Water Boards

CalEPA Tribal Advisory Committee Report

Q3 July 2025 – September 2025

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Announcements

California Native American Tribal GIS Summit 2025

Theme: Honoring Place, Empowering Nations

The first ever California Native American Tribal GIS Summit took place on July 31 – August 01, 2025, co-hosted by the Water Boards at the Cal EPA building in Sacramento California. The Tribal Summit focused on how Geographic Information Systems (GIS) can advance Tribal sovereignty, environmental stewardship, and cultural preservation while strengthening partnerships across jurisdictions.

The event marked a historic gathering of 90 California Tribes, including both federally and non-federally recognized Tribes and Tribal communities, alongside federal, state, nonprofit, and academic partners. Over 510 participants engaged across the two-day hybrid event, 280 in person and 230 virtually. This significant turnout created one of the largest multisector convenings of its kind, fostering invaluable networking, collaboration, and shared learning opportunities. The Summit was Tribally defined, the product of extensive planning led by California Tribal GIS, and Water Boards staff, ensuring that priorities reflected the needs and values of California Native American communities.

The following key themes emerged from the Tribal GIS Summit discussions:

- The need to embed GIS into public notice systems to ensure Tribes are fully informed of proposed land use and natural resources decisions.
- Tribes emphasized that water must be central to “land back” projects, recognizing that water rights are inseparable from land rights.
- Request for expanded workshops and webinars on Tribal Beneficial Uses and California water rights, tailored for Tribal communities to navigate these complex systems.
- The Summit reaffirmed the importance of GIS data sovereignty, positioning it as an essential tool in consultation and engagement processes and a pathway toward decolonizing mapping in public resources management.

- Participants called for expanded funding and resources for all Tribes, regardless of recognition status, to access GIS training, software licensing, and capacity building support.
- A reoccurring theme was the need to include California Tribal allotment lands on public maps, such as fire, flood, and environmental maps, so that Tribal lands are fully visible in planning and emergency response.

Beyond the policy and technical outcomes, the true strength of the Summit lay in its two days of networking and relationship building. By bringing together Tribal leaders, state and federal representatives, nonprofits, and academics, the Summit created new pathways for collaboration, innovative ideas, and share strategies to advance Tribal GIS.

The California Native American Tribal GIS Summit 2025 underscored a clear message: GIS is not just a technical tool, but a means to strengthen sovereignty, protect resources, and build resilient Tribal futures. With strong participation, Tribally driven outcomes, and actionable next steps, the Summit had laid the foundation for continued collaboration, expanded training opportunities, and more equitable future where Tribal voices and data are integral to California's environmental and cultural planning.

Tribal Consultation Policy & Engagement Protocol Update

September 2025

The State Water Board is moving forward with the revision of its Tribal Consultation Policy and the development of a new Tribal Consultation and Engagement Protocol. Together, these documents will strengthen government-to-government relationships with California Native American Tribes by providing both the guiding principles that explain why consultation matters and the step-by-step procedures that show staff how to conduct meaningful engagement.

Over the past year, the Water Board successfully completed its early consultation period, directly engaging with five California Native American Tribes. These discussions provided valuable input on several key areas, including the historical and legal context of consultation, roles and responsibilities for staff and leadership, expectations around timelines and communication, and best practices for culturally appropriate engagement. Tribes also shared perspectives on the protection and respectful use of Indigenous Knowledge and Traditional Ecological Knowledge. The insights gathered during this process have been carefully reviewed and incorporated into the current drafts. The draft documents have undergone the internal review process and are being prepared for Public and Tribal release.

Looking ahead, the fall of 2025 will mark the next major stage in this process. The Water Board will release the draft Policy and Protocol for public review, opening both a Tribal Consultation period and a Public Comment period. A series of Tribal Workshops will also be hosted, creating opportunities to review the draft documents in detail, discuss proposed changes, and gather verbal feedback directly from Tribal representatives. Following these

activities, the public comment period and Tribal workshops will close, and staff will prepare a briefing to present proposed revisions to the Board.

Engagement & Key Priority Projects

Clear Lake Hitch

The Clear Lake hitch is a large minnow found only in Clear Lake and its tributaries. The hitch population has substantially declined over the years, and in 2014 was listed as a threatened species under the California Endangered Species Act. In December 2022, a coalition of Native American tribes in the Clear Lake Watershed requested that state and federal agencies, including the State Water Board, help address the extinction risk faced by the hitch. In March 2023, Governor Newsom issued an [executive order](#) directing the State Water Board and California Department of Fish and Wildlife to evaluate minimum instream flows, work with water users and tribes on voluntary actions, and consider emergency regulations to protect the Clear Lake hitch. In 2024, the State Water Board adopted emergency information order regulations to collect water use information in the Clear Lake watershed and continued conducting a groundwater-surface water study to better understand how groundwater pumping impacts creek flows critical for hitch spawning and migration. The State Water Board regularly engages with tribal leaders regarding Clear Lake hitch activities. Current activities are focused on data collection and sharing, co-management opportunities, and groundwater-surface water model development.

For more information, visit waterboards.ca.gov/ClearLakeHitch.

Statewide Surface Water Ambient Monitoring Programs (SWAMP)

FHAB Pre-holiday Assessments & Partner Monitoring

For the past seven years, the SWAMP FHAB Program, CCHAB Network, and other FHAB Monitoring partners, including Tribes, have conducted [FHAB pre-holiday monitoring and assessments](#). The project aims to assess for HABs at recreational beaches before the major summer holiday weekends to keep the public informed on where to safely play in the water.

In Summer 2025, 30 partners, including 4 Tribes, participated in the pre-holiday monitoring and assessments. A summary of pre-holiday assessment activities is provided in the table below:

Holiday Weekend	Number of Waterbodies Sampled	Number of Samples Collected	Number of Public Health Signs Posted
Memorial Day (5/24-26)	34	69	20
Independence Day (7/4-6)	61	100	18
Labor Day (8/30-9/1)	73	109	33

If Tribal FHAB monitoring practitioners would like monitoring support outside of the above holiday weekends, they can apply to be part of the [SWAMP FHAB Partner Monitoring project](#). Tribes that participate can receive assistance with monitoring design, training on sampling procedures, providing entry level supplies for sample collection, and interpreting sample results for HAB advisory postings. Limited funding may be available for sample analyses.

For more information, view the [FHAB Partner Monitoring Flyer](#).

Tribally-centered Fish Consumption Application In Development

The [SWAMP Bioaccumulation Monitoring Program](#) is in the early phases of developing an interactive and user-friendly application that includes and contextualizes bioaccumulation monitoring data, consumption thresholds, advisories, and guidance associated with fish consumption and human health. The application will be tailored to the needs of California Tribal users who consume fish for subsistence and/or cultural purposes.

In July 2025, an invitation to join a Tribal Advisory Committee (TAC) for this project was sent to those who registered for and/or attended one or more of the courses in the 2024 [Tribally-centered SWAMP Bioaccumulation Monitoring Program Training Series](#). Those who accept the invitation by September 30 will be involved in scheduling the first TAC meeting in December 2025. So far, 13 individuals have accepted the invitation to join the TAC.

The invitation to join the TAC will continue through the course of the project and is open to representatives of any California Tribal Government or Tribal Organization interested in the application and its development (not just those who expressed interest in the 2024 training series). Representatives of California Tribal Governments or Tribal Organizations can request to join the TAC at any time. TAC members will be asked to provide guidance related to application development decisions, features, and functionality as well as supporting the early review of the application when it is available.

In addition to regular engagement with the TAC, Project leads will be available to attend and/or present about the application development and review efforts, and receive feedback at broader Tribally-led meetings, upon request and/or approval by meeting organizers.

If representatives of California Tribal Governments or Tribal Organizations or are interested in joining the TAC, would like to request a presentation about the project, or have any other questions please reach out to the Project Lead, Anna Holder, at: Anna.Holder@waterboards.ca.gov or (916) 341-5096.

For more information, please see the:

- [TAC Fact Sheet](#)
- [Application Work Plan](#)

Tribal Water Data Map

The Water Board's Office of Information Management and Analysis, serves as an advocate for FAIR and CARE data management and use, and provides transparency of the Water Boards

data infrastructure. Over the past four years, OIMA has been working with the Big Valley Band of Pomo Indians and other Tribal partners to co-create the [Tribal Water Data Map](#) and [User Manual](#). These tools are meant to increase awareness of and access to data that intersect with Tribal matters and needs and to support Tribal environmental and/or water related work.

At the [2025 California Native American Tribal GIS Summit](#), project partners gave a presentation and demonstration of how to navigate both resources (see [presentation slides](#)). The [User Manual's Resources Page](#) contains links to slides and recordings of similar presentations given since 2023.

For more information or to request a presentation about the Tribal Water Data Map project please reach out to the Project Lead, Anna Holder, at: Anna.Holder@waterboards.ca.gov or (916) 341-5096.

Tribal Beneficial Uses

The Water Boards recognize our parallel relationship to the people we serve, and we value tribes' traditional ecological knowledge and historic experience with managing California's water resources since time immemorial. To recognize the unique ways that tribes and tribal communities utilize water, the State Water Board adopted definitions for Tribal Beneficial Uses of water in 2017. Tribal Beneficial Uses provide a water quality safety measure that considers the specific uses of water by individuals, households, or communities of California tribes. The ten California Water Boards are all at different stages of working with tribes to protect water quality for tribal tradition, culture, and subsistence fishing.

Statewide Tribal Beneficial Uses Updates:

Region / Division	Current Status
Region 1— North Coast	In 2003, the State Water Board approved the North Coast Regional Water Board's definitions that protect Native American Culture and Subsistence Fishing. These definitions were developed in partnership with tribes within the North Coast and predate the tribal beneficial use definitions adopted by the State Water Board in 2017. The 2023 Triennial Review Draft Staff Report reaffirms the priority status of tribal beneficial uses and is scheduled for a North Coast Regional Water Board Hearing in April 2024. The North Coast Region is currently collaborating with tribes to provide input and guidance on whether existing North Coast Regional Water Board or State Water Board definitions would better serve their needs.
Region 2— San Francisco Bay	The San Francisco Bay Regional Water Board's 2021 Triennial Review identified tribal and subsistence beneficial uses designations as a priority project for the next three years. Five tribes submitted letters of support during the Triennial Review and five tribes have consulted with the San Francisco Bay Regional Water Board. Currently working to engage with

	tribes and adopt tribal beneficial use definitions into the basin plan. A draft tribal cultural use basin plan amendment.
Region 3— Central Coast	The Central Coast Regional Water Board adopted Racial Equity Resolution R3-2023-0002, which directed staff to prioritize the process to adopt Tribal beneficial uses (TBUs) into the Water Quality Control Plan for the Central Coastal Basin (Basin Plan). Basin Plan amendments adding TBU definitions and mercury objectives to the Basin Plan were adopted by Central Coast Regional Water Board Resolution R3-2024-0003 on June 21, 2024, and approved by State Water Resources Control Board Resolution 2025-0011 on April 15, 2025.
Region 4— Los Angeles	US EPA 205(j) phase 38 awarded a \$100,000 grant to the Los Angeles Region to strengthen our collaboration with Tribes. The overall goal of this grant is to support the Tribal Beneficial Use (TBU) designations as part of the Los Angeles Water Board's Basin Plan update process. This grant will be conducted with three tribes (Kizh Nation, San Fernando Band of Mission Indians, and Barbareno Ventureno Band of Mission Indians), together with the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) Institute of the Environment and Sustainability. This project will continue the existing project funded by the Los Angeles Water Board that focuses on Los Angeles County. In this project, UCLA will expand the historical blue line rivers, streams, and water bodies from USGS topographic maps previously digitized by Los Angeles Landscape History project with definitive river, stream, and water body mapping to Ventura County.
Region 5— Central Valley	The Central Valley Regional Water Boards's adoption of Tribal Tradition and Culture, Tribal Subsistence Fishing, and Subsistence Fishing beneficial use definitions into the Sacramento and San Joaquin River Basin Plan and Tulare Lake Basin Plan was approved by State Water Board on September 7, 2022. Staff submitted the tribal beneficial uses definitions Administrative Record to the Office of Administrative Law on October 30, 2023 and upon approval will be submitted to U.S. EPA for review and approval. The Central Valley Region is continuing to consult with individual tribes who submitted, or are planning to submit, tribal beneficial use designation requests and will continue to host semi-annual, tribal-only project update meetings. Continuous collaboration with the Clear Lake Hitch Implementation Team regarding preserving water quality, monitoring efforts, and keeping data of the Hitch in the Clear Lake area. Ongoing consultations with the Regional Water Boards staff on the importance of engaging with Tribal Nations, highlighting the significance of cultural and communication awareness.

<p>Region 6— Lahontan</p>	<p>The Lahontan Water Board incorporated tribal beneficial use definitions into the Region’s basin plan in 2021. Designating tribal beneficial uses was assigned a high priority for the 2022 and 2025 Triennial Reviews. A Basin Plan Amendment to designate tribal beneficial uses in the Mono Lake Basin (Mono Basin BPA) is being developed in coordination with the Mono Lake Kootzaduka'a and other local tribes. Staff held a California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) scoping meeting on February 9, 2023, to receive input on the scope of the environmental analysis for the Mono Basin BPA. In December 2023, Lahontan Regional Water Board staff held two tribal listening session (hosted by the Bishop Paiute Tribe) to discuss progress and challenges in developing tribal beneficial uses. The first listening session was with the members of the Mono Lake Kootzaduka'a Tribe and focused on progress and challenges in developing the Mono Lake Basin tribal beneficial use designations. The second listening session included members of the Mono Lake Kootzaduka'a, the Bishop Paiute Tribe, Big Pine Paiute Tribe, and the Lone Pine Paiute Tribe and included discussion on the Mono Lake Basin tribal beneficial use designations as well as future tribal beneficial use designations outside of the Mono Lake Basin.</p> <p>In April 2024, Lahontan Water Board held a public hearing to receive comments on the Mono Basin BPA. Lahontan Water Board staff are continuing to coordinate with State Water Board staff and the Mono Lake Kootzaduka'a on the Mono Basin BPA. After the State Water Board TBU guidance is released, Lahontan Water Board staff will update the Mono Basin BPA and associated materials, and the Lahontan Water Board will consider the Mono Basin BPA for adoption at a subsequent board meeting.</p> <p>The Lahontan Water Board also plans to begin a second phase of TBU designations for waters in the Lahontan Region outside the Mono Lake Basin following the release of the State Water Board TBU guidance.</p>
<p>Region 7— Colorado River</p>	<p>The Colorado River Regional Water Board is in the public process for the Tribal Beneficial Uses, Statewide Mercury Provisions, and Administrative Updates Basin Plan Amendment. Staff held a workshop during the April 9, 2024, board meeting. A 30-day comment period ran from March 25, 2024, to April 26, 2024. No comments were received during the comment period or workshop. The Colorado River Regional Water Board approved the Tribal Beneficial Uses, Statewide Mercury Provisions, and Administrative Updates Basin Plan Amendment on June 11, 2024. The Basin Plan Amendment was approved by the State Water Board on April 15, 2025.</p>
<p>Region 8— Santa Ana</p>	<p>The Santa Ana Water Board Triennial Review was adopted on October 25, 2024. The Triennial Review identifies the adoption of the TBU</p>

	definitions and designations as a priority for the Region during the three-year cycle. Santa Ana Water Board staff are currently in the process of preparing a BPA to incorporate the Tribal Subsistence Fishing, and Subsistence Fishing beneficial use definitions into the Basin Plan. San Ana Water Board staff will engage with tribes as part of the Basin Plan amendment process.
Region 9— San Diego	The San Diego Water Board adopted the tribal beneficial use definitions into the San Diego Basin Plan in 2021. A project to designate waters with the tribal beneficial uses was identified as a high priority project in the 2024/2025 Triennial Basin Plan Review, completed on August 13, 2025. Development of the designation project will continue. Since 2023 the San Diego Water Board staff has met regularly with tribal representatives to designate San Diego Region surface waters with Tribal Tradition and Culture and Tribal Subsistence uses.
Division of Water Rights— Bay Delta Plan	Incorporation of tribal beneficial uses were included as part of the Draft Staff Report in support of proposed updates to the Bay-Delta Plan for the Sacramento/Delta released in 2023. The draft Bay-Delta Plan was released in October of 2024 with a revised Plan released in July of 2025. The Sacramento/Delta updates to the Bay Delta Plan propose the incorporation of TBUs and the designation of CUL watershed wide.

Tribal Beneficial Uses resources:

- [Regional tribal coordinator contact information](#)
- [Tribal Beneficial Uses webpage](#)

The [Division of Water Quality has completed a map](#) identifying existing beneficial uses related to Tribal Tradition and Culture (CUL). The map categorizes waterbody segments as in attainment, impaired, or lacking sufficient data. The purpose of the map is to determine if it would be possible to do a large-scale statewide designation of CUL in areas where related beneficial uses are currently in attainment.

Other Regional Water Board Updates

Lahontan Water Board

At the August 2025 meeting of the Lahontan Water Board, staff presented an annual update on activities completed and planned since the board adopted its [Racial Equity Resolution](#) in August 2024. The update discussed the efforts of the Racial Equity Working Group on education, outreach, and the development of a draft Racial Equity and Environmental Justice Action Plan (Action Plan). The preliminary draft Action Plan was released in August 2025, and is available for comment at the following link:

[Racial Equity and Environmental Justice | Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board](#)

Comments on the Action Plan are requested by December 10, 2025. Lahontan Water Board staff continue to conduct outreach to Tribes and disadvantaged communities to solicit comments and

participation in the development of the Action Plan. In August 2025, Lahontan Water Board staff participated in joint harmful algal bloom monitoring with staff of the Bishop Paiute Tribe.

Colorado River Basin Regional Water Quality Control Board

On June 5, 2025, and July 10, 2025, the Tribal Coordinator attended the Spring RTOC Water/Wastewater Workgroup, which involved discussing potential uses for GIS mapping software for land boundaries, residential water services, groundwater boundaries, well locations, and for supporting infrastructure expansion. RTOC attendance also supported improving tribal contact list creation and opportunities to connect or follow up with tribal environmental departments were helpful, despite the virtual setting.

The Colorado River Basin Regional Water Quality Control Board Surface Water Ambient Monitoring Program is involved in a multi-agency sampling partnership to monitor harmful algal blooms in Lake Havasu. In May, June, and September 2025, the Region 7 SWAMP Coordinator and Tribal Coordinator participated in monthly sampling with the Chemehuevi Environmental Department on Lake Havasu. This is a twelve-month sampling effort at Lake Havasu, and the team collected samples across 15 sites. Multiple harmful algal blooms have been found this year.

During August 2025, Colorado River Basin Regional Water Quality Control Board staff and executive leadership attended a community workshop hosted by Alianza Coachella Valley to address the hydrogen sulfide odor at the Salton Sea. This workshop took place on Torres Martinez tribal lands to better meet tribal community members and learn more about the impacts of the hydrogen sulfide odor on the health and quality-of-life of local frontline communities near the Salton Sea.

Colorado River Basin Regional Water Quality Control Board staff attended a meeting with staff from the Morongo Band of Mission Indians during September 2025. We discussed regional water quality issues, including grant information, technical assistance, opportunities for partnership, and capacity building.

Available Funding Programs

Funding Program	What's funded	Link
SAFER Drinking Water Program	Emergency drinking water (e.g., bottled water or hauled water), Temporary connection to safe drinking water sources, Point-of-use or point-of-entry treatment systems,	Link

	<p>Technical assistance with planning, budgets, and review of proposed project alternatives,</p> <p>Compliance audits and troubleshooting to address permit violations or operations,</p> <p>Assistance with community outreach, awareness, and education,</p> <p>Training and developing technical and managerial staff,</p> <p>Operations and maintenance costs,</p> <p>Drinking water infrastructure improvements and upgrades,</p> <p>Drilling wells into uncontaminated aquifers, and</p> <p>Consolidation and regionalization (e.g., linking smaller systems into larger ones).</p>	
Clean Water State Revolving Fund (CWSRF)	<p>Provides low-cost financing for a variety of water quality projects.</p> <p>Capable of financing projects from <\$1 million to >\$100 million.</p>	Link
Domestic Wells and State Small Water Systems	<p>Support state small water systems, domestic wells, and other self-supplied communities.</p>	Link
Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (DWSRF)	<p>Finances the cost of drinking water infrastructure projects needed to achieve or maintain compliance with Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA) requirements for public water systems.</p>	Link
Drought Response Funding	<p>Drought-related urgent drinking water needs.</p> <p>Long-term resilience planning and implementation.</p>	Link
Office of Sustainable Water Solutions Small Community Funding Program	<p>For small, disadvantaged communities and small severely disadvantaged communities.</p> <p>Provides low-interest loans and other financing mechanisms, such as grants or principal forgiveness for the planning, design and construction of drinking water infrastructure projects, including: treatment systems, distribution systems, interconnections, consolidations, pipeline extensions, water sources, and water meters.</p>	Link
Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS) Funding	<p>Available for technical and financial assistance to drinking water systems to address PFAS in their water drinking water supply</p>	Link

Stormwater	Stormwater and dry weather runoff projects that best advance the Water Board's policy goals of improving water quality and realizing multiple benefits from the use of storm water and dry weather runoff as a resource.	Link
Technical Assistance	<p>For small, disadvantaged, communities (DACs)</p> <p>Develop, fund, and implement eligible drinking water, wastewater, stormwater, or groundwater needs.</p> <p>Coordination and development of capital improvement projects, facilitation of operation and maintenance, engineering and environmental analysis, legal assistance, leak detection/water audits, compliance audits, financial analysis, technical managerial and financial (TMF) assessments, and board or operator training.</p>	Link
Wastewater	Strategies to assist small and/or disadvantaged communities with wastewater needs.	Link