EXECUTIVE OFFICER'S REPORT
Covers May 1, 2022 – May 31, 2022

Contents

1. Personnel Report – *Sandra Lopez*

New Hires - None

Vacancies

- Engineering Geologist, Non-Point Source Unit, South Lake Tahoe. This position will assist with technical, regulatory, and administrative procedures related to review of project environmental disclosure and permitting documents.

- Senior Engineering Geologist (Specialist), Leviathan Mine, South Lake Tahoe. This position will evaluate and provide advice to Water Board management regarding the Water Board's cleanup and abatement actions needed at the Leviathan Mine to comply with the USEPA's Administrative Abatement Action Order.

- Engineering Geologist, Forestry / Dredge & Fill Unit, South Lake Tahoe. This position will review timber harvest plans and conducting pre-harvest and post-harvest field inspections to evaluate the impact of logging operations and other forest practices (e.g., vegetation management for utility corridors) on the quality and beneficial uses of water.

- Engineering Geologist, Cannabis Unit, Victorville. This position will work as a part of an interdisciplinary team and will perform duties regulating the discharge of waste from illegal or permitted cannabis cultivation sites and associated facilities or operations with similar environmental effects.

- Engineering Geologist, Land Disposal Unit, Victorville. This position will oversee waste discharges and site investigation/cleanup at various types of regulated and unregulated facilities including landfills, mines, and site cleanup sites.

- Engineering Geologist, Department of Defense Site Cleanup Unit, Victorville. This position will oversee site investigations and cleanups at Department of Defense sites in the South Lahontan area as well as various types of regulated and unregulated facilities including landfills, mines, and site cleanup sites

- Scientific Aid, Regulatory & Enforcement Unit, South Lake Tahoe. This position supports staff primarily though review of submitted self-monitoring reports, along with other special projects.

- Scientific Aid, Forestry/Dredge & Fill and Non-Point Source Units, South Lake Tahoe. This position will evaluate water quality data and assess compliance with water quality orders and permits associated with grazing, restoration, timber, and forestry activities.

Promotions

- Meghan Walsh, Scientific Aid promoted to Engineering Geologist of Forestry / Dredge & Fill Unit, South Lake Tahoe. This position will review timber harvest plans and conducting pre-harvest and post-harvest field inspections to evaluate the impact of logging operations and other forest practices (e.g., vegetation management for utility corridors) on the quality and beneficial uses of water.

Transfers

- Linda Stone, Engineering Geologist, transfer to Cleanup/Site Investigation & Enforcement Unit, South Lake Tahoe. This position will oversee/direct site investigation and cleanup activities at various sites, such as underground storage tank sites, dry cleaner sites, mines, landfills, and Department of Defense sites.

Departures

- Michelle Avila, Office Technician, Administrative Unit, South Lake Tahoe

2. Upper Owens River Watershed Mercury Investigation – Spring 2022 Update – *Ed Hancock & Alanna Misico*

This article is an update to information in the May 2021 EO report.

Concentrations of mercury (Hg) exceeding the relevant water quality and fish tissue objectives set to protect human health and the environment have been found in several surface waters in the Upper Owens River watershed (UORW), Mono County. Five surface waters are 303(d) listed as impaired because mercury contamination prevents the attainment of beneficial uses. 303(d) listings are shown in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1: 303(d) listings for mercury in the UORW

Waterbody Name	Waterbody Identification Number (WBID)	Sample Matrix	Year 303(d) Listed	Beneficial Use (BU) Impaired	Max Sampled Hg.: water ug/L; tissue mg/Kg	CTR Water Quality Objective Hg water ug/L; COMM Water Quality Objective tissue mg/Kg
Mammoth Creek (Twin Lakes Outlet to Old Mammoth Rd)	CAR603100512-0080816102743	Water; Tissue	2006	MUN COMM WILD	H_2O: 0.08 Tissue: 0.29	H_2O: 0.05 Tissue: 0.20
Mammoth Creek (Old Mammoth Rd to HWY 395)	CAR603100532-0080816102036	Water; Tissue	2006	MUN COMM WILD	H_2O: 0.14 Tissue: 0.42	H_2O: 0.05 Tissue: 0.20
Mill City Tributary[1]	CAR603100512-0080630162428	Water	2010	MUN	H_2O: 0.30	H_2O: 0.05 Tissue: 0.20
Hot Creek (Mono County)	CAR603100402-0170721056270	Water; Tissue	2018	MUN COMM WILD	H_2O: 0.13 Tissue: 0.20	H_2O: 0.05 Tissue: 0.20
Crowley Lake Reservoir	CAL6031009019-980806103521	Tissue	2018	COMM WILD	Tissue: 0.62	H_2O: 0.05 Tissue: 0.20

To better understand the nature and extent of mercury contamination in the UORW, beginning in spring 2021 Water Board staff deployed a sampling program to collect stream sediment, fish tissue, and water quality samples. Sampling was designed to determine which of the multiple streams, tributary to Crowley Lake Reservoir, are transporting mercury laden sediments to the reservoir, to what extent the reservoir fishery is impacted by mercury, and if methylmercury (MeHg) is a pollutant of concern in the watershed. Methylmercury is produced when bacteria react with mercury in anerobic conditions and is a potent neurotoxin which can cause neurological and reproductive harm to people and animals. Methylmercury is commonly ingested via intake of food, such as eating contaminated fish.

During the 2021 field season staff collected stream sediment samples from ten sites throughout the UORW. Eight sampling trips were planned for 2021, but the sample program was limited during the field season in response to wildfires and hazardous wildfire smoke conditions in the project area, and the Caldor Fire which forced the evacuation of the Water Board's South Lake Tahoe office. As a result of these disruptions staff made six visits to the project area between May and October. The Water Board's contractor, Marine Pollution Studies Laboratories/Moss Landing Marine Laboratories (MPSL/MLML) collected fish tissue, water quality, and sediment samples from Crowley Lake Reservoir. All in-lake sampling planned for Crowley Lake Reservoir was completed in 2021.

Preliminary data for mercury recovered from the sediment, tissue, and water matrices confirm that beneficial uses are impacted in Crowley Lake Reservoir, the Owens River between the tributary with Hot Creek and Crowley Lake, Hot Creek, Mammoth Creek, and the Mill City Tributary, a tributary to Mammoth Creek. Methylmercury was detected in many samples, although at low concentrations. Other tributaries sampled during 2021, including Convict Creek, Hilton Creek, Whiskey Creek, and the Upper Owens River upstream of the Hot Creek tributary do not carry mercury beyond accepted background concentrations (0.01-0.03 mg/Kg, Austin et al., 2020). Staff are presently engaged in quality assurance (QA) assessment on preliminary 2021 data to ensure those data meet the Water Board's data quality thresholds. Once 2021 data is finalized staff will prepare a data report for the 2021 field season.

Based on the preliminary 2021 data, staff adjusted the sampling program for the 2022 field season. Sampling in 2022 continues to focus on known mercury-impacted tributaries and includes two additional sediment sampling locations in the upper portions of the Mammoth Creek sub-watershed. The additional sampling locations are located on Mammoth Creek below the Twin Lakes outlet and on the Mill City Tributary above the Stamp Mill site. Sample locations for 2022 are shown in Figure 2.1. Additional sites are included to provide information on how sediment-mercury concentrations change with sediment transport in the Mammoth Creek sub-watershed. Additional analysis for two other pollutants, Arsenic (As) and Lead (Pb), is included at select sampling locations in the vicinity of the Old Mammoth Stamp Mill, a likely source of mercury to watershed sediments. Locations where sediment analyses will include As and Pb is depicted by the yellow triangle site locators shown in Figure 2.1. New analytes are included to provide a further line of evidence showing how impacted sediments are transported

through Mammoth Creek. For Crowley Lake Reservoir, no further sampling is planned for 2022 because the requisite volume of data was collected in 2021.

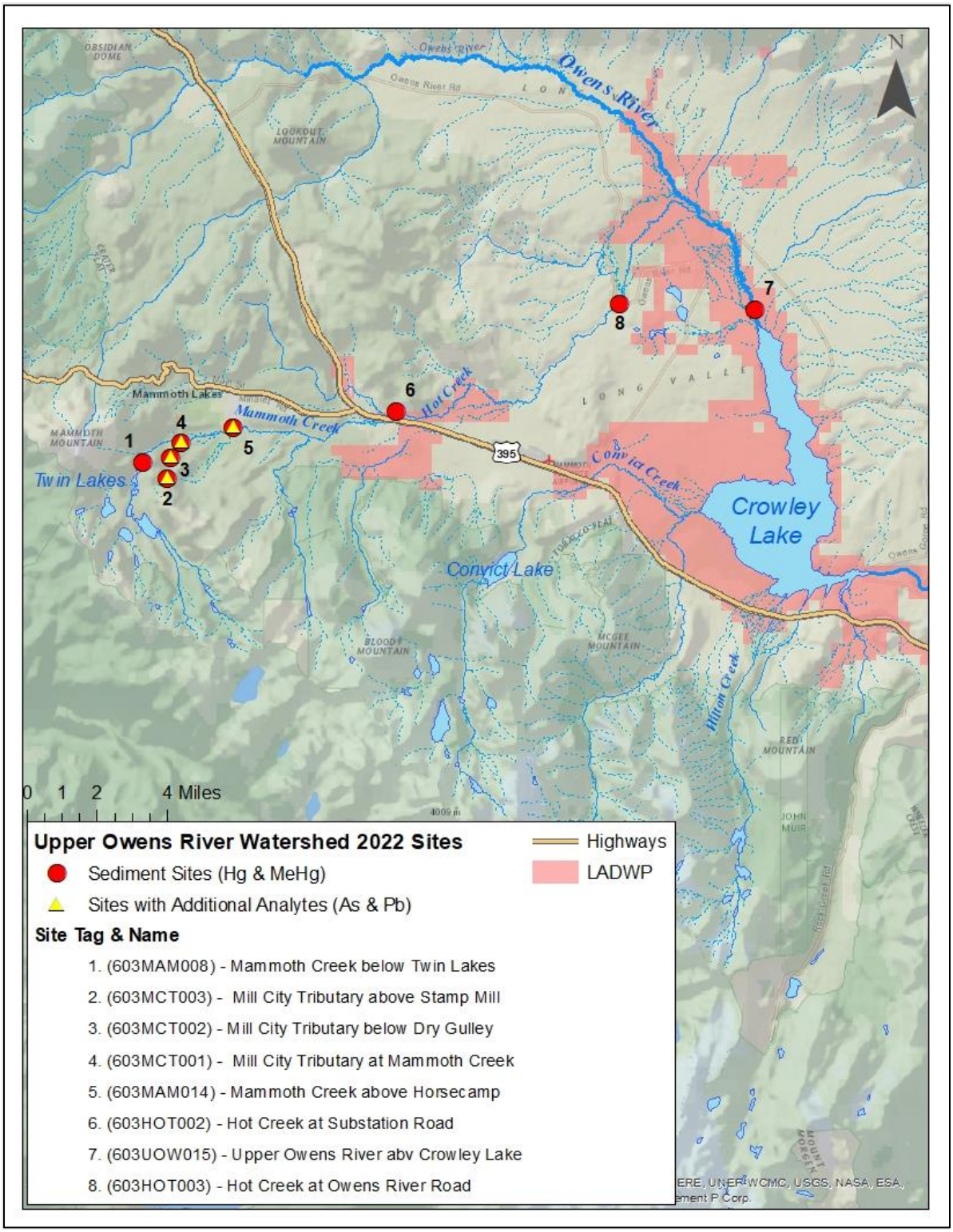


Figure 2.1. 2022 sediment sampling locations

3. **Standing Item – Climate Change Adaption and Mitigation Program – Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board (Water Board) Engagement in the Cutting Green Tape Initiative** – *Laurie Scribe*

The California Natural Resources Agency (CNRA) leads several initiatives aimed at furthering the State of California's climate change goals, including developing the Pathways to 30 x 30 Strategy, expanding nature-based solutions through the Natural and Working Lands Climate Smart Strategy, and the Cutting Green Tape initiative. This climate change focused EO Report provides an update on Water Board staff's engagement in CNRA's Cutting Green Tape (CGT) initiative.

CGT is an initiative to increase the pace and scale of ecological restoration and stewardship by amending and streamlining various government processes. It focuses on improving interagency coordination, partnerships and agency processes and policies to allow ecological restoration and stewardship to occur more quickly, simply, and cost-effectively. CGT will help further the Water Board's climate change policy statements, especially regarding the protection and restoration of wetlands, floodplains, and headwaters, and groundwater recharge and supply through increased pace of meadow restoration and forest health restoration.

Water Board staff have been involved with two aspects of the CGT initiative. One is participating in the development of the State Water Resources Control Board's General Order for Clean Water Act Section 401 Water Quality Certification and Waste Discharge Requirements for Restoration Projects Statewide (Restoration GO), the other is use of the new Statutory Exemption for Restoration Projects (SERP). The Restoration GO will provide a statewide permit for larger restoration projects that do not qualify for the existing Small Habitat Restoration General Order. Regional Board staff have been engaged in development of this permit for several years through review and commenting on early and public draft versions of the Restoration GO and associated Programmatic Environmental Impact Report (PEIR). In late April 2022, Water Board staff provided review and comments on the final internal draft of the proposed Restoration GO. The State Board anticipates considering adoption of the Restoration GO in August 2022. Enrollment and oversight of projects using the Restoration GO, and compliance with mitigations in the PEIR, will be done by Water Board staff.

The second point of engagement with CGT is potential utilization of a new temporary California Environmental Quality Act statutory exemption approved by the legislature in September 2021 – the SERP. Projects eligible under SERP are limited to those that involve habitat benefits to native fish and wildlife, and result in long-term benefits to climate resiliency, biodiversity, and sensitive species recovery. This exemption is set to expire at the end of 2024, although it could be extended. Water Board staff received a request from the Truckee River Watershed Council to use this exemption for two upcoming restoration projects. Utilization of the SERP requires obtaining concurrence from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW). Water Board staff and legal counsel are currently working with CDFW staff and legal counsel to determine steps and actions needed to implement this new exemption.

4. **Annual Hinkley Community Barbecue sponsored by the Independent Review Panel (IRP) Manager** – *Amanda Lopez*

   Lahontan Water Board staff, Amanda Lopez, Engineering Geologist, attended the Annual Hinkley Community Barbecue on May 21, 2022, that was sponsored by Project Navigator, Independent Review Panel (IRP) Manager, and held at the Hinkley Community and Senior Center. Raudel Sanchez, Anand Helekar, Lorena Barahona, and Margaret DeAngelis of the IRP were in attendance, as well as approximately 100 community members. The event was catered by a taco stand and included a bounce house and a raffle to win either Del Taco or In-n-Out gift cards.

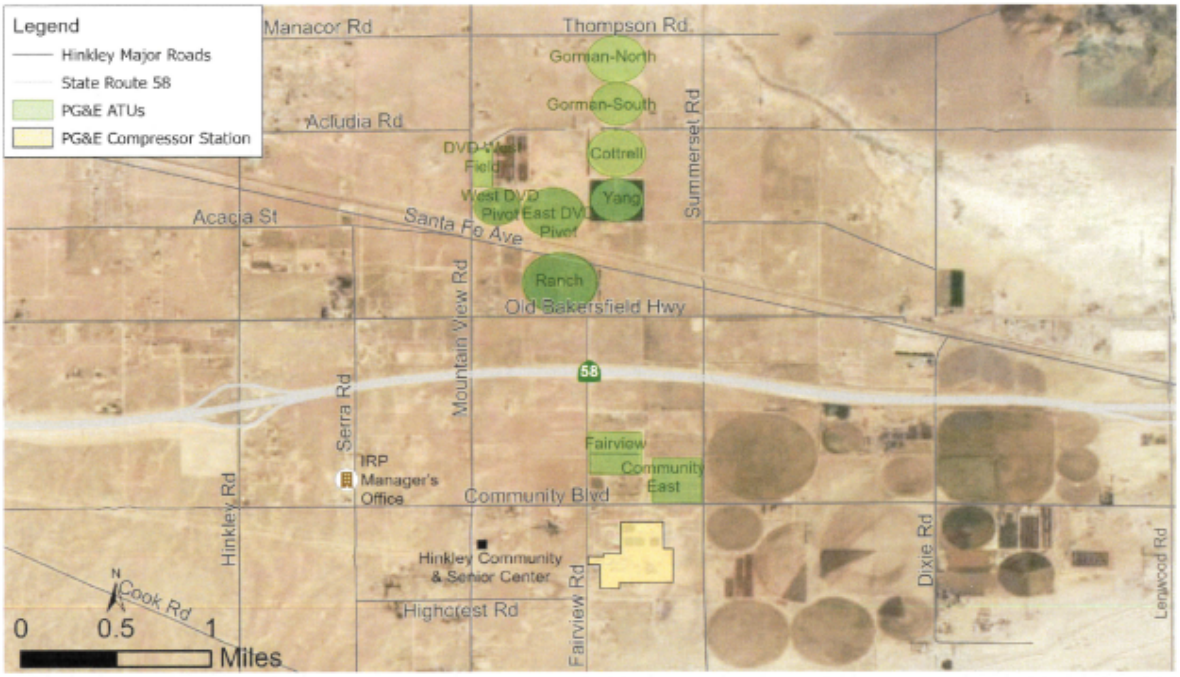
   At Water Board staff request, the IRP distributed a flyer at the event asking for input from the community on the future of agriculture in the Hinkley Valley (Figure 4.1). The community input is an integral part of making decisions on the chromium remediation project and we felt it essential to get their input on this topic as it relates to the agricultural treatment of hexavalent chromium, and the potential byproducts of that remedial approach. The IRP staff plans to hold community workshops in June and July to further the discuss with community members. At the regular Hinkley Community Meeting to be held on July 28, 2022, Water Board staff will also discuss the topic with the community. We anticipate the IRP will provide us with formal community input by early August.

HINKLEY GROUNDWATER REMEDIATION PROGRAM
WWW.HINKLEYGROUNDWATER.COM

PROJECT NAVIGATOR, LTD.

The Water Board Wants Your Input

The Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board (Water Board) would like to know your opinion on the presence of large commercial farm areas in the Hinkley community.



Would you like to see less commercial farm areas in Hinkley, or do you think they are good for the community?

- Please contact the IRP Manager Team to submit your opinion, thoughts, or concerns or visit us during our office hours.
- The Waterboard will use this information to help them shape future planning and decision-making regarding the Agricultural Treatment Units (ATUs).
- The IRP Manager Team will be hosting workshops in the coming months.

The IRP Manager's role in Hinkley is to serve as a resource to the Community to answer technical questions or address issues that need to be raised with regards to chromium remediation of groundwater.

To schedule a meeting or to find out our office hour schedule, please contact us at (tel) (714) 388-1800 or (email) info@projectnavigator.com.

To review resource information on Hinkley, groundwater, fact sheets, regulatory documents, etc., please visit www.HinkleyGroundwater.com.

Figure 4.1: Independent Review Panel generated flyer distributed to the Hinkley Community