

Regional Water Quality Control Board  
North Coast Region

Staff Summary Report  
February 08, 2024  
Regional Water Board Office  
5550 Skylane Blvd, Suite A  
Santa Rosa, CA

**ITEM:** 4

**SUBJECT:** Public Hearing to consider adoption of Proposed Order No. R1-2024-0003, General Waste Discharge Requirements and General Water Quality Certification for the Mendocino County Permit Coordination Program, and the associated Monitoring and Reporting Program (*Jake Shannon*)

**BOARD ACTION:** The North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board (Regional Water Board) will consider adoption of Proposed Order No. R1-2024-0003.

**BACKGROUND:** On November 20, 2013, the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board adopted Order No. R1-2013-0059 and Monitoring and Reporting Program No. R1-2013-0059 for the Mendocino County Resource Conservation District's (District) Mendocino County Permit Coordination Program (Program). Following five years of successful implementation of the Program, the Regional Water Board adopted Order No. R1-2019-0004 on February 21, 2019, to continue the Program. Order R1-2019-0004 expires on February 21, 2024.

The District, in partnership with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), developed the Program to provide technical, financial, and permitting assistance to landowners seeking to make environmental improvements on their lands. The Program promotes the implementation of high-quality conservation and restoration projects on farms, ranches, and forestland throughout the watersheds of Mendocino County. Projects implemented through the Program are designed to control erosion and sediment discharges, improve instream habitat for aquatic species, stabilize eroding streambanks, promote native vegetation growth, and enhance aquatic and terrestrial habitat that may be affecting water quality and beneficial uses.

The Program is based on a successful model of coordinated, multi-agency regulatory review designed to ensure the integrity of agency mandates, while simplifying permitting for working landscapes. Since its inception in 2013, the Program has successfully implemented many projects in Mendocino County watersheds, including the upper Russian River, Gualala River, Garcia River, and Navarro River. Completed projects include hydrologically disconnecting miles of roads from streams, upgrading watercourse crossings, removal of barriers to fish migration through culvert removal and replacement with bridges, removal of non-native vegetation, and riparian replanting projects.

The implementation of conservation and restoration practices through the Program promotes watershed recovery by controlling sources contributing to sediment and temperature impairments, consistent with Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) load allocations. Additionally, the conservation and restoration practices are consistent with the recommended actions included in state and federal recovery plans for endangered salmonids.

Under Order R1-2013-0059, the District completed ten conservation and restoration projects across 24 properties at approximately 242 sites between 2013 and 2018. These projects treated approximately 30 miles of roads to reduce chronic sediment delivery to watercourses, decommissioned 15 miles of roads, upgraded 97 culverts to the 100-year storm event flow, restored 1,750 linear feet of stream bank, removed six fish passage barriers, and installed four bridges. Stream improvements included removal of over 500 feet of invasive *Arundo donax* with riparian restoration, installation of 11 large wood habitat structures and re-opening over seven miles of anadromous habitat in Mill Creek.

Under Order R1-2019-0004, the District initiated ten conservation and restoration projects (five of which have been completed) across 24 properties at approximately 323 sites between 2019 and 2023. Through these projects the District has treated over 23 miles of roads to reduce sediment delivery to watercourses, including 287 road stream crossings to withstand the 100-year storm event flow; permanently decommissioned 63 road stream crossings; and restored approximately 3.3 miles of stream bank with native plantings and/or erosion control measures.

**DISCUSSION:** Proposed Order No. R1-2024-0003 transitions the expiring Order No. R1-2019-0004 from a Conditional Waiver of Waste Discharge Requirements to a General Waste Discharge Requirements Order (GWDR). No substantive changes to the Conditional Waiver were made as part of this transition to a GWDR. This transition to a GWDR is appropriate because the Order is protective of beneficial uses and has proven effective in improving water quality and implementing the goals of sediment and temperature TMDLs in watersheds of Mendocino County. Projects previously enrolled in the Program under the expired Waiver shall be automatically enrolled under this new GWDR. All conditions included in the new GWDR shall apply. The GWDR will continue to apply to activities associated with the ten conservation practices implemented through the Program and identified below.

Adoption of the Proposed Order and MRP continues this successful program and maintains our regulatory efficiency while gaining valuable water quality improvements. This partnership-based regulatory program allows the Regional Water Board to continue to leverage our grant funds effectively and efficiently through annual project prioritization and authorization. The Order and MRP authorize proven NRCS conservation and restoration practices and incorporate appropriate mitigation measures identified through the CEQA process to be protective of water quality.

**SIGNIFICANT CHANGES:** No substantive changes to the Conditional Waiver were made as part of this transition to a General Waste Discharge Requirements Order.

**PUBLIC COMMENT:** Staff issued a 45-day public notice of hearing and draft Order adoption on the Regional Water Board's website from October 19 to December 3, 2023. No comments were received.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Staff recommend adoption of Order No. R1-2024-0003 and MRP R1-2024-0003, as proposed.

**SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS:**

1. Proposed Order No. R1-2024-0003, General Waste Discharge Requirements and General Water Quality Certification for the Mendocino County Permit Coordination Program
2. Monitoring and Reporting Program Order No. R1-2024-0003 for General Waste Discharge Requirements and General Water Quality Certification for the Mendocino County Permit Coordination Program
3. Notice of Public Hearing

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