

**Regional Water Quality Control Board
North Coast Region
Staff Summary Report
July 23, 2026**

ITEM: 2

SUBJECT: *Workshop on the Water Code Section 13267 Informational Order Directing Applicable Landowners in the Gualala River Watershed to Submit Technical Reports Pertaining to the Inventory, Assessment, and Prioritization of Ownership-Wide Road-Related Sediment Discharge Sites (Order)* (Matt Graves)

BOARD ACTION: No formal action will be taken by the North Coast Water Board. The Board will solicit comments from interested parties and may provide comments or direction to staff.

BACKGROUND:

The Gualala River Watershed occupies the mountainous and rugged terrain that spans the Mendocino and Sonoma County coastlines. The mainstem Gualala River flows into the Pacific Ocean near the Town of Gualala, 114 miles north of San Francisco, where it drains approximately 298 square miles, or 190,720 acres. Population centers in the Gualala River Watershed are concentrated on the coastline and include the towns of Gualala, Sea Ranch, Stewarts Point, and Annapolis.

In 1993, the entire Gualala River Watershed was placed on the federal Clean Water Act section 303(d) List as impaired for excessive sedimentation/siltation. Excessive sediment in the Gualala River Watershed impairs beneficial uses associated with the Gualala River's salmonid fishery, specifically: Commercial or Sport Fishing (COMM), Cold Freshwater Habitat (COLD), Estuarine Habitat (EST), Migration of Aquatic Organisms (MIGR), and Spawning, Reproduction, and/or Early Development (SPWN). Elevated sediment levels can increase rates of sediment deposition and turbidity, reducing water quality, limiting oxygen flow in spawning gravels for salmonids, altering stream morphology, and impacting municipal, domestic, and agricultural water supplies (MUN and AGR) and other beneficial uses of water.

In 2001, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency established a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) for sediment in the Gualala River Watershed, supported by the *Gualala River Watershed Technical Support Document for Sediment* (Technical Support Document) developed by North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board (North Coast Water Board) staff. The TMDL and Technical Support Document identified roads as the largest human-caused source of sediment in the watershed. Report findings remain valid 25 years later because land use¹ in the watershed has generally remained

¹ Staff acknowledge that management practices employed within existing land uses have in some cases changed since the 2001 TMDL and that roads improvements have

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unchanged since these reports were developed. Road assessments conducted as part of the Order will collect updated, property-specific data on road-related sediment sources and identify areas where source control is needed.

A 2021 lawsuit filed by Friends of Gualala River contended that the Gualala River Sediment TMDL had not been incorporated into the Water Quality Control Plan for the North Coast Region (Basin Plan) as required by the Clean Water Act. The resulting stipulated settlement agreement included two main components: (a) the North Coast Water Board will undertake a public process to incorporate the Gualala Sediment TMDL into the Basin Plan and (b) the North Coast Water Board will undertake a public process to develop an order or orders to address road-related sediment discharge sites in the Gualala River Watershed. Requirement (a) of the agreement was fulfilled by the June 13, 2025 adoption of Resolution R1-2025-0019 and the February 18, 2026 adoption of Resolution R1-2026-0011 that incorporates the Action Plan for the Gualala River Sediment TMDL into the Basin Plan. This Order is intended to fulfill requirement (b).

Pursuant to section 13267 of the California Water Code, North Coast Water Board staff have developed the draft *Water Code Section 13267 Informational Order Directing Applicable Landowners in the Gualala River Watershed to Submit Technical Reports Pertaining to the Inventory, Assessment, and Prioritization of Ownership-Wide Road-Related Sediment Discharge Sites (draft Order)*. The draft Order seeks to provide both the landowner and the North Coast Water Board with the information necessary to assess the risk of sediment delivery from the landowner's rural roads to surface waters and determine the actions necessary to mitigate or eliminate that risk.

On July 13, 2026, the North Coast Water Board opened a 30-day public comment and review period for the draft Order. The public comment and review period will close on August 14, 2026.

The North Coast Water Board will hold a public hearing on December 3 or 4, 2026 to receive oral public input and comments on and consider adoption of the proposed Order.

DISCUSSION:

The draft Order requires landowners in the Gualala River Watershed whose aggregated ownership is 1,000 acres or more to inventory, assess, and prioritize rural roads on their property. The 1,000-acre threshold incorporates into the draft Order 74% of the total road miles in the watershed, addressing a portion of rural roads large enough to significantly reduce sediment delivery to surface waters in the watershed and result in road-related sediment load reductions.

been made in some areas. The draft Order would, in part, result in the compilation of information regarding roads improvements that have already taken place in the watershed.

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The North Coast Water Board has secured \$5 million in contract funds to support landowners in the Gualala River Watershed. These funds are being used to (1) develop technical reports that describe current watershed conditions and industry standard road assessment protocols, (2) conduct community outreach, (3) provide landowner trainings on road improvement techniques, and (4) conduct on-the-ground road assessments and develop Road Management and Treatment Plan for landowners subject to the draft Order.

The draft Order requires the following key actions and deadlines:

- Landowners may request contract-funded assessment support by **March 1, 2027**.
- Landowners should submit requests to reduce the scope of required assessments (based on any assessments or road treatments previously completed on a property) no later than **July 1, 2027**.
- Landowners must submit Annual Status Reports on **July 1 each year, beginning in 2027**.
- Landowners must submit Road Management and Treatment Plans by **April 1, 2030**.

Public participation in the Order development process began in early 2025 and includes eight primary avenues: (1) Tribal engagement with the Kashia Band of Pomo Indians of the Stewarts Point Rancheria, (2) a series of letters mailed directly to landowners expected to be subject to the Order; (3) dozens of individual meetings with interested parties; (4) more than twenty updates to email subscribers; (5) nine informal staff office hours open to the public; (6) three formal community meetings; (7) public review of the draft Order, including a public workshop; and (8) future public participation in an adoption hearing before the North Coast Water Board. The public comment and review period ends on August 14, 2026, and the proposed Order adoption hearing is scheduled for December 3 or 4, 2026.

RECOMMENDATION: Not applicable.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS:

1. Notice of Public Comment Opportunity, Board Workshop, and December Public Hearing to Consider Adoption of *Water Code Section 13267 Informational Order Directing Applicable Landowners in the Gualala River Watershed to Submit Technical Reports Pertaining to the Inventory, Assessment, and Prioritization of Ownership-Wide Road-Related Sediment Discharge Sites*
2. Draft *Water Code Section 13267 Informational Order Directing Applicable Landowners in the Gualala River Watershed to Submit Technical Reports Pertaining to the Inventory, Assessment, and Prioritization of Ownership-Wide Road-Related Sediment Discharge Sites* and appendices