



North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board

Regional Water Quality Control Board North Coast Region Staff Summary Report October 1-2, 2026

ITEM: 4

SUBJECT: North Coast Water Board and the Public Trust Doctrine

BOARD ACTION: This is an informational item; no action will be taken by the Board

BACKGROUND: The Public Trust Doctrine establishes that the State of California holds navigable waters in trust for the benefit of the public. The Doctrine has evolved to apply not only to navigable waters, but also those waters that may affect navigable waters, such as tributaries and groundwater. The Public Trust Doctrine establishes a duty to protect these lands and waters for wildlife, navigation, commerce, recreation, scientific, ecological and aesthetic value. The Public Trust Doctrine, however, does not direct a particular analysis or outcome in the Board's decisions. In its actions, the North Coast Water Board applies Water Code provisions that codify its public trust responsibilities and protects public trust uses and values when feasible.

This informational discussion will provide a general background and overview of the public trust and examples of its application in the Water Boards' actions.

RECOMMENDATION: N/A