**North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board**
**Regional Water Quality Control Board**
**North Coast Region**
**Staff Summary Report**
**December 3, 2026**

**ITEM:** **5**

**SUBJECT:** Update on the Hydrology and Water Quality Basin Plan Amendment *(Bryan McFadin)*

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

**BACKGROUND:** North Coast Water Board staff will update the Board on progress made on the Hydrology and Water Quality Basin Plan amendment (HAWQ amendment or project) since the last update in December 2025. The information provided will include an overview of the scope of the Basin Plan amendment, including refinements to the regulatory approach and updates on Tribal consultation, the external peer review process, CEQA scoping, and next steps in the year ahead.

This project began as an effort to develop a narrative water quality objective for instream flow. The project was first listed as a priority in the 2014 Triennial Review and included in the Planning Program Workplan in the 2018 Triennial Review. The objective of that project was the development of a regional narrative flow objective and corresponding implementation methodology. The Board identified this effort as a high priority again during the 2023 Triennial Review in recognition of the ongoing impacts that water quantity-related issues are having on water quality and beneficial uses. In 2025, the project was reorganized as the Hydrology and Water Quality Basin Plan Amendment to reflect a shift in focus towards development of regulatory tools that rely upon implementation mechanisms within the North Coast Water Board's direct authority to address water quality impacts of altered hydrology.

**DISCUSSION:** The HAWQ Basin Plan amendment would establish two new conditional waste discharge prohibitions that add and enhance tools for the North Coast Water Board to address hydrologic alteration and water quality degradation. The conditional prohibitions would be included in Chapter 5, "Regionwide Implementation, Prohibitions, Plans, and Policies", and focus on (1) restoration and maintenance of hydrologic function and (2) reduction of agricultural tailwater discharges. Together, these measures would support sustainable water resource management and watershed resilience.

In addition to the conditional prohibitions, staff are developing Basin Plan language to incorporate, by reference, State Water Board Resolution No. 2008-0030, *Requiring*

*Sustainable Water Resources Management* and State Water Board Resolution No. 2017-0012, *Comprehensive Response to Climate Change* into Chapter 5. This will establish the North Coast Water Board's intent to prioritize activities, such as low-impact development and support of sustainable forestry practices.

The HAWQ amendment is grounded in the North Coast Water Board's authority under the Porter-Cologne Water Quality Control Act to regulate discharges of waste and controllable water quality factors that may impact water quality objectives and beneficial uses. The HAWQ amendment does not regulate water rights or diversions; rather, it complements the State Water Board's water rights program by focusing on water quality impacts associated with waste discharges and related controllable factors.

The overarching goal of the HAWQ amendment is to establish prohibitions and implementation guidance that set a clear and consistent regulatory framework that advances watershed resilience and safeguards water quality throughout the North Coast Region. By directly addressing controllable water quality factors and hydrologic degradation, the HAWQ amendment seeks to maintain the ecological health of rivers, wetlands, and groundwater systems, ensuring that beneficial uses are protected now and into the future as climate-driven pressures intensify.

**RECOMMENDATION:** N/A

**SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS:**
North Coast Water Board Hydrology and Water Quality Project webpage
(https://waterboards.ca.gov/northcoast/water_issues/programs/basin_plan/hawq/)

"Prohibitions and the Importance of the Basin Plan" – An article in the August 2025 Executive Officer's Report that describes the utility of prohibitions of waste discharge
(https://waterboards.ca.gov/northcoast/board_info/board_meetings/08_2025/pdf/8/8-aug2025-eoreport.pdf)