REGIONAL WATER QUALITY CONTROL BOARD
SAN DIEGO REGION

EXECUTIVE OFFICER SUMMARY REPORT
OCTOBER 11, 2023

ITEM 4

SUBJECT
Teamwork Makes the Dream Work: Sediment Cleanups in San Diego Bay (Sarah Mearon)

STAFF RECOMMENDATION
Informational item only; no recommendation.

KEY ISSUE
San Diego Bay is the largest natural enclosed bay in southern California and the most intensively used water body in the San Diego region. Restoring the fish and shellfish consumption key beneficial use in the Bay is a high priority for San Diego Water Board staff. To this end, one pathway taken by staff focuses on ensuring contaminated sediments within the Bay are assessed and remediated under Board oversight. This item will provide the Board with information on how staff across the Board's three branches (Site Restoration and Groundwater Protection, Healthy Waters, and Surface Water Protection) have found opportunities to support each other and work together to improve the health of San Diego Bay sediments, with the overall goal of restoring the fish and shellfish consumption beneficial use. The Unified Port of San Diego and the U.S. Navy also will provide updates on their work within the Bay.

PRACTICAL VISION
Chapter 1 of the Practical Vision: Strategize for Healthy Waters helps the Board prioritize resources and efforts toward what is most important to protect and restore the health of the waters in the region by implementing an outcome-focused key beneficial use and key area approach. The 2015 Strategy for a Healthy San Diego Bay was developed to help San Diego Water Board staff identify, prioritize, and implement programs and projects that will improve the conditions of San Diego Bay for its key beneficial uses.

DISCUSSION
After the Board endorsed the Strategy for a Healthy San Diego Bay in 2015, Board staff reviewed available data to assess conditions of the Bay for its habitats and ecosystems, fish and shellfish consumption, and recreation key beneficial uses. In 2017, Board staff developed a data and information visualization tool (DIViT) to display the sediment chemistry data available from the Board's various programs. The San Diego Bay Sediment Chemistry DIViT has helped Board staff identify where more coordination and communication between programs is needed to improve conditions of the Bay for the fish and shellfish consumption key beneficial use.

The San Diego Bay Programs Coordination Workgroup was formed in 2018 for staff to share information among programs and identify areas where collaboration and coordination of staff work could better improve the conditions of San Diego Bay for the fish and shellfish consumption key beneficial use, as well as the habitats and ecosystems and

recreation key beneficial uses. Since the formation of the Workgroup, Board staff are no longer working in isolation on Bay issues and have found several opportunities to assist and support each other.

Sediment cleanups are managed by two units at the San Diego Water Board: the Site Restoration Unit and the Site Restoration, Military Facilities Unit. However, sediment cleanup work cannot be successful without the collaboration and assistance of other Board units including the Monitoring, Assessment, and Research Unit (MARU) and the Wetlands and Riparian Protection Unit (WRPU).

Site Restoration Unit
The San Diego Water Board's Site Restoration Unit (SRU) oversees investigation and remediation work at several sediment sites in the northern and central areas of San Diego Bay as part of the Site Cleanup Program. These cleanup cases operate under enforcement orders issued to parties responsible for the discharge of wastes to sediments. Sediment cleanup site management is complex and challenging. Program staff have improved their success in managing complex sediment cleanup sites through collaboration with MARU and WRPU. MARU assists SRU by providing technical guidance on Bay-wide sediment data and application of the Sediment Quality Objectives (SQOs), which are part of the Water Quality Control Plan for Enclosed Bays and Estuaries. Additionally, SRU regularly interfaces with WRPU to evaluate potential impacts on known contaminated sediment sites during the permitting process for dredge and fill projects within the Bay.

Monitoring, Assessment, and Research Unit
MARU provides support to numerous programs within the San Diego Water Board through its monitoring and assessment work. MARU will provide an update on recent and ongoing monitoring and assessment work in San Diego Bay completed to support multiple San Diego Water Board programs. This work includes tribal and subsistence studies, eelgrass mapping and bioassessment, and both participation in and assessment of Southern California Bight monitoring data.

Wetlands and Riparian Protection Unit
WRPU regulates activities that have the potential to impact water quality within San Diego Bay through the issuance of Clean Water Act section 401 Certifications (401 Certifications) and/or Waste Discharge Requirements (WDRs). These activities include dredging, dock replacement, pier and pile replacement, and shoreline improvements that suspend sediment and, potentially, contaminants within the Bay. In the past, 401 Certifications have required Best Management Practices (BMPs) and monitoring to control turbidity as an indicator for other contaminants. WRPU has started coordinating with the Site Restoration Units (SRUs) to determine if these requirements are adequate. Coordination efforts include attending pre-application meetings for 401 Certifications, evaluation of pre-project sediment sampling data, establishing minimum BMP requirements for activities, and potential prohibition of some dredge and fill activities within parts of San Diego Bay. For Navy dredging projects that require upland disposal of contaminated sediments, a 2021 Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the San Diego Water Board and the Navy is in place. The MOA establishes standard receiving water limitations, monitoring requirements, and BMPs that will be applied to these types of maintenance dredging projects. The result is a collaboration that is protective of water

quality and facilitates the 401 Certification application process.

Site Restoration, Military Facilities Unit
The San Diego Water Board's Department of Defense regulatory program continues to focus on the investigation and remediation of Installation Restoration Program (IRP) sites discharging into San Diego Bay. IRP projects at Naval Base San Diego and Naval Air Station North Island are focused on sites where historical discharges of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), chlorinated solvents, and per- and polyfluoroalkyl (PFAS) substances have occurred near shoreline sediments. The Board's oversight of IRP sites discharging into the Bay is conducted pursuant to the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA), and, if warranted, the Sediment Quality Provisions and SQOs, which are included in the Water Quality Control Plan for Enclosed Bays and Estuaries.

Port of San Diego Update
The Port of San Diego is the state designated public trustee of more than 14,000 acres of tidelands and submerged tidelands in and around San Diego Bay, of which most are in-water areas. The Port's core trust uses, including navigation, commerce, fisheries, recreation, and natural resource protection, have helped shape its role as an environmental steward of San Diego Bay. The Port has implemented a multitude of programs that focus on improving air, water, and sediment quality and enhancing biological integrity. Additional initiatives include those focused on protecting the Bay against potential adverse effects related to sea level rise and driving sustainable development of the blue economy. This presentation will highlight several of the Port's ongoing and new environmental initiatives that have been implemented to work towards the Port and San Diego Water Board's shared goal of achieving a healthy Bay. Highlighted projects include those related to water and sediment quality, long-term monitoring trends, legacy pollution, and implementing nature-based solutions in response to environmental challenges.

U.S. Navy Update
The Navy conducts numerous ongoing efforts designed to improve San Diego Bay water quality and enhance natural habitat. The Navy has funded several efforts in the Bay that include surveys and monitoring of green sea turtles, marine mammals, fish, invasive species, and seabirds. In addition, the Navy, through partnership with the Port of San Diego, has increased eelgrass extent in San Diego Bay through mitigation banks, which have positively affected water quality; the success of this program has become a state-wide model for implementation. The Navy also implements other projects in the Bay such as trash removal from Chollas and Paleta Creeks, shorelines, and beaches that have increased Bay water quality through the removal of tons of trash.

LEGAL CONCERNS
None.

PUBLIC NOTICE
The agenda notice for today's meeting was posted on the San Diego Water Board's website and sent to subscribers to the email list for Board meetings. This satisfies the Bagley-Keene Open Meeting Act requirements to publish the meeting notice and agenda.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS
None.