

**REGIONAL WATER QUALITY CONTROL BOARD
SAN DIEGO REGION**

**EXECUTIVE OFFICER SUMMARY REPORT
NOVEMBER 10, 2026**

ITEM 3a

SUBJECT

Tijuana River Trash Boom Update from Rural Community Assistance Corporation and Alter Terra. (*Melissa Corona*)

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Informational item only; no recommendation.

KEY ISSUE

The Tijuana River Trash Boom pilot project has demonstrated substantial near-term water quality benefits by intercepting large volumes of trash and solid waste originating in Mexico before it reaches the Tijuana River Estuary and Pacific Ocean. Following two storm seasons of successful operation, the State Water Resources Control Board authorized an additional \$2 million from the Cleanup and Abatement Account (CAA) to fund operations and maintenance through the 2026-2027 storm season while the Rural Community Assistance Corporation (RCAC) pursues long-term funding.

PRACTICAL VISION

The Tijuana River Trash Boom project advances the San Diego Water Board's Practical Vision¹ Chapter 1 commitment to "Strategize for Healthy Waters" by producing measurable improvements in a watershed designated as one of the Board's highest priority Key Areas. The project prevents thousands of tons of trash, plastics, and large debris from entering the Tijuana River Estuary and Pacific Ocean, which are water bodies with sensitive Beneficial Uses and longstanding impairments. By reducing pollutant loads before they reach these critical habitats, the project demonstrates the Practical Vision's principle of focusing resources where they can achieve the greatest ecological benefit.

The Tijuana River Trash Boom project supports Practical Vision Chapter 2 "Monitor and Assess" by generating data on the types, sources, and volumes of debris entering the watershed during storm events. RCAC and Alter Terra have conducted trash characterization studies, demonstrating the dominance of plastics and Styrofoam by volume and heavier materials like organic waste and lumber by mass. This information enhances the Board's understanding of pollutant pathways and informs future regulatory and planning decisions in the Tijuana River Valley, including source control strategies and infrastructure investments.

Because the transboundary pollution disproportionately impacts neighboring disadvantaged communities, the Tijuana River Trash Boom project substantially supports Practical Vision Chapter 4 "Implement Racial Equity and Environmental Justice

¹ https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/sandiego/water_issues/programs/practical_vision/

Measures.” The system provides immediate reductions in pollution entering the United States from Mexico. By supporting near-term pollution control while long-term binational solutions develop, the project demonstrates the San Diego Water Board’s commitment to alleviating inequitable environmental impacts.

The Tijuana River Trash Boom project also supports Practical Vision Chapter 7 “Mitigate Climate Change Impacts” because it is designed to withstand increasingly intense storm flows associated with climate change. Recent storms have produced extreme flows that deposited massive debris loads, yet the boom remained intact and fully functional. This resilience demonstrates that the system is helping the region adapt to climate-driven hydrologic variability by reducing the downstream consequences of extreme rain events.

DISCUSSION

In November 2024, RCAC and Alter Terra deployed the 1,200-foot floating trash boom in the Tijuana River Flood Control Channel just north of the U.S.-Mexico border. The State Water Resources Control Board financed the two-season pilot project with a \$4.7 million grant with authorization from 2021 State Senate Bill 170. The boom is constructed with recycled plastic modules and forms a horseshoe-shaped floating fence engineered to trap bulky debris while allowing river flows to pass. RCAC estimates that the Tijuana River Trash Boom project has already intercepted over 2,000 tons of debris, preventing its discharge to sensitive habitats and coastal waters. On July 21, 2026, the State Water Resources Control Board approved up to \$2 million in CAA funding (Resolution No. 2026-0026) to sustain operations and maintenance through the 2026-2027 storm season.

RCAC and Alter Terra will brief the Board on operational readiness for the 2026-2027 storm season, trash removal logistics, and long-term solutions and funding strategies.

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.