



North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board

Regional Water Quality Control Board North Coast Region Staff's Summary Report December 12-13, 2023

ITEM: #10

SUBJECT: Update on the Russian River Regional Monitoring Program (“R3MP”) (*Matt St. John, Sean McNeil, City of Santa Rosa, Alison Whipple and Sarah Lowe, San Francisco Estuary Institute*)

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

BACKGROUND: The Russian River flows more than 100 miles from Redwood and Potter Valleys to the ocean, spanning 1,500 square miles. Most of the watershed is privately owned, and more than 600,000 people live in the region, and it is home to three endangered salmonid fish species. The [Russian River Regional Monitoring Program \(R3MP\)](https://sites.google.com/sfei.org/r3mp/) (<https://sites.google.com/sfei.org/r3mp/>) was established in 2019 to provide the scientific information necessary for successful long-term management of Russian River watershed health. Management challenges in the Russian River watershed are amplifying due to rapid environmental change with climate and land use changes, exemplified by altered ecological processes and functions and negative impacts to public health and safety, wildlife and aquatic life. These challenges demand a coordinated watershed-scale approach to monitoring and assessment to inform water resource management in the watershed. The R3MP is envisioned as an integral part of a scientific enterprise centered on the watershed that services the many management interests, including counties, municipalities, other public agencies, Tribes, non-governmental environmental organizations, and private interests that need a dependable source of high quality, independent, scientific information to successfully address clearly defined watershed health issues.

DISCUSSION: Informed by the success of other regional monitoring programs in the state, including the Regional Monitoring Program for Water Quality in San Francisco Bay, in 2015 staff of the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board first called for the creation of a regional monitoring program to coordinate the best available science to support environmental regulatory and management decisions throughout the Russian River watershed. In 2017, the Regional Water Board first contracted with the

San Francisco Estuary Institute - Aquatic Science Center (SFEI-ASC) to help develop the R3MP.

The overarching purpose of the R3MP is to coordinate regional entities to support adaptive and coordinated environmental planning, regulation, and management of the Russian River watershed to achieve and sustain its health. The goal of the R3MP is to help coordinate entities, assess baseline conditions, and track key indicators of watershed health over the long-term, and communicate the health status of the Russian River watershed in ways that are scientifically sound and that effectively inform environmental planning, regulatory and management decisions in the watershed context.

The R3MP is now governed by a Steering Committee (SC) representing many of the interests in the watershed, with guidance from a Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) that draws upon the wealth of local and regional expertise in environmental science, engineering, and management. Having established the purpose, organization, and governance of the R3MP in Phase I of the program development, the R3MP is currently in the Phase II planning process, which is focused on the science framework development. To date, the program has established Management and Monitoring Questions, developed a Monitoring Matrix of key indicators of watershed health, and identified monitoring data gaps. This development phase is culminating in a R3MP Coordinated 5-year Monitoring Plan, which centers on the near-term priorities for addressing the R3MP Management Questions:

- 1) What are the status and trends of biostimulation in the watershed? and
- 2) What are the status and trends of stream habitat in the watershed?

The draft Monitoring Plan is currently in review by the R3MP committees. Another work product in development is a draft Data Management Processes memo (based on a recent workshop held on September 20th, 2023), which will outline existing data storage systems and access tools to support data transparency, visualization, and summary. Concurrent to R3MP program development, a base map of aquatic resources is being created through a project funded by the US EPA Wetland Program Development Grant. Also in progress is a status and trends retrospective analysis of a subset of the indicators in the Monitoring Plan.

This presentation will provide an overview of the R3MP, including the goals of the program and the plan to accomplish these goals, the key accomplishments of the R3MP program development and planning phases, and discuss options for program implementation in the years to come. While the R3MP has made a tremendous amount of progress since 2019, the program is still evolving. Fundamental elements of the R3MP that have yet to be determined include establishment of an implementing entity and identification of funding sources and funding mechanisms. The presenters will share the efforts of the broad array of stakeholders that are working collaboratively to advance this important scientific enterprise for the Russian River watershed.

RECOMMENDATION: N/A

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS: Governance documents and a 2022 Fact Sheet are available at: [R3MP](https://sites.google.com/sfei.org/r3mp/) (https://sites.google.com/sfei.org/r3mp/).