

**DESCRIPTION**

The Pajaro River flows through diverse and important habitats. Water quality problems facing this Critical Coastal Area (CCA) watershed include erosion and sedimentation, pesticides, nutrients, heavy metals, pathogens, streambed flow alterations, impacts to endangered species habitat, and riparian vegetation removal.

Agricultural lands are considered to be the major source of nutrient and sediment loading into this watershed. Wetlands are being degraded due to land development and current farming practices. Low-density residential development, flood control projects, sand and gravel mining, mercury mining, and off-road vehicle activity have also directly impacted water quality in the watershed.

Land use modifications have resulted in riparian and in-stream habitat loss, changed the geomorphology of streams and rivers, increased flooding, and reduced groundwater recharge. Due to the high demand for housing in recent years, substantial portions of the upper watershed areas have been developed for residential subdivisions. Due to the close proximity of the watershed to large urban centers, and the extent of urbanization occurring, pollutant loads to rivers and streams have significantly affected water quality for the entire watershed. In recent decades, off-road vehicle use along riparian corridors and in the Clear Creek area has increased sediment migration and degraded riparian areas.

Historic mercury mining activities in Hernandez Lake area, and gravel mines in the Pajaro River, have resulted in heavy metals migration and disrupted geomorphologic functions in portions of the watershed. Airborne and waterborne transport of asbestos from the Clear Creek area is currently being evaluated.

Waterbodies in this CCA that are listed as impaired on the current (2016) Clean Water Act 303(d) list are **Pajaro River** (impaired by toxicity, turbidity, PCBs, pH, chloride, sodium, and pollutants in the categories pesticides, metals/metalloids, sediment, fecal indicator bacteria, and nutrients); **Pajaro River Estuary** (impaired by toxicity, pH, water temperature, dissolved oxygen, and the pesticides diazinon, malathion, and DDE); and **McGowan Ditch** (impaired by nitrate, toxicity, and the pesticides DDD, DDE, and malathion).

Potential sources of these pollutants, organized by **Source Categories**, are listed as **Agriculture** (agriculture, and grazing-related sources); **Silviculture** (logging roads construction/ maintenance); **Municipal Wastewater** (collection system failure); **Urban Runoff** (urban runoff/storm sewers); **Hydromodification**; **Miscellaneous** (domestic animals/livestock); **Habitat Modification**; **Construction/Land Development**; **Natural Sources**; and **Source Unknown**.

**Pajaro River**

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For more photos, see the [California Coastal Records Project](#).

## CRITERIA FOR CCA IDENTIFICATION

The Pajaro River [Critical Coastal Area](#) (CCA) was identified in 2002 based on the criterion of a coastal watershed where an impaired waterbody on the 2002 Clean Water Act Section 303(d) list (Pajaro River) flows into a federal Marine Managed Area (Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary).

This CCA also met the 2014 CCA identification criterion of a coastal watershed where an impaired waterbody on the 2010 303(d) list (Pajaro River) flows into a state-identified Principal Bay or Estuary (Monterey Bay). See California Department of Fish and Wildlife's "[California's Living Marine Resources: A Status Report](#)" (2001) and associated [map of the Principal Bays and Estuaries of California](#).

## ADDRESSING POLLUTANTS

Section 303(d) of the federal Clean Water Act requires states to make a [list of impaired waters](#) that are not attaining water quality standards, and to develop a [Total Maximum Daily Load \(TMDL\)](#) or similar approach to account for all sources of the pollutants that caused the water to be listed as impaired. TMDLs include allocations to both point and nonpoint sources (NPS) of the listed pollutants. The current (2016) 303(d) list of impaired waterbodies includes pollutants, potential pollutant sources, and year a TMDL was approved or is expected.

To address NPS pollutants, see [California's Nonpoint Source Management Measures](#) for guidance on selecting appropriate Management Measures, which consist of a suite of plans, practices, technologies, operating methods, or other measures that may be used to control NPS pollution.

Information for this factsheet was originally compiled by members of California's Critical Coastal Areas Statewide Committee in 2006. The factsheet was revised and updated in 2019 by the California Coastal Commission's Water Quality Program staff.

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