

DESCRIPTION

The Salinas River originates in San Luis Obispo County and flows northwestward into Monterey County and through the entire length of the Salinas Valley. Urbanization, flood control activities, hydromodification of creeks, and mining (of sand, gravel, mineral, and oil reserves) are impacting water resources within this coastal watershed.

Agriculture is the dominant land use throughout this Critical Coastal Area (CCA) watershed, and has had serious impacts on water resources. As a result of over-pumping for irrigation, seawater has intruded nearly six miles inland in the Castroville area, requiring abandonment of several water supply wells. Nitrate contamination is also widespread throughout the Salinas Valley Groundwater Basin, and has been found at high levels in surface water.

Urbanization in many areas of the watershed is resulting in increased runoff volumes, velocities, and pollutant levels. The upper Salinas River watershed land changes are characterized by increased urbanization along the Salinas River and U.S. 101 corridors, and the proliferation of ranchettes and irrigated crops in surrounding lands. The lower Salinas River watershed land changes involve conversion of agricultural land to urban development, and more intensive irrigated farming. Negative effects of urbanization include streambank scouring, sediment deposition, and downstream flooding.

Waterbodies in this CCA that are listed as impaired on the current (2016) Clean Water Act 303(d) list include **Lower Salinas River** (impaired by turbidity, PCBs, benthic community effects, nitrate, E.coli bacteria, fecal coliform bacteria, enterococcus bacteria, chloride, total dissolved solids, sodium, toxicity, and the pesticides dieldrin, chlordane, toxaphene, DDT, DDE, diazinon, and chlorpyrifos); **Salinas River Lagoon North** (impaired by nutrients, pH, water temperature, toxicity, and the pesticides chlorpyrifos and DDE); **Salinas River Refuge Lagoon South** (impaired by pH and turbidity); and **Old Salinas River** (impaired by pH, dissolved oxygen, nitrate, chlorophyll-a, E. coli bacteria, fecal coliform bacteria, turbidity, toxicity, and the pesticides diazinon and chlorpyrifos).

Potential sources of these pollutants, organized by **Source Categories**, are listed as **Agriculture** (agriculture); **Urban Runoff** (urban runoff/storm sewers); **Miscellaneous** (domestic animals/livestock, and domestic pet waste); **Unpermitted Discharges** (illegal dumping); **Natural Sources**; and **Source Unknown**.

**Mouth of Salinas River**

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

CRITERIA FOR CCA IDENTIFICATION

The Salinas River [Critical Coastal Area](#) (CCA) was identified in 1995 based on the criterion of a coastal watershed where an impaired waterbody on the 1994 Clean Water Act Section 303(d) list (Salinas River) flows into a bay or estuary (Salinas River Estuary).

This CCA also met the 2014 CCA identification criterion of a coastal watershed where an impaired waterbody on the 2010 303(d) list (Salinas 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.

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