

DESCRIPTION

The Big River is located southeast of the town of Mendocino, and has approximately 5.5 river miles within the coastal zone. This Critical Coastal Area (CCA) watershed drains approximately 180 square miles, and the estuary extends 8.3 miles.

This watershed supports municipal, industrial, agricultural, and recreational uses. The cold freshwater habitat supports coho salmon and steelhead trout, both listed as threatened under the federal Endangered Species Act. Between 1852 and 2002, this watershed was intensely managed for commercial timber harvest, including the construction of an extensive road network and in-stream dams.

Waterbodies in this CCA that are listed as impaired on the current (2016) Clean Water Act 303(d) list are **Big River** (impaired by sedimentation/siltation, dissolved oxygen, and water temperature); and **Big River Beach at Mendocino Bay** (impaired by indicator bacteria). Potential sources of these pollutants, organized by **Source Categories**, are listed as **Hydromodification** (flow alteration/regulation/modification); **Silviculture** (silviculture, and logging road construction/maintenance); **Unspecified Nonpoint Source** (nonpoint source); **Construction/Land Development** (road construction, and disturbed sites land development); **Habitat Modification** (removal of riparian vegetation); and **Source Unknown**.



Big River Estuary

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

CRITERIA FOR CCA IDENTIFICATION

The Big River [Critical Coastal Area](#) (CCA) was identified in 1995 based on the criterion of a coastal watershed that flows into an impaired bay or estuary on the 1994 Clean Water Act 303(d) list (Big 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 (Big River) flows into a state-identified Principal Bay or Estuary (Big River Estuary). 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](#).

In addition, this CCA met the 2014 CCA identification criterion of a coastal watershed where an impaired waterbody on the 2010 Clean Water Act 303(d) list (Big River) is adjacent to a [California Marine Protected Area](#) (Big River Estuary State Marine Conservation Area).

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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