

DESCRIPTION

Aliso Creek drains a long, narrow coastal canyon with headwaters in the Cleveland National Forest. The creek discharges into the Pacific Ocean at Aliso Beach. The approximately 30-square-mile watershed includes portions of the cities of Laguna Beach and Laguna Niguel, and unincorporated areas within the County of Orange.

This Critical Coastal Area (CCA) watershed is largely developed, with the exception of the Cleveland National Forest in the upper watershed and the Aliso Wood Canyon Regional Park in the lower watershed. Major transportation arteries through the watershed include the San Joaquin Hills Transportation Corridor and Interstate 5.

Most of the water quality impairments in the CCA are a result of urban runoff. Residential and commercial use of fertilizers and pesticides, and pet and waterfowl waste, are most likely the primary contributors to the elevated nutrient and bacterial loads, and potential toxic impacts of stormwater runoff.

Waterbodies in this CCA that are listed as impaired on the current (2016) Clean Water Act 303(d) list in this CCA are **Aliso Creek** (impaired by phosphorus, selenium, toxicity, indicator bacteria, benthic community effects, malathion, and nitrogen); **Aliso Creek (Mouth)** (impaired by indicator bacteria, and toxicity); **Pacific Ocean Shoreline at Aliso Creek Mouth** (impaired by indicator bacteria, and toxicity); **Pacific Ocean Shoreline at Aliso Beach – Middle** (impaired by indicator bacteria); and **Wood Canyon (Orange County)** (impaired by benthic community effects, diazinon, and selenium).

Potential sources of these pollutants, organized by **Source Categories**, are listed as **Agriculture** (agriculture); **Municipal Wastewater** (municipal point sources); **Unspecified Nonpoint Source** (unknown nonpoint source); **Unspecified Point Source** (unknown point source); and **Source Unknown**.

CRITERIA FOR CCA IDENTIFICATION

The Aliso Creek [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 303(d) list (Aliso Creek, and Aliso Creek Mouth) flows into a state Marine Managed Area (formerly Laguna Beach State Marine Park, now Laguna Beach State Marine Reserve).

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 (Aliso Creek) flows into a [California Marine Protected Area](#) (Laguna Beach State Marine Conservation Area).



Aliso Creek

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

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.

Funding for this project has been provided in part by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA) pursuant to Assistance Agreement Nos. C9-79757514; C9-79757515; C9-79757517, and any amendments thereto which have been awarded to the Water Board for the implementation of California's NPS Program. The content of this document does not necessarily reflect the views and policies of the U.S. EPA or the Water Board, nor does mention of trade names or commercial products constitute endorsement or recommendation for use.