SAN FRANCISCO? More of California?s waterways

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SAN FRANCISCO— More of California’s waterways are impaired than previously known, according to a list of polluted waterways submitted by the state to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and finalized by the agency today. Increased water monitoring data shows the number of rivers, streams and lakes in California exhibiting overall toxicity have increased 170 percent from 2006 to 2010.

California has some of the most magnificent rivers, lakes and coastal waters in the country. However, of its 3.0 million acres of lakes, bays, wetlands and estuaries, 1.6 million acres are not meeting water quality goals, and 1.4 million acres still need a pollution clean-up plan, known as a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL). Of the 215,000 miles of shoreline, streams and rivers, 30,000 miles are not meeting water quality goals, and 20,000 miles still need a TMDL. The most common contaminants in these waterways are pesticides and bacteria, followed by metals and nutrients.

“Clean water is vital to California's public health, economy, recreation and wildlife,” said Jared Blumenfeld, EPA’s Regional Administrator for the Pacific Southwest. “California has done an excellent job of increasing the amount of water monitored. Unfortunately, much of the new data points in the wrong direction. This list of impaired waters is a wake-up call to continue the critical local and statewide work needed to heal California's damaged waters. “

The Clean Water Act requires states to monitor and assess their waterways and submit a list of impaired waters to EPA for review. The 2010 list is based on more comprehensive monitoring as well as new assessment tools that allow the state to evaluate larger quantities of data.

The data showed several important trends including:
Many more beaches, both inland and coastal, are on the 2010 list because bacteria reached unsafe levels for swimming. This increase is largely driven by a more extensive review of data collected by counties.

Better reporting of trash in waters has led to an increase in trash impairments by 76% from 2006 to 2010. California’s statewide Trash Policy is under development and will address trash impacts to both local wildlife and reduce California's contribution to the Great Pacific Garbage Patch.

The numbers of listings showing pollutants in fish are at levels too high for safe human consumption has increased 24% from 2006 to 2010, with the greatest increases seen in mercury. Rather than signaling an increase in fish contamination,

this trend is due to California's recent statewide sport fish monitoring effort. Additionally, some pollutants such as DDT are no longer manufactured and are slowly decreasing in concentration over time.

Waters identified as impaired by pesticides showed a 36% increase from the prior list, likely a result of the more thorough monitoring required under the State's Irrigated Lands Regulatory Program. Under this program, close collaboration between the Water Boards and the Department of Pesticide Regulation has resulted in reduced pesticide discharges to surface and groundwater.

Last year, California submitted to EPA for approval its list of polluted rivers, lakes and coastal waters. EPA added several waterways to the list, including portions of the San Joaquin River, where increasing temperatures and salinity imperil salmon and trout populations. Following public comment, EPA today finalized the additions.

Today’s action will lead to the development and adoption of hundreds of pollution clean-up plans by California to restore waters to swimmable, fishable and drinkable conditions. Work is already underway in California to address hundreds of waters previously listed as impaired. EPA will continue to work with the state to develop and implement additional TMDLs to address the remaining waters.

The supporting documents for EPA’s listing decision and a link to the list submitted by California are available at EPA’s web site: http://www.epa.gov/region09/water/tmdl/california.html [1]

For information on Total Maximum Daily Loads, please visit EPA’s web site: http://water.epa.gov/lawsregs/lawsguidance/cwa/tmdl/index.cfm [2]

For the full list of EPA’s added waters, maps, and more information, please visit EPA’s media center at: http://www.epa.gov/region9/mediacenter/impaired-waters/ [3]

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