

## INTRODUCTION

### Introduction

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The 2015 State of the Bay Report is a science-based comprehensive assessment of the Bay's environmental condition. The Santa Monica Bay National Estuary Program (SMBNEP) periodically conducts and makes a report on this assessment, with the goal of measuring progress in restoring the Bay's natural habitats and resources, educating the public about the Bay's valuable natural resources, and identifying and helping scientists and managers to address remaining and emerging challenges. More specifically, this report provides information that can be used both to gauge the progress in implementing the Bay Restoration Plan (BRP) and to guide updates of the BRP to meet new and existing challenges.

This report covers a broad range of issues across all major Bay habitats, closely following the three priority issues addressed by the BRP: water quality, natural resources, and benefits and values to humans. It represents the multi-year collaborative effort of the SMBNEP's Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), with participation of outside experts and several partner agencies and organizations. The report includes an assessment of the ecological health of all major habitats in the Bay and the Bay watershed, using a refined rating system and available data on the indicators recommended by panels of experts. Professional judgments by the TAC and expert panels were also considered and applied to the assessments for indicators with no available data.

Planning for the 2015 State of the Bay Report began shortly after the publication of the last State of the Bay Report, in 2010. The 2010 report marked the first time that a new standard scale was used to rate the condition and characterize the overall status and trends of all major habitats in the Bay. The method used in 2010 has now been improved upon for the 2015 report by developing and applying a standardized assessment framework that encompasses all major types of habitats in the Bay. The new framework uses a set of comparable indicators of habitat health (quality of habitat, quantity of habitats, etc.) in the same categories across habitat types. Additionally, this approach focuses on indicators that directly relate to BRP goals. These goals often related to numeric values associated with acres of habitat restored or protected, pollutant reductions, and other management actions, like the establishment of marine protected areas.

Additionally, the report identifies and discusses issues that affect the health of the Bay's beneficial uses in more detail, with feature articles and sidebars written by TAC members and invited experts. The topics of these articles were selected to represent the most current and pressing issues in the Bay and the Bay watershed. Many of the articles also provide good examples of how various issues have been addressed, including areas of progress, current status, information gaps, major obstacles, and causes of remaining problems. In some cases,

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solutions to these issues are suggested by the contributing authors. Finally, the report looks ahead at emerging issues that will need to be addressed in the coming years.

Information included in the report was gathered from a variety of sources, including many years of monitoring data collected in the Bay, research findings published in scientific journals, and technical reports developed by agencies and other organizations.

### About the SMBNEP

The Santa Monica Bay National Estuary Program (SMBNEP) is one of 28 similar programs established under Section 320 of the 1987 *Clean Water Act* and administered by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The SMBNEP's comprehensive plan of action for protecting and restoring Santa Monica Bay, known as the Bay Restoration Plan (BRP), was approved by the State of California and the EPA in 1995 and updated in 2008 and 2013. The BRP includes goals, objectives, and milestones that guide the SMBNEP's programs and projects in three priority areas: water quality, natural resources, and benefits and values to humans. The BRP also identifies responsible lead and partner entities, as well as the roles of the SMBNEP in supporting, promoting, and implementing restoration work.

The SMBNEP comprises a partnership of three entities. The Santa Monica Bay Restoration Commission (SMBRC) is a non-regulatory, locally based state entity established by an act of the California Legislature in 2002. It is charged with overseeing and promoting the BRP by securing and leveraging funding to put solutions into action, building public-private partnerships, promoting cutting-edge research and technology, facilitating stakeholder-driven consensus processes, and raising public awareness. The Santa Monica Bay Restoration Authority (SMBRA) was created by a joint exercise of powers agreement between the SMBRC and the Los Angeles County Flood Control District, and operates as a local public agency within the Santa Monica Bay Watershed and the jurisdictional boundaries of the SMBRC and the District. The purpose of the SMBRA is to broaden funding opportunities for projects within the Santa Monica Bay Watershed; it provides an efficient method by which state agencies can fund important programs of the SMBNEP. The Bay Foundation (TBF), also known as the Santa Monica Bay Restoration Foundation (SMBRF), is an independent, non-profit 501(c)(3) organization founded in 1990. It serves as the fiscal partner for the SMBNEP and provides administrative, management, and program services to the SMBNEP.

To learn more about the SMBRC, go to [www.smbrc.ca.gov](http://www.smbrc.ca.gov).

To learn more about TBF, go to [www.santamonicabay.org](http://www.santamonicabay.org).

