

Protect Clean Water at the United States/Mexico Border

OVERVIEW:

The U.S./Mexico border is plagued by severe pollution. In southern California, stormwater and wastewater discharges from Mexico bring raw sewage, harmful chemicals and immense amounts of trash to beaches across South San Diego County. **In 2020 alone, San Diego border-area beaches were closed for nearly 300 days** due to unsafe levels of these contaminants.

Additionally, U.S. Border Patrol Agents risk their health and wellbeing to conduct patrols in contaminated environments. The Navy trains their elite in this area and recently invested over \$1 billion in a new coastal campus which has brought in more than 3,000 new service members.

This issue threatens public health, the environment, local economies and our national security. The solution depends on resources, knowledge and political will on both sides of the border to collaborate.



©John McCauley/This Is Ca

SOLUTION:

Surfrider calls upon Congress (and all levels of government) to support federal legislation and funding to address stormwater and wastewater upgrades through the Border Water Infrastructure Project (BWIP) and North American Development Bank (NADBANK).

We are asking for your support on the following 2021 objectives:

Objective 1: Support the appropriation of \$75 million to the EPA BWIP Border Infrastructure Grant Program to help fund key projects to protect water quality. (Federal)

Objective 3: Encourage and coordinate public-private partnership opportunities. Surfrider believes that to definitively address transboundary sewage issues, private industries must be a part of the solution. (All levels)

Objective 2: Support the expenditure of \$300 million of United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) funds to address U.S. infrastructure solutions. (Federal)

Objective 4: Support and advocate for a 2021 Tijuana River Valley cleanup from various funding sources: State, Federal, municipalities, Covid-19 relief funding, and private. (All levels)

BACKGROUND

Objective 1 (Federal): Support the appropriation of \$75 million to the U.S. EPA BWIP Grant Program. BWIP is authorized to distribute up to \$100 million to the grant program to fund projects that address water pollution along the U.S./Mexico border, but this program frequently only receives \$15 to \$30 million in the national budget. Funding of \$75 million in FY2022 will help fund key projects to protect water quality.

[EPA](#) works to ensure our future generations will inherit a better and healthier environment.

EPA funds and administers the [BWIP](#) for the region 100 kilometers (62 miles) north to 100 kilometers south of the U.S.-Mexico border. Infrastructure project development, design and construction within the region is implemented via cooperative agreements (grants) to the NADBANK, and Mexico's [Comisión Nacional del Agua](#) (CONAGUA) jointly invests in those projects in the south.

While there is \$300 million allocated to funding a solution through the [USMCA](#) (Objective 2), additional funding is still needed to appropriately address the untreated sewage, plastic and other pollution making its way into the Tijuana River Valley and the Pacific Ocean. Under the USMCA, trade will be strengthened, leading to continued population growth in Tijuana, Mexico and more strain on already burdened Mexican sewage infrastructure.



Sewage entering the Pacific Ocean via the Tijuana River

BACKGROUND

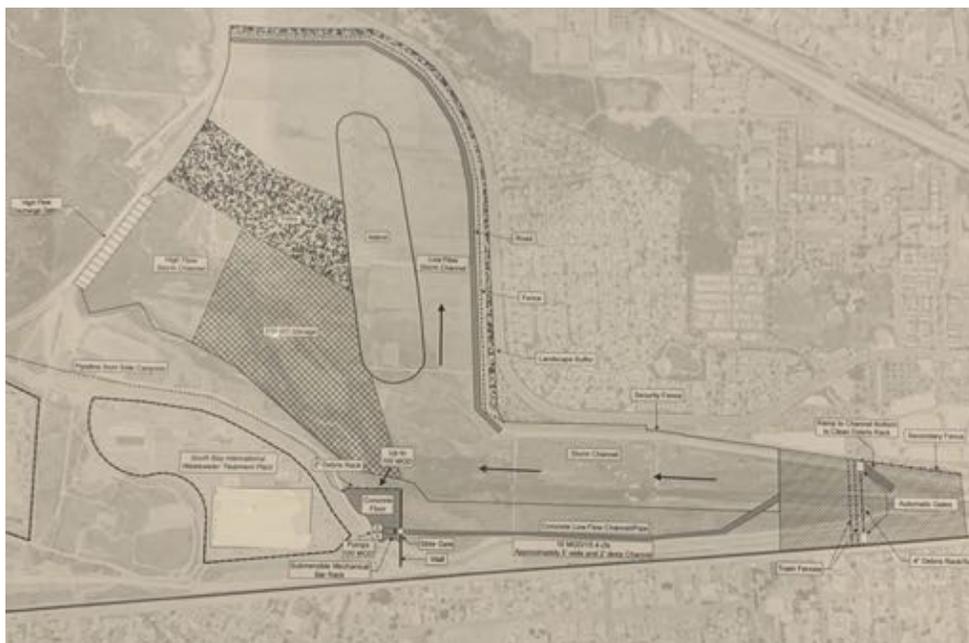
Objective 2 (Federal): Support the expenditure of \$300 million of USMCA funds to address U.S. infrastructure solutions.

The U.S. EPA is currently engaging in a feasibility study of ten project alternatives that will address transboundary sewage. Surfrider San Diego supports spending these funds on U.S. side solutions that will have a direct impact on the amount of untreated sewage entering the United States through the Tijuana River Valley (TRV). As part of this process, the EPA is also considering Mexico-side projects. Surfrider is concerned that enforcement and oversight of our taxpayer funds will not be possible if projects are constructed in Mexico.

The TRV Solution is a [conceptual design plan](#) created to address some of the toughest sewage issues that we’re facing at the border. In the absence of federal leadership, Surfrider began designing this solution in 2018 on the heels of one of the most egregious sewage spills the region had ever seen. The goal of the TRV Solution is to address the sewage, chemicals, plastics, tires, and sediment that are destroying the TRV and putting the health and safety of the community at risk. The Tijuana Slough shoreline has been closed in excess of 288 days in 2020 alone.

For instance, the TRV Solution calls for:

- continuous waste removal of the TRV,
- construction of infrastructure that will divert excess sewage to the South Bay International Wastewater Treatment Plant, and;
- treatment of sewage before it gets to U.S. beaches and the Pacific Ocean.



Map of TRV Solution

BACKGROUND

Objective 3 (All levels): Encourage and coordinate public-private partnership opportunities. Surfrider believes that to definitively address transboundary sewage issues, private industries must be a part of the solution.

Surfrider San Diego will be coordinating a public/private partnership conference focusing on solutions in the TRV to address plastics, tires, water-reuse/resale and other subjects. We aim to bring together decision makers, policy personnel and private industries to share, develop and participate in solutions.

Surfrider will be examining opportunities in the following areas:

1. Creating solutions to plastics in the Tijuana River Valley;
2. Outreach and education events and opportunities in the Tijuana River Valley to educate the public on the dangers of plastics, their impact on the Tijuana River Valley and ocean, and personal changes the public can make as individuals;
3. A clean-up event in the Tijuana River Valley;
4. A Tire-Reuse program in the region, and;
5. A Water resale/reuse program in the region



Trash and sewage coming through the Tijuana River Valley after a storm

BACKGROUND

Objective 4 (All levels): Support and advocate for a 2021 Tijuana River Valley Cleanup from various funding sources: State, Federal, municipalities, Covid-19 relief funding, and private.

There has been no recent clean-up effort in the Tijuana River Valley. Thousands of tires, plastic bottles and other waste are buried on public lands on what could be a very beautiful recreational area and trail. We are calling you to assist with an essential clean-up event in the Tijuana River Valley during 2021.

We are calling on all levels of government to invest funds and to coordinate a large scale clean-up effort of the Tijuana River Valley. This clean-up event must take place in 2021. This is a critical year. Due to litigation and increased public pressure in both Mexico and the United States, there is not only interest in addressing the pollution but also preliminary steps are being made to tackle the sewage and trash. A large clean-up event would not only cement the importance but also allow agencies to measure the extent of trash and tires at a pivotal time when projects are being created and implemented. Through its contract with Veolia Water Operating Services, the IBWC recently (week of November 30, 2020) removed tires, sediment and trash from an area of the Tijuana River Valley called Smugglers Gulch. Up until 2018, volunteers were able to coordinate small scale clean up events but this effort ceased when volunteers began falling ill. This effort is necessary on a regular basis and will prevent trash from being buried in the Tijuana River Valley or being swept into the ocean.



This trash will remain unless our elected officials and public agencies help contribute so that this can be cleaned up safely

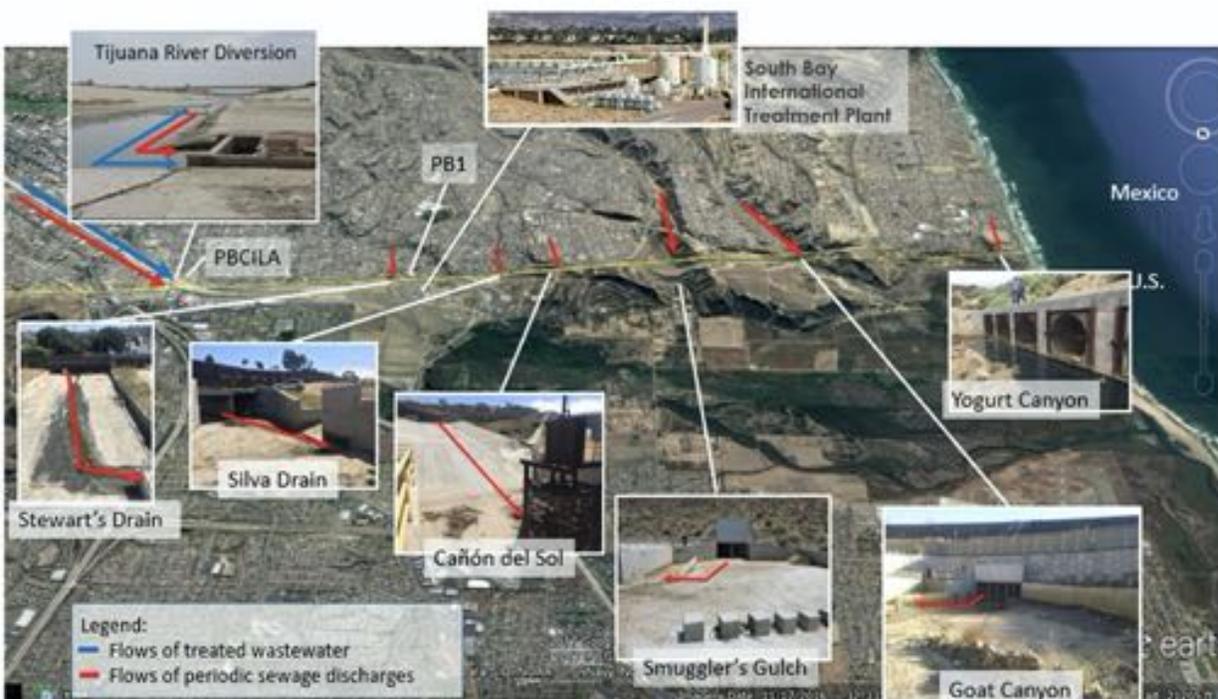
ADDITIONAL DATA/ INFORMATION

2020 Beach Closure Data: Reported by the Department of Environmental Health, County of San Diego

2020 (as of 12/7/2020)			
Area	Total # of Closures	Total # of Days	Dates
Tijuana Slough Shoreline	3	288	*1/1 – 9/20 (263) 10/4 – 10/6 (2) 11/9 – 11/22 (13) 11/28 – 12/7 (10)
Imperial Beach Shoreline	13	160	*1/1 – 1/7 (6) 1/10 – 1/11 (1) 1/17 – 1/23 (6) 2/22 – 2/24 (2) 2/28 – 3/4 (5) 3/10 – 5/3 (56) 5/8 – 5/16 (8) 5/28 – 6/9 (12) 6/12 – 7/17 (35) 7/22 – 7/31 (9) 8/4 – 8/6 (2) 8/14 – 8/25 (11) 9/8 – 9/11 (3) 11/13 – 11/17 (4)
Silver Strand Shoreline	5	59	3/10 – 3/28 (19) 4/2 – 5/2 (30) 5/13 – 5/15 (2) 6/5 – 6/8 (3) 8/18 – 8/23 (5)
Coronado Shoreline	1	17	3/10 – 3/27 (17)

* Closure extends from/into the next year

TRV Canyon Collector Map





Punta Bandera, a sewage treatment plant that processes nearly 40 percent of Tijuana's sewage, has failed to comply with Mexico's coastal emission standards since 2015. This has caused over 20 million gallons of wastewater (treated and untreated) to spew into the Pacific Ocean each and every day.



©John McCauley/This Is Ca

Punta Bandera sits only five miles south of the United States/Mexico border, so when there is a south swell or shift in ocean current, the pollution often travels north and pollutes U.S. coastal beaches as far north as Coronado.



Punta Bandera remains inoperable; however, according to Mexican officials, in March of 2021 there will be a bid and project submission process with respect to upgrades at this facility. **Surfrider's CBWN will continue to monitor the progress on this project as this is also a major contributor to our South San Diego County beach pollution.**

For more information, visit sandiego.surfrider.org/cbwn