

# Contra Costa Resource Conservation District



Photo courtesy of CCRCD



The mission of the **Contra Costa Resource Conservation District** is to facilitate conservation and stewardship of the natural resources in Contra Costa County.

The Contra Costa Resource Conservation District (CCRCD) was formed in 1941. Their service area is consistent with the political boundaries of Contra Costa County and covers 516,191 acres. The mission of the Contra Costa Resource Conservation District is to facilitate conservation and stewardship of the natural resources in Contra Costa County.

## Project Description

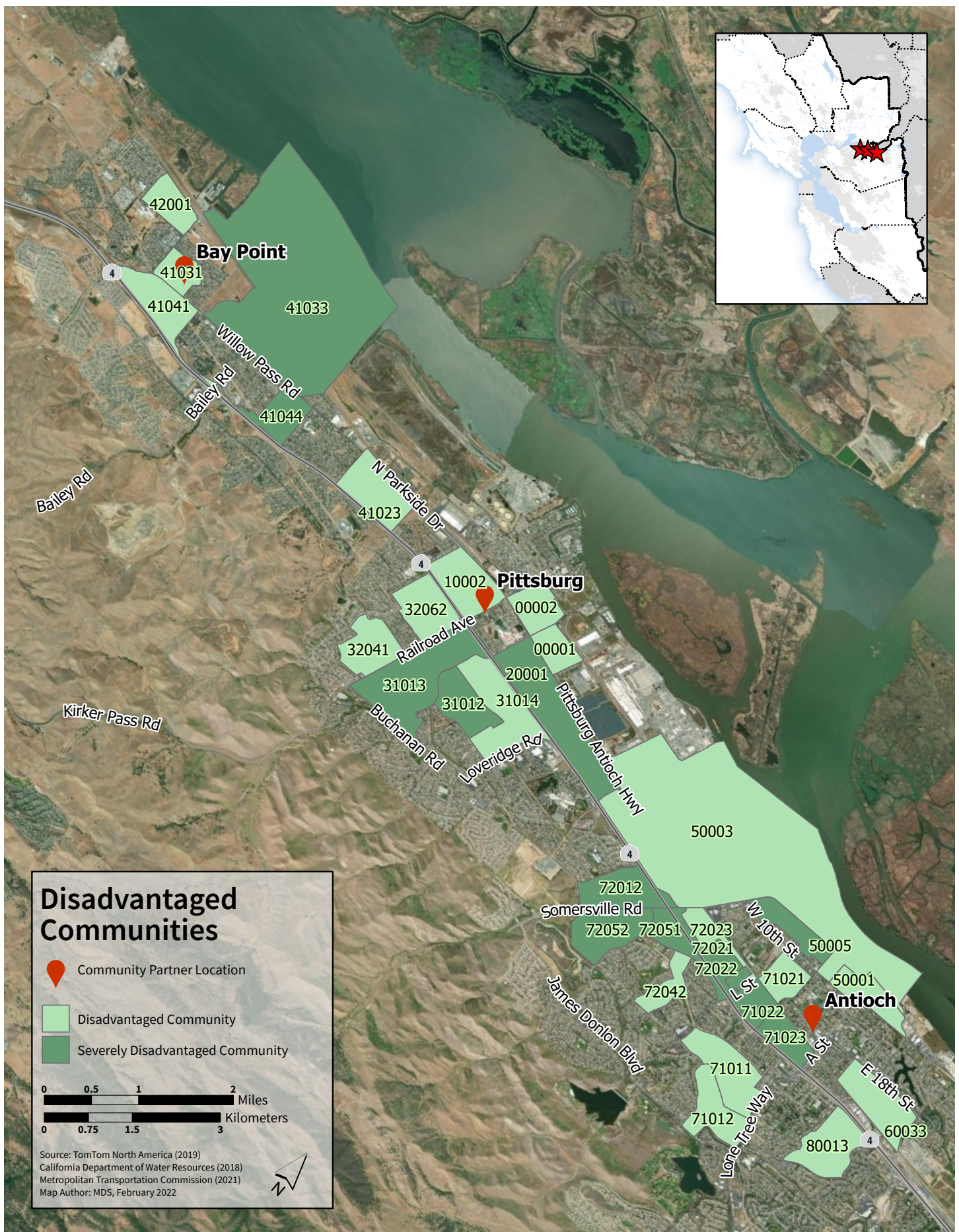
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CCRCD staff engaged with the communities of Bay Point, Pittsburg, and Antioch to identify local water priorities and potential projects that address water-related issues, such as water quality, flooding, and climate resilience. CCRCD attended community events, provided an online survey platform, and held listening sessions with small groups. CCRCD held a final meeting within each community to report back the findings.











### Demographics

East Contra Costa County (East County) has seen significant population changes in the last 30 years, evolving from primarily semi-segregated industrial or rural towns, to sprawling suburban aggregates. All three communities that were part of this program, Bay Point, Pittsburg, and Antioch, have a mixture of income levels, and there are pocket communities within each that are recognized by the California Department of Water Resources (DWR) as Disadvantaged Communities. Longstanding neighborhoods in the heart of the community are where the disadvantaged communities are clustered on the census tract maps. These cities are each defined by income now rather than by ethnicity.

**Bay Point** is a census-designated place located in eastern Contra Costa County along Grizzly Bay. It had an estimated median household income in 2016 of \$51,999.

**Pittsburg** has historically been a city that supports industry. There are neighborhoods dating back to Camp Stoneman during World War II, as well as houses still being built in the southern hills. Estimated median household income in 2016: \$67,392.

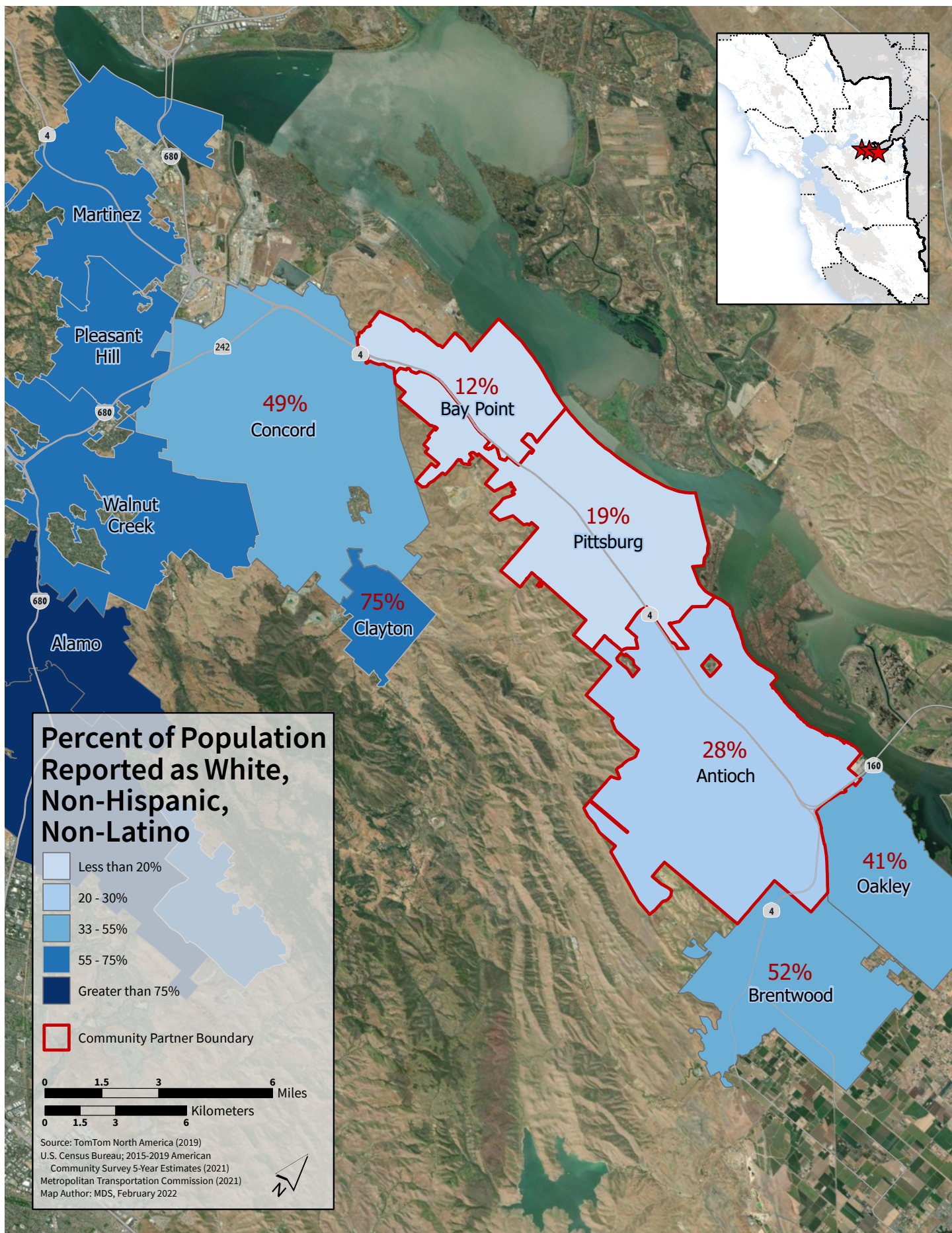
**Antioch** is the second largest city in Contra Costa County and is the furthest east of the communities addressed by this grant. The income levels are highly diverse, with some very low-income communities scattered primarily throughout the downtown area, and higher income communities in the outlying areas. The estimated median household income in 2016 was \$81,203 (\$60,359 in 2000).

In all three communities, the Latinx community represents the highest percentage of the population. East County as a whole was almost 62% non-white in 2010, and of the major communities—i.e. places with more than 10,000 residents—only Brentwood and Discovery Bay are majority white. The largest city in the region, Antioch, is almost two-thirds non-white, while in Bay Point and Pittsburg four out of every five residents are persons of color (Schafran, A., Lopez, O., and Gin, J., 2013). Each community is diverse in part as a result of the housing boom of the 1990s, and the influx of people of color fleeing the gentrification of cities that rim the San Francisco Bay.



Photo courtesy of Eden Housing







## History of Environmental Injustice and Inequity in Pittsburg, Antioch, and Bay Point

The roots of the communities of Pittsburg and Bay Point reach back to the mining days. Antioch is considered one of the oldest towns in California. In the 1800s the hills to the south housed five mining communities: Nortonville, Somersville, Stewartville, Black Diamond and Judsonville. Starting in 1859, coal was mined from a network of tunnels and caves; after that was no longer profitable, the mines produced sand for glassmaking.

The first railroads transported these products from the hills to the waterfront, where they were shipped throughout the Bay Area. Over the decades the waterfront remained an industrial hub, housing steel mills, lumber yards, and other factories. The housing that developed to support the people who worked in these factories and mills are within close proximity to the industry. Over the years, even though these industries have become mostly defunct, those areas are where most of the disadvantaged community tracts are clustered.

### Pittsburg

Pittsburg has industrial relics and brownfields scattered throughout its downtown area, adjacent to homes, businesses, and parks. Stacks from these factories sit throughout downtown. The most recent community environmental activism occurred when a proposal to refit a former Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E) plant to store oil products and then ship to refineries by railcar was met with community outcry (Rattu, 2020).



Pittsburg residents organizing against WesPac oil storage facility project.

Photo: Rattu

### Antioch

Antioch's downtown was built to support industry along the waterfront, including lumber yards. High arsenic levels were found at one site where there was historically a canning operation: the peach pits that were a food byproduct naturally contained arsenic, and concentrating them in large numbers and disposing of them onsite left a toxic legacy.

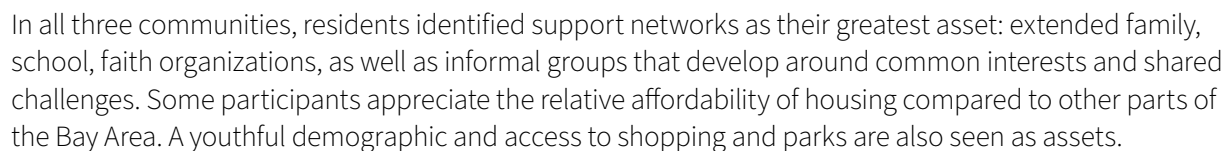
### Bay Point

Bay Point was at the center of a study done in 2009 by the Bay Area Latino Environmental Action Project (LEAP) who received an Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) grant to conduct a study similar to the one described in this report by CCRCD. They worked with the community to identify areas of environmental concern. Over 10 years later, the findings of this study echo the concerns found in the LEAP study: toxins in fish caught in the Bay/Delta, illegal dumping, and concerns over the cost and safety of tap water from a private company. The community is still dealing with the same issues (CCHSD and LEAP, 2009).



In 2003, Contra Costa was the first county in California to develop an environmental justice policy (Doyle, 2003). The environmental justice committee, which was formed by this policy, focused on illegal dumping as its pilot project. Illegal dumping is still an issue throughout Contra Costa, identified as one of the top issues in CCRCD's assessment, but the environmental justice committee no longer has momentum, and now appears to be defunct.

In the survey of community members, there was a question asking about community strengths. The following word cloud shows the responses:



“Giving back. What Ray [Ray Harts of Healthy Hearts Institute] is doing by coming back, trying to help younger people.” – Pittsburgh

“We know our neighbors – our neighborhood feels like a little town in a big city.” – Antioch



## Needs Assessment Process

CCRCD collected data through paper surveys at outreach events, online surveys hosted at [ccrcd.org](http://ccrcd.org), and three listening sessions held with local groups in each of the three communities. By focusing on groups active in the disadvantaged communities, CCRCD developed an understanding of the problems each community faced. CCRCD organized and analyzed the data and presented their results at wrap-up sessions so residents could confirm the findings.

The survey asked respondents about community amenities and challenges, water-related issues, access to creeks and shorelines, and barriers to addressing challenges. CCRCD asked similar questions at the listening sessions and invited group discussion. While survey data is less detailed than listening session responses, survey responses to multiple choice questions can be ranked to shed light on priority issues.

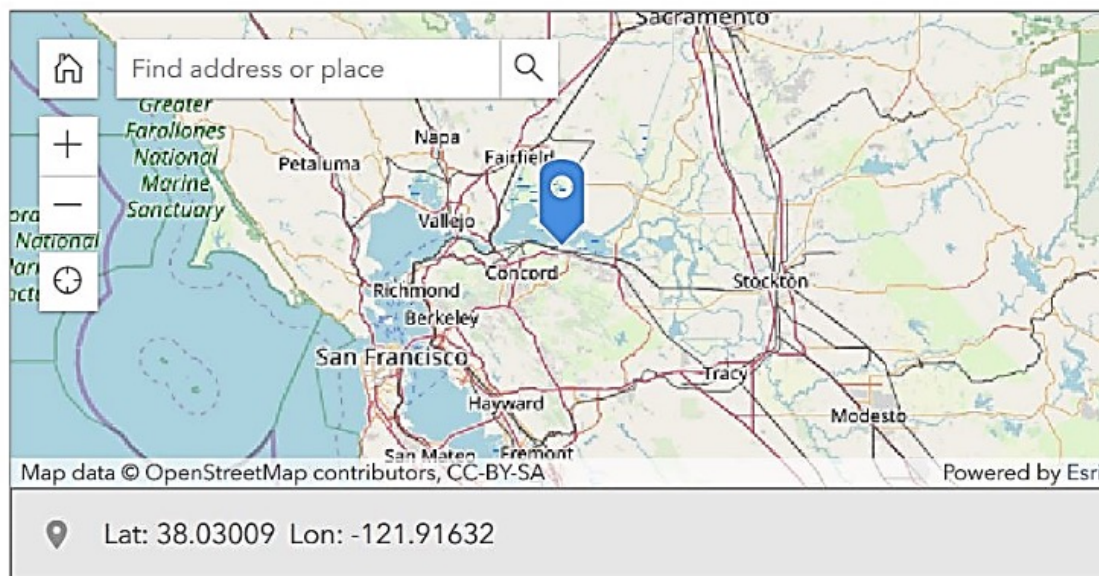
CCRCD collected 57 surveys from residents of the disadvantaged neighborhoods and spoke to 94 people at listening sessions, for a total of 151 participants in the water needs assessment.

### Evaluación de necesidades de agua - Condado de East Contra ...

Encuesta para determinar las necesidades de agua autoidentificadas dentro de las comunidades en el este del condado de Contra Costa.

#### ¿Dónde está tu comunidad?\*

Para comprender mejor los datos reunidos, indique la ubicación aproximada de su vivienda en el siguiente mapa.



Spanish version of the online survey. Map courtesy of CCRCD





CCRCD attended community events to raise awareness of the ongoing Needs Assessment and provide the opportunity for people to fill out a survey in person.

Photo courtesy of CCRCD

### Community Water Survey

DWR is funding research into addressing community's water needs. The funding for this is focused on sections of our communities that have been left out of the discussion in the past. This effort is an attempt to balance the scales, and make your needs known.

NAME AND ADDRESS\*\* We use this information to ensure we are collecting data from all neighborhoods. This is optional, but required for entry into gift card raffle. We will not release this information.

NAME: [REDACTED]

ADDRESS: [REDACTED]

There are many types of communities that we are involved in, how would you describe yours? Is it your family? Neighborhood? Friends group? Church?

FAMILY

What does your community do well?

CLEANING STREETS

If money were available to be spent in your community, how would you want that money to be spent?

HELPING W/ WATER'S TASTE

Of these common water issues, which have you identified in your own community? Select all that apply.

<input type="checkbox"/> Flooding	<input type="checkbox"/> Old infrastructure/pipes	<input type="checkbox"/> Litter in the streets or storm drains
<input type="checkbox"/> Unsure of drinking water supply	<input type="checkbox"/> Unsafe drinking water	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Water tastes bad
<input type="checkbox"/> Landfill pollution	<input type="checkbox"/> Contaminated fish	<input type="checkbox"/> Other
		<input type="checkbox"/> None

Example of a survey that was completed at an in-person event. Image courtesy of CCRCD



# Needs Assessment Findings



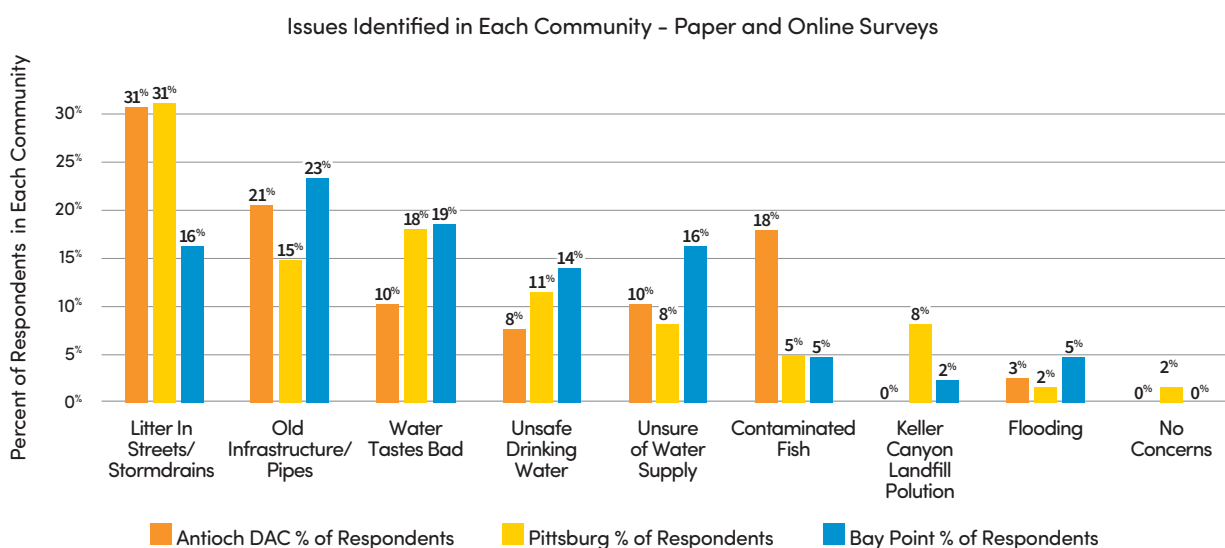
## Survey Rankings for Water Concerns

CCRCDC's survey included a list of water-related issues and asked respondents:

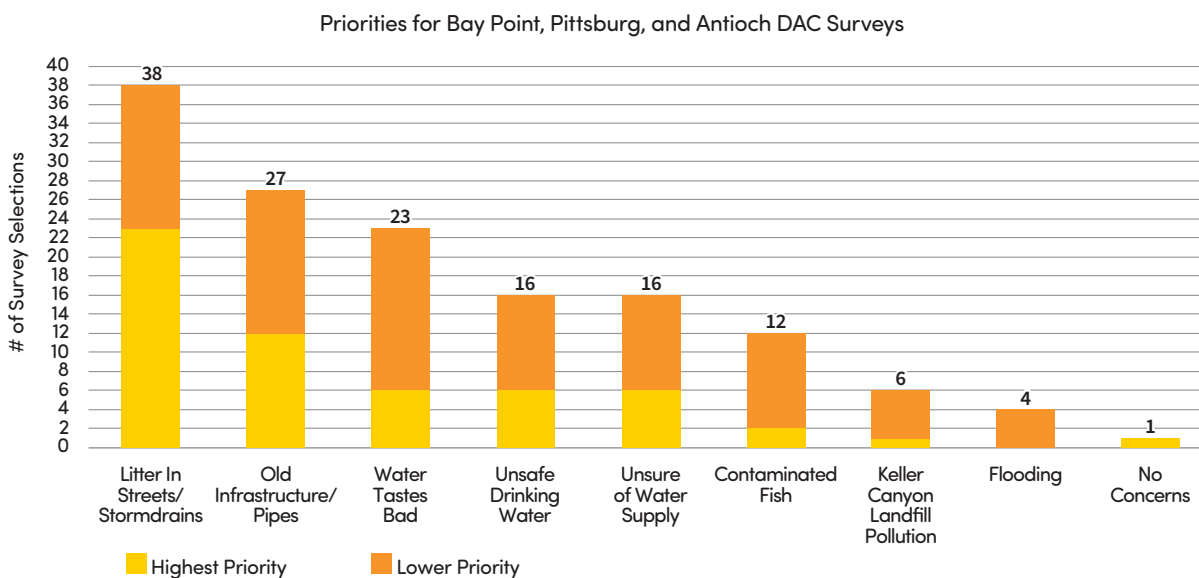
- Which issues have you identified in your own community? Select all that apply.
- Which issue would you tackle first? Select one.

Figure 1 below shows the percent of survey-takers who identified each issue in Antioch, Bay Point and Pittsburg's disadvantaged communities. Most respondents chose more than one issue.

**Figure 1.** The top priorities of survey-takers from all communities.



**Figure 2.** The top priorities of survey-takers by number of survey selections for all three communities collectively.





- **Litter in streets or storm drains** was identified as the most urgent issue by the largest number of respondents.
- The next three highly ranked issues are tap water concerns: **old infrastructure/pipes, water tastes bad and unsafe drinking water**. Based on survey comments, many people who prioritized old infrastructure/pipes have tap water problems at home.
- Those who prioritized **unsure of water supply** are concerned about droughts, the effect of the Delta's salinity on drinking water supply reliability, and residential water prices.
- Although **contaminated fish, Keller Canyon landfill pollution, and flooding** were selected less frequently in surveys, listening session participants voiced concerns about these issues.
- Listening session participants also described issues related to access to **parks and recreation**.

## Details about identified issues



### Litter in Streets and Polluted Stormwater

Polluted stormwater and trash in creeks, waterways, and streets were among the most common problems identified in the listening sessions. Participants described the need for pollution prevention, trash removal, treating polluted stormwater, and for storm drain maintenance.

In surveys, litter in streets and storm drains was most frequently chosen as the top priority. 67 percent of survey respondents identified it as an issue in their community and 40% of survey respondents said it was the issue they would address first.

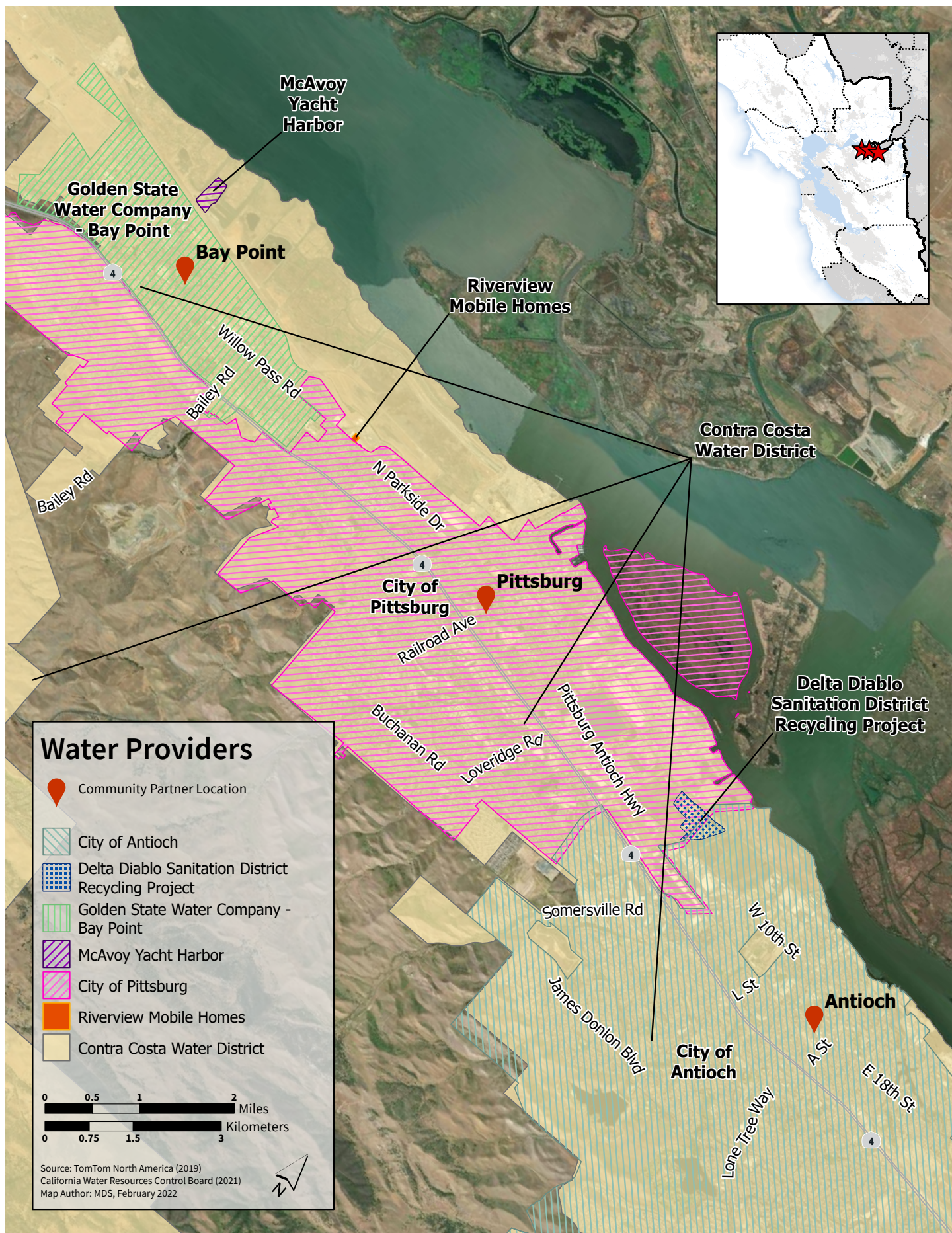
Antioch residents identified illegal dumping and encampments as sources of trash. Pittsburg participants cited neglected homes and encampments as pollution sources. They also expressed concern about oil leaks from older vehicles polluting storm runoff. In Bay Point, illegal dumping sites include Port Chicago Highway and Bailey Road. Encampments also contribute to trash on Port Chicago Highway. Bay Point residents were concerned about trash in parks and along trails as well as polluted storm runoff.

Listening session participants urged better maintenance of both storm drains and landscaped ground cover to reduce pollution and prevent erosion. Suggestions for solutions include reduced trash disposal fees or free monthly disposal at dumpsters throughout the city.

When asked, “**If money was available to enhance your community, how would you want that money to be spent,**” listening session participants said:

“I think it would be good to be spent on making the drainage system better because sometimes all the sewer water runs out onto the street.” —Bay Point

“Do something about these deadbeat landlords that let their stores sit empty forever and attract crime, filth, rats etc.” —Antioch







## Tap Water Concerns

Along with trash and polluted stormwater, poor tap water quality was one of the greatest needs identified in listening sessions and in surveys. Tap water problems were identified as a community issue by 68% of survey respondents with 21% saying that tap water concerns were their most urgent priority.

Bad-tasting water was identified in surveys more often than unsafe drinking water (40% and 28%, respectively). However, survey respondents who ranked poor tap water quality as their most urgent concern were evenly divided between describing it as unsafe tap water and bad-tasting tap water (10.5% for both). Staggeringly, some participants noted that they buy bottled water for their animals to drink—that is the extent to which they felt their water was not safe to drink.

In Bay Point, listening session participants described particles in the tap water and a mineral content that made them feel ill. People compared the taste of tap water to the smell of garbage. One lifelong resident of Bay Point said everyone purchases bottled drinking water although they use tap water for other purposes. Another participant said that tap water dries her skin and she is wary of bathing in water that may be contaminated. Water pricing was also a concern for Bay Point community members who said their tap water was both more expensive and had poorer quality than water in neighboring communities. Unlike Antioch and Pittsburg, Bay Point is unincorporated, and a private company distributes tap water.

Some Pittsburg residents are also uncertain about tap water safety and buy bottled water to reduce risks. Participants noted that water tastes metallic, smells like chlorine, is cloudy, and leaves a film on the skin after showering which causes skin to dry out. One participant noted that aging infrastructure may contribute to the problem since the pipes in their housing complex are over 70 years old.

In Antioch, participants said that tap water has a bad taste during droughts. A participant expressed concern about hard water spots on dishes, odor, and bubbles. Participants again noted the role that old pipes in homes and buildings may play in tap water quality.

The cost of buying bottled water or treating tap water is an additional burden to these communities and several participants mentioned their desire for equitable and affordable domestic water pricing. Some renters are afraid to complain to landlords or apartment managers about tap water problems.

**“When I boil my tap water at home it takes on a funny smell and even weirder taste. Shouldn’t it taste like nothing (clean)?” —Pittsburg**

**“A private company tested our tap water and determined it was contaminated; we purchased a tap water treatment system.” —Bay Point**

**“The annual report from the water company says it meets all national standards but it’s hard to trust the report because the taste is so bad.” —Bay Point**





## Old Infrastructure and Pipes

Old pipes were a common concern voiced in the listening sessions, usually associated with old pipes in homes that contribute to tap water quality issues, as described above. Some participants commented on problems with wastewater plumbing as well. Concerns about old infrastructure and pipes were noted by 47% of survey respondents. When asked which problem they would address first, 21% of respondents selected this issue.

Participants say they need assistance to diagnose problems with the pipes in their homes. People had questions about whether increases in water bills are due to leaking pipes, how to determine the age of pipes in their homes, and when pipes should be replaced. Some noticed that tap water problems are limited to specific faucets in their home.

In Bay Point, old infrastructure and pipes in homes was the most frequently chosen top priority on the survey. In Antioch it was the second highest priority issue and a top priority at one of three listening sessions. In Pittsburg it was the third highest priority issue and listening session participants commented that many old homes in disadvantaged communities have unreliable plumbing.

**“Some residents can smell sewage in homes, it comes from the drain in the shower, it is like a mold smell. Two units share one sewage line. If it backs up you can see toilet tissue in your backyard.” —Pittsburg**

**“The kitchen tap water is OK but bathroom tap water isn’t drinkable. It tastes like garbage. Tap water tastes bad even with a filter.” —Bay Point**

**“A drinking water pipe broke outside our house, after it was repaired the tap water was dirty.” —Bay Point**



## Water Supply and Conservation

At listening sessions, water conservation programs and resources were frequently discussed. 28% of survey respondents said there is uncertainty about water supply in their community, and 10.5% of respondents would prioritize addressing water supply issues.

Most Antioch residents were more concerned about water supply than tap water quality. They expressed frustration with neglected homes and commercial areas and saw the cost of irrigating landscaping as part of the problem. Many Bay Point survey respondents also identified water supply issues as a community concern but did not choose it as their top priority. In listening sessions, Bay Point participants focused on tap water affordability. Water supply concerns did not rank high on Pittsburg surveys, but several listening session participants prioritized water conservation and mentioned the need to conserve water to ensure a dependable supply for fighting fires.

Participants say they need better communication from water purveyors about drought-related water restrictions and pricing, as well as justifications for these policies. They want to contribute to water use efficiency by reporting water wasted by daytime watering during droughts or broken sprinklers.

Listening session participants had several suggestions for encouraging conservation: water education encompassing the social and ecological value of water, free recycled water for residents, ways to deliver non-potable water to residents who don't have a truck, and tax credits or other incentives for people to replace lawns with native plant mixtures.

When asked, **“If money was available to enhance your community, how would you want that money to be spent,”** listening session participants said:

**“Drought-tolerant landscaping. The local water district does have some funding, but it is only for people removing a front lawn. Gardening grants should be for everyone, not just the owners of lush lawns.” —Antioch**

**“Programs to convert lawns that have been ‘let go’ to drought resistant yards. This should be required for rental units.” —Antioch**



### Contaminated Fish

Listening session participants said that access to safe fishing is an important public health issue. More residents of Antioch expressed concern about contaminated fish than residents of Pittsburg or Bay Point. A total of 21 percent of survey respondents said that contaminated fish is an issue in their community, and 3.5 percent of respondents said the issue is their highest priority. Participants support increased outreach and information about cleaner boating and fishing practices.

**“I have caught fish from in the Delta near Antioch that were infected with parasites.” —Pittsburg**



### Water and Recreation Opportunities

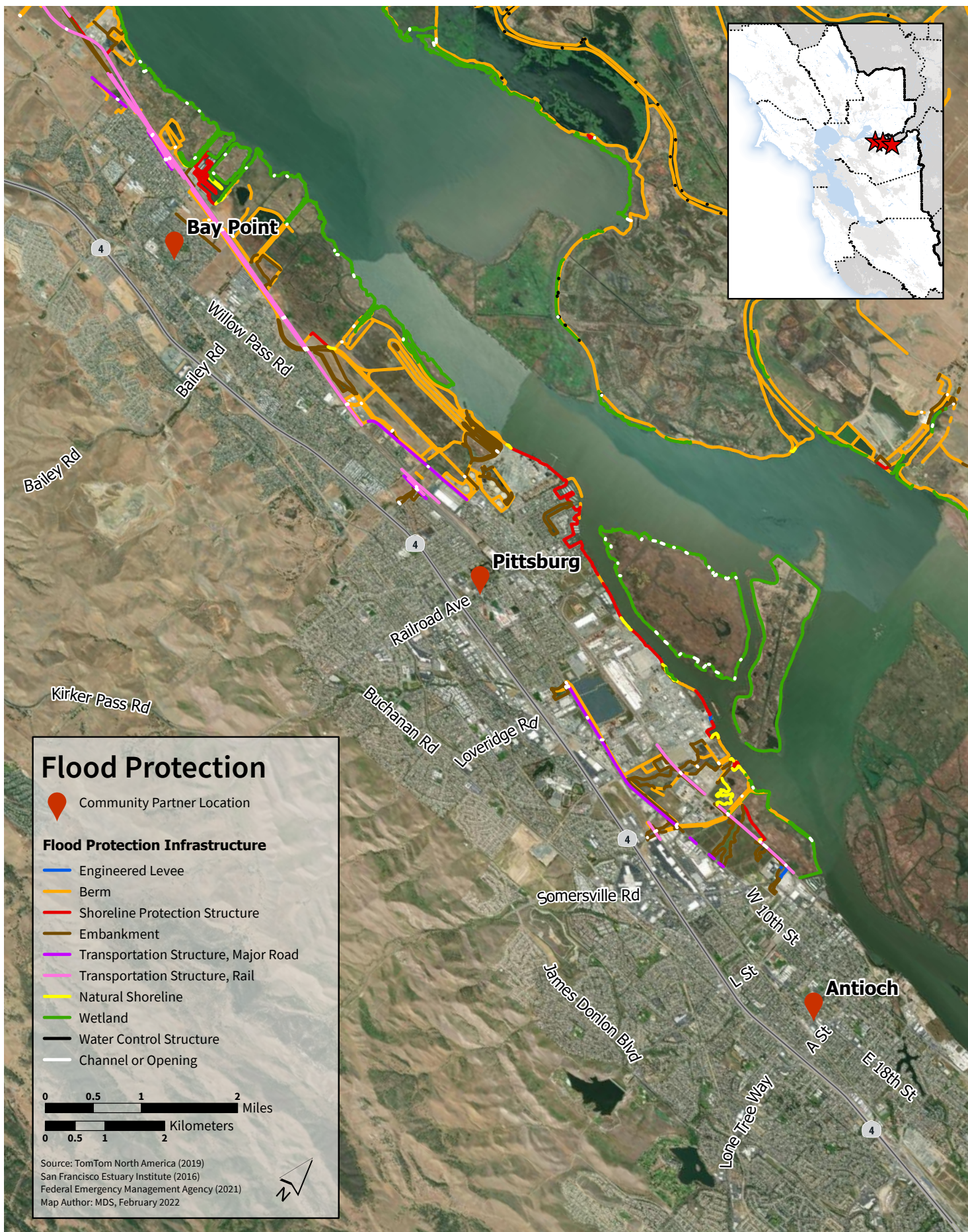
Listening session participants communicated the need for more water for park landscaping, better access to shorelines, and safer fishing, as well as safe drinking fountains in parks. Antioch listening session participants want safe places to view and access the river. Some mentioned reducing homeless encampments along the waterfront, access to recreation facilities, and outreach fairs or festivals sponsored by water districts. Bay Point residents mentioned the need to improve access to safe parks and trails.

When asked, **“If money was available to enhance your community, how would you want that money to be spent,”** listening session participants said:

**“Make the parks look better, like the ones in Brentwood or Oakley or even Walnut Creek because we deserve as much as other cities.” —Pittsburg**

**“I would plant trees to offer filtration from the highway traffic exhaust. Asthma is a high priority health issue for our children.” —Bay Point**







## Other Issues

Other water-related issues listed on the survey were Keller Canyon Landfill pollution (10% identified the issue in their community and 2% prioritized action), and flooding (7% identified the issue in their community and 2% prioritized action).

Bay Point and Pittsburg residents are concerned about wind-blown trash and odors from the Keller Canyon Landfill and allegations that soil contaminated by radioactive waste from the former Hunters Point Naval Shipyard was disposed of in the landfill in 2018. A 2020 audit found no evidence of radioactive materials at the landfill but some community advocates are not convinced.

In listening sessions, participants said that flooding due to blocked storm drains is associated with neglected waterways, storm drains, homes and commercial areas. In Antioch, flooding is a priority issue along West Antioch Creek and the East Contra Costa Integrated Regional Water Management (IRWM) Funding Area submitted a Proposition 1 DWR proposal to address the issue in 2019. Antioch listening session participants also mentioned a sewage smell on 10th Street near the shoreline. In Pittsburg, flooding was described as poor drainage in front of apartment units and problems during king tides or long periods of rain.

## Next Steps

Many residents in the disadvantaged communities of Antioch, Pittsburg, and Bay Point question the safety of the tap water in their homes. Premise plumbing is a concern in all three communities. CCRCD will work with the Bay Area DACTI Program Tap Water Quality Testing Effort to implement the program in eastern Contra Costa County. Recognizing that trust is critical to the success of the program, CCRCD will publicize the program with help from community groups. CCRCD staff will coordinate testing while a qualified consultant and/or lab will analyze tap water samples. CCRCD's goal is to help residents refine and add specificity to their tap water concerns so that water purveyors, landlords, or homeowners can resolve the problems.

CCRCD will also hold community workshops and seek implementation funding to address priority issues that are not directly related to tap water. These include trash reduction, upgrades to aging stormwater infrastructure, and access to clean, safe parks and trails. Structural components of these green infrastructure and green streets projects include trash catchment devices for storm drains, street trees to provide shade and improve air quality, and signage in English and Spanish.



Photos courtesy of CCRCD



## Potential projects and locations in Pittsburg

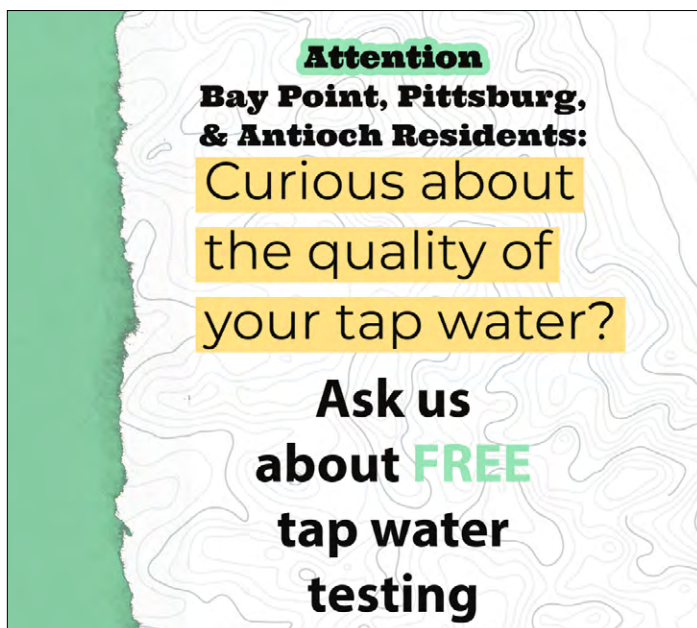
- Stormwater and wastewater infrastructure improvements at El Pueblo Housing Development
- Restoration of Kirker Creek and its tributaries at publicly accessible sites
- Reducing illegal dumping on the Pittsburg/Antioch Highway

## Potential projects and locations in Antioch

- Reducing litter and the impact of encampments at the Antioch waterfront and downtown Antioch neighborhoods
- Trash capture and stormwater conveyance above East Antioch Creek's outlet to the San Joaquin River near Fulton Shipyard Road

## Potential projects and locations in Bay Point

- Sites identified in Contra Costa County's Green Infrastructure Plan for Bay Point, including Bel Air Elementary School and Ambrose Community Center
- Restoration of the seasonal creek behind Riverview Middle School
- Restoration of seasonally flooded lowlands along the train tracks in Bay Point
- Trail improvements at Bayshore Regional Shoreline and Driftwood Drive, Bay Point
- Reducing illegal dumping on Port Chicago Highway and Willow Pass Road, Bay Point/Pittsburg



Photos courtesy of CCRCD

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