



# EMERALD KEEPERS

For an Emerald Green, Ocean Blue Coronado

## SEWAGE

*The second in a three-part series about water quality.*

### IN OUR FRONT YARD

Have you ever headed to the beach to surf or swim only to see a sign posted warning of unhealthy water and wondered why? Have you visited the Tijuana Estuary Park in Imperial Beach where the largest coastal wetland and salt marshes in Southern California are a key stopover point for hundreds of species of migratory birds on the Pacific Flyway? Both are related to the Tijuana River (TR).

The TR ends on the beaches of Imperial Beach after passing through the coastal Tijuana Estuary, a beautiful urban oasis. However, the TR's main upstream tributary has long been a source of pollution, especially over the past 30 years, from explosive population growth and heavy industrialization south of the border: everything from old tires, heavy industrial metals (DDT, mercury), drug resistant ("flesh eating") bacteria and fecal coliforms (poop!). All this adds up to beach clo-



sures in Imperial Beach more than one third of the year, and frequently in Coronado.

The plume of pollution exiting the mouth of the river can be tracked with aerial photography. An animated gif on <https://sccoos.org/data/tracking/IB/> depicts this in real time. Regular sampling of coastal waters by the San Diego County health authorities determines water quality; if the quality surpasses a certain threshold, the beach is closed.

Adequate sewage treatment is one part of a difficult cross boundary problem. Multiple aging sewage treatment infrastructures south of the border and the 1999 South Bay International Wastewater Treatment Plant just north of the border simply haven't been able to keep up with increasing demands on its systems.

### ACTION MAKES THINGS HAPPEN

A series of major sewage spills in Mexico affecting local beaches in early 2017 kicked efforts into high gear. A groundbreaking lawsuit in 2018, led in large part by the efforts of Imperial



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Beach Mayor Serge Dedina as well as the City of Chula Vista and the San Diego Port Commission, successfully sued the U.S. government for violations of the Clean Water Act. Coronado Mayor Richard Bailey joined Dedina's intense efforts, as they and other Coronado and San Diego elected officials traveled to Washington, D.C., in September 2019. Early this year, \$300M from an amended US-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA), plus an additional \$25M from the EPA's Border Water Infrastructure Improvement Program was allocated to engineering, design, planning and construction for sewage treatment infrastructure. Work has begun with the \$25 million via several short term fixes of leaking pipes, diversion of millions of gallons of wastewater and a new "trash-capture system" completed this September. Dedina said, "A permanent fix is vital — the goal being ZERO flow."

### WHAT WE CAN DO?

Visit the Tijuana Estuary Park! Enjoy the local beaches and keep an eye on the progress of the efforts to keep our parks and beaches safe and clean for all. Check this website: [sdbeachinfo.com](http://sdbeachinfo.com) for current beach closures and warnings. And pick up at least 3 pieces of trash every day as a nod to our local civic heroes!



DEREK EMGE



- Hot/cold reusable Emerald Keepers bottle. \$30

### HOLIDAY SHOPPING

Looking for a that perfect holiday gift for friends and family? Visit Emerald Keepers' store for sustainable products. at [EmeraldKeepers.org/store](http://EmeraldKeepers.org/store)



- Bamboo utensil set with a metal straw and cleaner in an Emerald Keepers case made from recycled water bottles. \$15

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Photo by Brian Lippe

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