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Project Description

Title: Table Bluff Landfill Repair and Rehabilitation Project

Date: July 29, 2025

Location

The closed Table Bluff Landfill is located along Hookton Road north of Loleta with three Assessor Parcel Numbers (APN 308-071-009, 308-071-011, 308-071-006). Figure 1 provides a site location map and Figure 2 depicts coastal zone jurisdiction.

Site Overview

The site received uncontrolled dumping from the 1930's through 1972 and was managed as a landfill from 1972 until its closure in 1979. After closure, the waste was encapsulated (capped) with earthen fill material and a system was installed to manage leachate (water that contacts the buried waste) pursuant to an order from the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board. The landfill facility includes the landfill cap, surface drainage features, subsurface leachate collection system, leachate transfer system, and leach field. The landfill is designed for leachate to be captured and routed to an on-site leach field for subsurface treatment. The Regional Water Board's order contains a condition that discharge of leachate shall be prohibited to the maximum practicable extent. The geometry of the landfill cap is intended to provide positive drainage that minimizes infiltration of precipitation and generation of leachate. Similarly, the surface drainage features are intended to divert stormwater runoff away from the buried waste to reduce generation of leachate. Figure 3 identifies the landfill cap, the leach field, and the leachate collection sump where the collected leachate is pumped up to the leach field.

Project Need and Urgency of Corrective Action

During the winter of 2024-2025, the landfill experienced two unexpected performance failures: (1) a persistent seep of leachate emerged from the northeast slope of the landfill cap and discharged to a stream, and (2) the capacity of the leach field was exceeded, resulting in ponded water on the ground surface in the leach field area. The Interim Status Report (Humboldt County, 2025) provides detailed information on the investigation of the two failures and recommendations for corrective actions.

For the leachate seep, the County installed an interim collection system (composed of a "spring box") to contain the seep, direct the overflow to the leachate transfer system, and limit discharge. The seep is suspected of being caused by areas of broken subsurface piping. Localized slumping on the northeast slope of the cap may have been a contributing factor to breakage of the piping and/or displacing the low-permeability layer over the buried waste. Breaks in the subsurface piping may be providing a pathway for stormwater to enter the leachate collection system and increase loading to the leach field. The seep discharge ceased in May 2025 as hydrologic conditions transitioned from wet season to dry season.

For the leach field, the County initiated emergency repair actions and re-directed the overflowing leachate to the center of the leach field area to prevent it from discharging into a surface water. Broken pipe fittings were repaired but subsequent investigation indicated that the leach lines are severely impacted by sediment and iron precipitate, which significantly reduces the capacity of the system.

Multiple interconnected actions are needed to reduce infiltration of precipitation below the landfill cap, reduce leachate generation, reduce loading to the leach field, restore the capacity of the leach field, restore the facility's overall effectiveness in capturing and treating leachate, and eliminate leachate discharge to the maximum practicable extent.

CalRecycle retained Geo-Logic Associates (GLA) to develop design plans for remediating the landfill cap (Attachment 1). The landfill cap requires re-grading to eliminate flattened slopes that have developed due to waste settlement. The subsurface leachate collection system requires replacement. A depression on an access road requires improvements in order to eliminate ponding and infiltration of precipitation. The drainage ditch adjacent to the access road requires vegetation clearing and re-grading to reduce ponding and infiltration. A drainage feature between the toe of the landfill cap and the access road on the northeast side of the landfill should be lined with concrete to reduce ponding and infiltration, and the access road should be extended approximately 150 feet along the toe of the cap.

Humboldt County retained SHN Consulting Engineers and Geologists (SHN) to prepare a design report for repair and rehabilitation of the leach field (Attachment 2). The leach field requires new subsurface disposal trenches which will be designed to promote subsoil aeration, maintain an acceptable vertical separation from the wet season water table, and minimize the potential for groundwater mounding. New storage tanks and piping will be installed to improve the resilience of the system to damage and provide features that facilitate ongoing operation and maintenance.

Collectively, these repair and rehabilitation actions are intended to reduce the volume of water contacting buried waste, restore the capture of leachate generated from the buried waste, reduce the net volume of leachate entering the leach field, and restore the capacity of the leach field to treat the captured leachate. These improvements will be designed based on the best available information regarding site conditions, current standards and guidelines for similar facilities, and modern materials and construction methods.

Implementing these corrective actions before the winter wet season is urgent to prevent discharges of leachate and avoid environmental impacts. If this work is not performed before the winter wet season, the leachate seep would most likely resume flowing and discharge off site into a tributary of Humboldt Bay. In addition, leachate would most likely overflow onto the ground surface at the leach field with the potential to drain off site into a waterway. As a result, the landfill would be out of compliance with the Regional Water Board's order. Immediate actions are needed to repair the landfill features and facilities and prevent loss or damage to environmental resources.

Proposed Project

The proposed project has two interrelated components (or sub-projects) which will be administered and contracted separately.

Landfill Final Cover Remediation

CalRecycle will fund work to repair the landfill cap, improve surface drainage, and replace the subsurface drainage system. CalRecycle has retained ERRG, Inc. to construct these improvements. The primary elements of this portion of the project include the following:

1. Perform clearing and grubbing of vegetation within the grading area of the landfill cap (approximately 6.3 acres).
2. Import approximately 6,000 cubic yards of cover soil and approximately 390 cubic yards of low permeability material. Grade the landfill cap to the target geometry.
3. Improve approximately 350-feet of the access road on the north side of the landfill cap to reduce ponding of precipitation and improve site access during the winter. The road will be outsloped toward the drainage ditch located north of the cap.

4. Clear vegetation and regrade a portion of the drainage ditch located north of the cap (approximately 550 feet).
5. Replace the subsurface leachate collection system. The replacement system will include a network of six-inch-diameter perforated pipes leading to a new concrete manhole, with associated appurtenances including cleanout pipes with risers protected by concrete blocks.
6. Install a six-foot-wide concrete channel (approximately 300 linear feet) between the toe of the landfill cap and the access road on the northeast side of the landfill. The concrete channel will lead to an 18-inch-diameter culvert pipe placed under the extended access road. The outlet of the culvert pipe will be armored with rock slope protection (approximately five cubic yards) to provide energy dissipation.
7. Extend the access road at the northeast side of the landfill cap (approximately 150 feet).
8. Perform hydroseeding of all disturbed soil areas.

Leach Field Rehabilitation

Humboldt County will fund work to repair and rehabilitate the leach field and will retain a construction contractor to construct the improvements. The primary elements of this portion of the project include the following:

1. Remove the existing aboveground 1,200-gallon concrete vault.
2. Install four 4,000-gallon polyethylene water storage tanks and associated distribution piping.
3. Install new transmission lines connecting the leachate transfer system to the new storage tanks.
4. Install new dispersal trenches with drain rock and 3-inch-diameter perforated pipe and associated clean-outs (total of approximately 2,400 feet of subsurface disposal field).
5. Improve the access road leading to the leach field.

Agency Consultation and Special Protective Measures

A site visit with representatives from California Department Fish & Wildlife, California Coastal Commission, Humboldt County Division of Environmental Health, and Humboldt County Department of Building & Planning was held on July 1, 2025. All representatives agreed with the urgency of the proposed work and with the finding that the proposed work will not adversely affect environmentally sensitive habitat areas. The agencies supported the following protective measures:

Timing of Work Activities

1. Conduct vegetation clearing after August 15 to avoid bird nesting season. If work is performed before August 15, a qualified biologist should be on site to monitor for nesting birds.

Erosion Control and Stormwater Pollution Prevention

2. Prepare and implement a stormwater pollution prevention plan in accordance with the State Water Board's Construction General Permit.

Vegetation Maintenance near Project Boundaries

3. Provide oversight of vegetation management activities along the margins of the landfill cap to ensure that the work is limited to limbing and/or removal of trees encroaching onto the cap and does not extend into the mature riparian area adjacent to the landfill.

Inadvertent Discovery Protocol for Archaeological Materials

4. If concentrations of archaeological materials are encountered during construction or grading operations, all ground-disturbing work shall be temporarily halted on the site. Work near the archaeological finds shall not be resumed until a qualified archaeologist has evaluated the materials and offered recommendations for further action. Prehistoric materials which could be encountered include: obsidian or chert flakes or tools, locally darkened midden, groundstone artifacts, deposition of shell, dietary bone, and human burials. If human remains are uncovered, state law requires that the county coroner be contacted immediately. If the coroner determines that the remains are likely those of a Native American, the California Native American Heritage Commission must be contacted. The Heritage Commission consults with the most likely Native American descendants to determine the appropriate treatment of the remains.

California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)

The project meets the statutory exemption for emergency projects pursuant to CEQA Guidelines 15269(b) which establishes that emergency repairs to publicly owned facilities necessary to maintain service essential to the public health, safety or welfare are exempt from the requirements of CEQA. Emergency repairs include those actions that require a reasonable amount of planning to address an anticipated emergency.

In addition, the project meets the categorical exemption for existing facilities pursuant to CEQA Guidelines 15301 because the project involves the repair and maintenance of an existing public facility involving negligible or no expansion of existing or former use. The footprint of the landfill cap and leach field will not be expanded and the site will not receive any new waste.

Timeframe

Humboldt County and CalRecycle plan to implement this repair and rehabilitation project from late August through early October 2025.

References

Humboldt County Public Works Department (June 4, 2025). Interim Status Report. Closed Table Bluff Landfill, Hookton Road, Humboldt County.

North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board (July 24, 1974). Order No. 74-138.

North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board (May 24, 1979). Order No. 79-101.

List of Attachments

Figure 1 Site location map

Figure 2 Coastal zone jurisdiction

Figure 3 Site features map

Attachment 1 Table Bluff Landfill Final Cover Remediation Design Drawings (GLA)

Attachment 2 Leachate Disposal System Design Recommendations Report, Table Bluff Landfill, Hookton Road, Loleta, Humboldt County, CA (SHN)