

# STAKEHOLDER INPUT REPORT #1 (NEEDS AND EXPECTATIONS)

## SAN DIEGO RIVER WATERSHED MANAGEMENT PLAN



### OVERVIEW

The County of San Diego conducted three public workshops in June 2002 to solicit public input and ideas to begin development of a watershed management plan (WMP) for the San Diego River Watershed. The WMP is being developed with Proposition 13 grant funding and is intended to restore and protect water quality and quantity. The County will conduct additional public workshops prior to WMP completion in March 2005. The workshops were held at locations throughout the watershed to encourage broad and diverse stakeholder participation. Locations included Point Loma Nazarene University (lower watershed), Mission Trails Regional Park (middle watershed), and the Lakeside Community Center (upper watershed). Approximately 70 participants took part in the workshops and provided a wealth of input on a broad range of issues pertaining to the WMP.

The primary focus of the workshops was to engage participants in a discussion regarding their ideas and concerns. Representatives of the County and City of San Diego opened the workshops by providing short presentations detailing the purpose and scope of WMP development. Participants were informed about the timeline for completion of the plan, opportunities for public involvement in the process, and the relationship of the WMP to other existing planning efforts.

Participants were encouraged to provide input on two aspects of the development of the WMP:

- What should the goals and objectives of the WMP be?
- What methods should be employed to accomplish these goals?

These issues were first addressed in discussions facilitated by Lewis Michaelson from Katz & Associates. During these discussions, participants offered many suggestions about what should be the priorities and goals of the WMP. The attendees were then asked to document their suggestions, and offer other new ideas, on index cards provided by the facilitator.

This report summarizes and categorizes the needs and expectations presented by workshop participants through facilitated discussion. For a detailed account of each workshop, please refer to the individual workshop summaries. The workshop summaries, County presentation, and this final report are available on the project website at [www.projectcleanwater.org](http://www.projectcleanwater.org).

## PUBLIC COMMENTS

The three issues below were consistently raised at each of the workshops:

### 1. WATER QUALITY AND WETLANDS

A majority of the participants stressed the importance of preserving and enhancing water quality. The creation of wetlands and the proper management of existing wetlands and riparian areas were commonly seen as effective means of doing this.

The following are examples of participant suggestions regarding water quality and wetlands issues:

- a) The sum and goal of all policies should be to allow water to sustain natural communities and prevent health risks to humans from pollutants.
- b) To preserve water quality, buffer zones should be established along riparian corridors to limit or prohibit industrial uses near water bodies.
- c) Groundwater quality is an important issue and should be monitored.
- d) Coastal waters are a priority. The natural progression of the watershed and the quality of the water once it finally reaches the ocean should be looked at.
- e) Recreational use becomes impacted with the deterioration of water quality. While it is secondary to the sustainability of life and health, it is an important issue and should be addressed.
- f) Water quality should be improved by creating extensive wetland areas. Wetlands provide water filtration, nutrient and metals uptake, flood control, ground water infiltration and recharge, and habitat.
- g) Acquisition of land to create wetlands is the surest way to preserve and protect water quality.
- h) The Plan should answer questions about the impact of reclaimed water on water quality.

### 2. EDUCATION

Participants emphasized the importance of a proactive educational component, stressing that active community involvement and concern are necessary to protect and restore the watershed.

The following are examples of participant suggestions regarding education issues:

- a) The local school system is an untapped resource. The WMP should include an outreach program that engages schools and gives students hands-on experience with preserving and protecting wildlife and water quality.

- b) Different communities that exist along the San Diego River Watershed need to be educated about the consequences of their practices on the river system.
- c) Individuals and stakeholders need to be educated about several different issues related to watershed maintenance. Some of these include appropriate landscaping for this region, non-point source pollution, manure management, septic/leach field impacts, run-off versus drainage, groundwater monitoring, and aquifer monitoring/rate of loss.

### **3. INTER AGENCY COORDINATION AND LAND USE**

The need for coordination between different environmental organizations, stakeholder groups, and governmental agencies for the effectiveness of this Plan was underscored repeatedly. Related to government oversight, a majority felt that land use decisions were key to protecting water quality, and to a lesser extent controlling flooding.

The following are examples of participant suggestions regarding interagency coordination and land use issues:

- a) The San Diego Watershed crosses several jurisdictions. This requires that there be efficient coordination between agencies for the WMP to be effective.
- b) The need for coordination between San Diego's water quality objectives, stormwater plans, and land use plans should be addressed in this WMP.
- c) Industry also needs to be engaged in promoting the success of this watershed effort.
- d) Property values need to be kept in mind and the Management Plan should also work to the benefit of the property owners.
- e) Land use and regional planning authorities need to be involved to implement ideas such as:
  - Limiting growth in order to protect water and habitat quality.
  - Integrating land use planning policy and ordinances to reduce run-off by infiltration and vegetation cover. Using swales and wetlands in new development to increase groundwater infiltration.
  - Improving water quality by land use policy to reduce contaminants from various land uses.
  - Reducing variances in planning and permits.
  - Acquiring land or conservation easements to create buffers in riparian areas.
  - Converting impervious surfaces to grass parking areas.

In addition to the three predominate issues above, workshop participants also considered the following to be important:

#### **4. WILDLIFE HABITAT**

Participants emphasized the need for preserving native habitat and allowing the natural functioning of the watershed system to enhance quality of life.

The following are examples of the types of comments received on wildlife habitat issues:

- a) A coordinated and consistent effort toward the removal of exotics and invasive species is needed.
- b) The use of native vegetation needs to be promoted.
- c) The Plan should have respect for all biota, including plankton and invertebrates.

#### **5. WATER QUANTITY**

Conservation, education, and the creation of wetlands were seen as an effective means of ensuring an adequate water supply in the future.

The following are examples of the types of comments received on water quantity issues:

- a) Encourage water conservation to increase water availability.
- b) The issue of recharging groundwater wells also needs to be considered and wetlands should be used for ground water recharge.
- c) The Plan should answer questions about the impact of imported water on the functions of the watershed.
- d) Given the scarcity of water in Southern California, the Plan needs to look at how it interacts with projects such as the Emergency Storage Project.

#### **6. PARTNERSHIPS AND PROVEN PRACTICES**

Many participants stressed that partnerships should be fostered to ensure that the WMP is developed cooperatively. The WMP should take advantage of proven practices developed here and in other communities.

The following are examples of the types of comments received on partnership and proven practices issues:

- a) Partnerships should be forged with groups and people already engaged in such activities. The San Diego Native Plant Society and the Cuyamaca Community College are two such groups.
- b) Use the Web site as a communication tool and create a bulletin board for the exchange of ideas and information between interested parties.

- c) A number of practices used in San Diego and other western communities should be considering, including:
- There is a new piece of equipment that has been very effective in the removal of invasive species. The San Diego County Department of Public Works should be able to provide more information on this equipment.
  - Easements are an effective way to deal with the concerns of property owners. Programs in Colorado have been successful in making property owners give up rights to develop certain portions of their property in exchange for tax benefits.
  - In the Tahoe region natural vegetation areas (vegetated swales, berms, etc.) are an effective means of dealing with stormwater run-off.
  - Studies have shown that the removal of tamarisk results in a prompt increase in the quality and quantity of water.

## **7. FLOOD CONTROL**

Participants stressed the need for a delicate balance in flood control policies and the environmental needs.

The following are examples of the types of comments received on partnership and proven practices issues:

- a) Strategies should be implemented to reduce or eliminate development in the flood plain to provide opportunities to widen channel segments that influence flooding.
- b) The success of riparian habitats is dependent on the stimulation provided by floods.
- c) There should be a balance in flood control policies since activities such as habitat restoration may lead to the offset of flood control.

## **8. OTHER PLAN ELEMENTS**

The WMP should incorporate other elements to ensure that necessary actions are taken and resources developed to guarantee the effectiveness of the program.

The following are examples of the types of comments received on this issue:

- a) The WMP should enable results to be measured.
- b) The WMP should incorporate regular monitoring of water quality, groundwater, etc.
- c) The WMP should have strong implementation and conflict resolution strategies.
- d) There needs to be real “public” participation and involvement.

## CONCLUSION

The workshops were successful in generating substantial input to develop an effective WMP. This input will assist project team members in establishing priorities as WMP development moves forward. Areas of primary participant concern included:

1. Preserving water quality and wetlands
2. Educating stakeholder groups, school students, and the public-at-large about the benefits of the watershed and their role in its maintenance
3. Successful coordination between environmental groups, stakeholders, and government agencies

Workshop participants also emphasized the importance of protecting wildlife habitat, enhancing water quantity, fostering strategic partnerships, balanced flood control policies, and building techniques into the WMP that ensure its effectiveness.

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