

2000-2002

BIENNIAL REPORT



WATERSHED MANAGEMENT DIVISION

PUBLIC RELATIONS & OUTREACH UNIT

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Unit Background

The Public Relations and Outreach Unit of WMD serves two very distinct and important roles: public outreach and environmental permitting. While the Unit provides support to the whole Division, by communicating the new watershed management philosophy to stakeholders, it also lends



a holistic, environmentally-sensitive approach to Public Works' evolving permitting process.

Public Outreach Function

The Public Relations and Outreach Unit was created as one of the support sections in WMD to promote the new integrated approach to watershed management and establish programs to inform, educate, and define watershed management. The Unit was designed to complement the watershed sections and the other support sections by evaluating the watershed management educational needs and developing plans to convey the information.

The focus of the watershed sections and other support sections was to create the watershed management paradigm shift through projects. The focus of the Unit was to change the watershed management "mind set" through educational outreach. Efforts were to be directed at Public Works personnel as well as outside agencies and stakeholders.

Environmental Permitting Function

Before Watershed Management Division was created in August 2000, the Environmental/Special Studies Section of the former Planning Division was responsible for obtaining construction and general maintenance permits for Public Works flood control projects and activities, with the exception of permits for Water Resources Division's activities. The former Section would obtain permits for construction of a storm drain or enlargement of a debris basin, for example. They were also responsible for working with regulatory agencies to secure permits for Flood Maintenance Division's routine soft-bottom channel clearing and debris basin maintenance.

With the formation of WMD, however, the project-related, one-time permit functions were transferred to



Programs Development Division. The reasoning behind the move was the thought that project-related permits would be better handled by the Division that also had purview over the project management of

Public Works flood control and road projects. WMD then became responsible only for permits related to routine, general flood control maintenance activities because these were thought of as needing a more holistic, watershed-based approach.

The general permits responsibilities were delegated to the Public Relations and Outreach Unit. Today, this Unit handles the general maintenance permits needs of Flood Maintenance Division for soft-bottom channels and debris basins, and has recently begun working on general permits for coastal outlets.

Mission

Public Outreach Function

To assist Public Works in becoming an urban watershed management leader in our nation. Through evaluation of educational needs this Unit will initiate a forum for disseminating watershed-related information to all interested parties. The goal is to become a central source of watershed management information.

The Unit will evaluate both Public Works internal and external customers to ensure that the new watershed management approach is being communicated and implemented.

Environmental Permitting Function

To secure general maintenance permits for Flood Maintenance Division's soft-bottom channel clearing, debris basin cleanouts, and coastal facilities cleanouts. Working with Flood Maintenance Division, the Unit prepares permit applications, provides permit interpretations, ensures permit compliance, and acts as a liaison and negotiator with regulatory agencies, such as the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of Fish and Game, Regional Water Quality Control Board, and California Coastal Commission to be environmentally-sensitive while maintaining flood protection and operational priorities.

Accomplishments

Public Outreach Function

The Unit was to coordinate the upgrading of WMD's homepage on Public Works' Website. Also, to work with the watershed teams and other support sections to compile and submit information to Information Technology Division (ITD).

The Unit coordinated the implementation of the Watershed Stakeholders Directory and Newsletters archive on the homepage.

The Unit implemented the monthly Watershed Management Lobby displays and the All In The Works "News from Watershed Management" articles and prepared a WMD brochure and identifier.

After visiting the Watershed Management homepage, the Unit was contacted by an Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) parent inquiring if the County had any programs or presentations available to LAUSD teachers for the water segment of their science program. The parent was looking for information to contribute to her second grade daughter's class at Eagle Rock Elementary School.

In response to the request, the Unit arranged to present the interactive watershed model demonstration to the Eagle Rock Elementary School second grade class. The demonstration was well received by both students and teacher. This demonstration will be the example to develop a Watershed Management



Watershed Model Demonstration at Eagle Rock Elementary School

Model Demonstration program for County schools.

To promote public awareness of watershed management, the Unit initiated a program to display Watershed Management exhibits at County facilities. The exhibits will

be displayed for one week, with a new topic introduced every month. The goal is to inform and educate County employees and the public on all aspects of watershed management through creative and informative exhibits. The first exhibit "Watershed Management in Public Works" was held at the Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration.

Environmental Permitting Function

Due to the nature of the permitting process, accomplishments cannot be easily measured. Often, it takes several months or years to successfully negotiate a permit due to biological survey requirements.

Currently, the Unit is in negotiations with the Corps of Engineers, Regional Board, and Fish and Game for four permits related to soft-bottom channel



clearing and debris basin maintenance. The Unit has developed excellent working relationships and credibility with the Corps, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Ser-

vice, and State Department of Fish and Game.

Projects of Public Outreach and Environmental Permitting Functions

Public Outreach Function

WMD Website Content Manager

The Unit is responsible for reviewing WMDs website to ensure all content is accurate, current, and in compliance with CIO-DPW and Board policies. The Unit is watershed management's liaison to ITD.

WMD Public Relations and Outreach Consultant

The Unit gives advice and support to the eight watershed sections to promote their mission and projects at community events. The Unit coordinates WMDs monthly Headquarters Lobby Display and "News from Watershed Management" articles for the All In The Works newsletter.

Public Outreach to Divisions and Other County Departments

To promote watershed management, this Unit gives training presentations to other divisions and County departments, hosts tours of watershed management project sites, and partners with other divisions to introduce stormwater and recycling programs at community events.

American Public Works Association (APWA) Workshop Coordinator and California Stormwater Quality Task Force Bookkeeper

The Unit organizes registration activities for the Water Resources Committee of the APWA Southern California Chapter's workshops. Also, the Unit manages the accounting tasks related to the bimonthly California Stormwater Quality Task Force meetings.

Ongoing Community Outreach Events

The Unit represents Public Works at community fairs, festivals, and environmental awareness events and/or donating promotional products and information to such events.



Environmental Permitting

Nationwide Permit 31 – this Corps of Engineers permit is required for routine soft-bottom channel clearing. The first such permit was obtained by Public Works in 1997 which expired on February 11, 2002 with a "grandfathering" provision which extended our authorization under the original permit until February 11, 2003. Currently, the Unit is in negotiations for a renewal. Section 401 Certification – this Certification is needed from the Regional Board for routine soft-bottom channel clearing and debris basin maintenance. The first such permit for channel clearing was obtained in 1997, which was renewed in 1999 and expired on February 11, 2002. On September 11, 2002, the Unit obtained a renewal of the soft-bottom channel Certification for one year.

Also in 1997, Public Works obtained Waste Discharge Requirements for routine debris basin maintenance in lieu of a Section 401 Certification. Currently, the Unit is in negotiations for a renewal of the debris basin certification.

Regional General Permit 45 – this Corps of Engineers Permit is required for routine debris basin maintenance. The first such permit was obtained by Public Works in 1998 and it will expire in June 2003. Currently, the Unit is in negotiations for a renewal.

Streambed Alteration Agreement – this Fish and Game Permit, pursuant to Section 1601 of the Fish and Game Code, is required for routine soft-bottom channel clearing and debris basin maintenance. The first such permit obtained for channel clearing was

issued in 1991. In September 1999, Planning Division obtained a Streambed Alteration Agreement that covered all 100 reaches of soft-bottom channels; this agreement will expire in September 2004. Currently, the Unit is in negotiations for finalization of an agreement for debris basin maintenance.



Lessons Learned

Public Outreach Function

Attending community events is a great way to promote programs, acquire new ideas, and network. Attendance at the Los Angeles County Fair increased school awareness and requests for the watershed model demonstration.

To invoke interest in educational information requires an imaginative and intriguing forum. When distributing promotional items use products that not only promote your programs but also create interest in your programs.

Examples: To promote recycling, give away shoelaces made out of recycled soda bottles or rulers made out of recycled milk and egg cartons. The interactive watershed model piqued curiosity and created opportunities to communicate, inform, and educate.

Environmental Permitting Function

Due to the often controversial nature of these permits, it is important to secure the support and understanding of local environmental groups who, in the past, have challenged Public Works' maintenance practices. Public Works gained much credibility in 2001 with the establishment of an increased working relationship with the Los Angeles and SGR Watershed Council, members of which were our strongest and most active critics in the past. Through a six-month process of numerous field trips to Public



Works' facilities, presentations, and written articles, the Watershed Council gained an understanding for, and appreciation of, the challenging nature of our work, our flood protection responsibilities, and our environmental sensitivity and proaction.

Recently, it also proved vital to have experienced and knowledgeable legal counsel on the side of Public Works. Significant efforts are needed to ensure that regulatory agencies understand our func-



tions and legal responsibilities to the public. It is paramount to understand the environmental regulations and to question and challenge unreasonable requirements or illegal requests.

Future

Public Outreach Function

Future plans for this Unit include efforts to:

1. Establish a coordinator to develop and maintain the Unit's projects and programs and be WMD's liaison to the Public Relations Group to implement requests for services.
2. Develop a Watershed Management Model Demonstration program for County schools. Establish guidelines for demonstration requests. Develop a lesson plan for administering and monitoring the demonstration.
3. Continue and expand the program of displaying watershed management exhibits at County facilities. Future exhibit sites include County libraries, museums, and parks.
4. Expand outreach knowledge through attendance at seminars, conferences, and trade shows that emphasize science and environmental issues.

Environmental Permitting Function

The future holds more challenges to the Unit with respect to compliance with the Endangered Species Act, CEQA, water quality regulations, and public desires while not compromising flood protection; public health and safety; financial accountability; and operational needs.

