WATERSHED MANAGEMENT DIVISION

SANTA CLARA RIVER/ANTELOPE VALLEY & DOMINGUEZ WATERSHED

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Section Background

Santa Clara River Watershed

The Santa Clara River is one of the few natural river systems remaining in Southern California. The River originates in the Angeles National Forest near the community of Acton and flows from the headwaters westwardly for approximately 100 miles to the Pacific Ocean. Throughout its length, the River crosses through sparsely-populated lands and cities of both the County of Los Angeles and Ventura County. The Los Angeles County portion of the watershed is home to a population of over 250,000 with City of Santa Clarita being home to nearly 160,000.

Prior to the formation of WMD, coordinated watershed planning was limited. The City of Santa Clarita has been very proactive in planning and creating open space and recreational opportunities for the region. Public Works, working together with Ventura County Flood Control District (currently known as Watershed Protection District) and numerous Federal, State, and local agencies, as well as other stakeholders, initiated the development of a river corridor sustainability study. The study, known as the Santa Clara River Enhancement and Management Plan, was subsequently placed on hold due to funding. Pending lawsuits between the local environmental groups, water agencies, developers, and between Ventura County and the County of Los Angeles, related to housing developments, further strained the momentum to develop any watershed plans.

Mission

Santa Clara River Watershed

To help the stakeholders with diverging interests in the watershed overcome the challenges posed by current legal conflicts so they can help make the Santa Clara River watershed a model for sustainable growth by balancing socio-economic development with habitat protection and sound resources management.

Dominguez Watershed

Foster better understanding and stewardship of the Dominguez Watershed, promote resource restoration and ensure sustainable watershed health, functions, and uses – adopted as Vision for the watershed by the Dominguez Watershed Advisory Council (DWAC).

Antelope Valley Watershed

The Antelope Valley Watershed is geographically unique in a way that the Flood Control District does not serve the portion of the watershed north of Avenue S. As a result, there is no adequate source of revenue to fund, construct, and maintain drainage and appurtenant structures, nor implement many of the NPDES permit programs. In 1987, recognizing the mounting need for flood protection and water supply in this budding Valley, the Board of Supervisors adopted a valley-wide Master Drainage Plan to be partially funded from new development fees. Other funding sources were to be developed as well. This Plan identified a backbone network of solutions for flooding and water replenishment that includes:

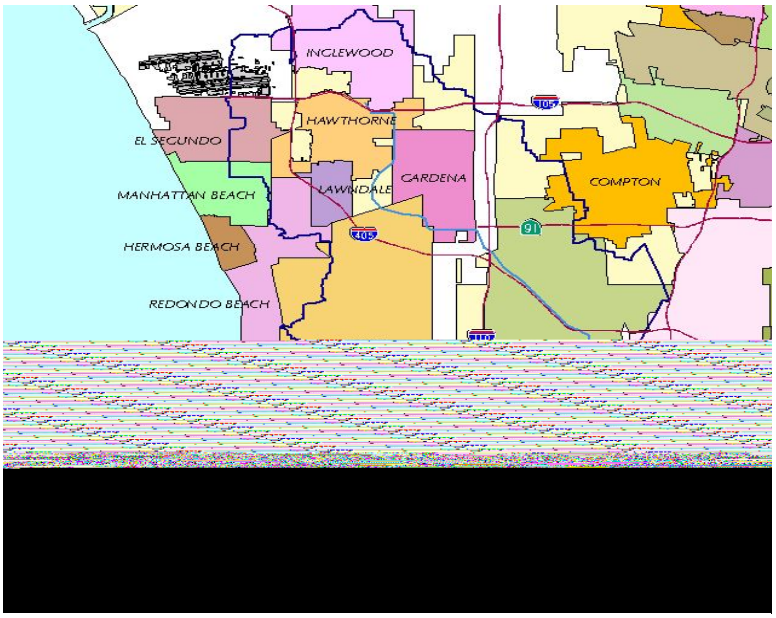
8 retention basins, 114 miles of channels, 73 miles of storm drains, 6 groundwater recharge areas, and 279 miles of "natural" watercourses in rural areas.

Since 1987, the Cities of Lancaster and Palmdale, the two cities in the County of Los Angeles portion of the watershed, adopted their own drainage plans and developer fees, which mostly conform to the County's Master Plan. This, coupled with the gradual decrease in new home construction in the early 1990s, has led to a severe drop in collection of developer fees needed to fund new facilities within County communities. These fees could be used as seed money for development of a regional drainage solution to address the chronic flooding conditions in the unincorporated County community of Quartz Hill, or to reevaluate the entire Antelope Valley Drainage Master Plan. In 1991, Public Works worked with the cities and the communities to develop a proposal to either include the entire valley within the Los Angeles County Flood Control District, or form an altogether new District. The Valley residents took an advisory vote and the majority voted against the proposition. Later, in 1995, residents in Antelope Valley, including those in Kern County, voted against the formation of the Antelope Valley Storm Water Conservation and Flood Control District.

Dominguez Watershed

At the time WMD was created, there was limited and very little coordination of watershed management related efforts throughout the Dominguez Watershed. The watershed area was initially included in the Section with the much more active areas of Ballona and Malibu but later moved to the Santa Clara and Antelope Watershed Section. Given the charge to get something started and realizing most grant money available for projects required a systematic plan to be in place, Public Works applied for Proposition 13 grant money to create a Dominguez Watershed Management Master Plan (Master Plan) for the watershed. At the same time, this Section began contacting agencies, organizations, and industries throughout the watershed that would be interested in partnering to create the Master Plan and to set up an initial meeting. At the first meeting, the group agreed to establish the DWAC to oversee the creation of the Master Plan if, in fact, the grant was awarded to Public Works.

The Dominguez Watershed is primarily made up of relatively small cities or relatively small sections of large cities. Encompassing an area of 120 square miles, it is made up of portions of 17 different cities. Therefore, at least up to this point, Public Works has been looked to for leadership in coordinating efforts simply because Public Works is the only stakeholder with the resources to do so.



Dominguez Watershed

Accomplishments

Santa Clara River Watershed

Watershed Advisory Committee

Shortly after the formation of the Division, the Section began collaborating with key government agencies with watershed-related responsibilities. In early 2001, these agencies came together to form the Santa Clara River Watershed Advisory Committee. Regular attendees, at the monthly meetings, included representatives from Supervisor Antonovich's Office, City of Santa Clarita, Castaic Lake Water Agency, Los Angeles County Sanitation Districts, Regional Board, California Department of Fish and Game, and Caltrans. Newhall Land, the largest land owner in the watershed, also participated regularly.

Initial meetings focused on defining the group's purpose. Public Works advocated the need for increased interagency cooperation leading to finding holistic solutions to various watershed-related concerns, and perhaps the eventual creation of a watershed management plan. Many in the Committee questioned the need for it. According to some, the watershed faced little pollution or resource problems and all of the existing concerns are being addressed. For these reasons, many felt little need to continue to meet and were concerned with costs associated with developing a watershed management plan.

The Committee evolved into a forum for informational seminars, focusing on raising awareness of watershed issues. Seminars included a presentation on the chloride TMDL by the Regional Board, and another on "Cool" Schools by TreePeople. The Committee last met in October 2001. Recently, there have been discussion group meetings in the summer and fall of 2002 to share progress of various watershed-related planning activities.

Proposition 13

In early 2002, the Section submitted a concept proposal requesting Proposition 13 funding to conduct a long-term, watershed-wide *Arundo donax* eradication program. *Arundo donax* infestation threatens the survival of native flora and has been identified by the Regional Board as a threat to surface water quality in the watershed. In April 2002, after receiving an invitation from the State to submit a full proposal, Public Works transferred its role as lead agency to the Ventura County Resource Conservation District (RCD), which also facilitates the Ventura County Arundo Task Force. In June 2002, we prepared the full proposal and forwarded it to the RCD for them to submit to the State as the lead agency. The State accepted the grant proposal and awarded $1.5 Million to the RCD.

Stakeholders Outreach

During the past two years, the Section has held meaningful discussions with many people who live in the watershed. Meetings with representatives from Friends of Santa Clara River, Santa Clarita Organization for Planning the Environment, Sierra

Club, as well as Acton, Aqua Dulce, and Castaic Town Councils have shed light on their concerns with the watershed's condition . Overall, these groups are troubled by the ongoing loss of open space and sensitive habitats in the watershed. They also questioned whether the watershed's aquifers will have enough water to support the region's projected population of more than 300,000 by 2020, and felt that the government needs to commit more resources to protect the watershed.

Dominguez Watershed

In February 2001, WMD submitted a grant application to the State Board proposing to create a Master Plan. This application was accepted and the contract with the State Board to complete this Master Plan was executed in August 2002. Public Works retained the services of a consultant in July 2002 for the development of this Master Plan.

In March 2001, Public Works initiated the creation of the DWAC. The DWAC is a stakeholder group whose objective is to help Public Works create and support implementation of the Master Plan. Public Works currently cochairs the DWAC with the City of Torrance. The DWAC provides a forum for stakeholders to share information and resources to collectively address issues and problems and pave the way to develop watershed management projects, measures, and solutions.

Projects in the Santa Clara River and Dominguez Watersheds

Santa Clara River Enhancement and Management Plan

In 1991, several agencies and river stakeholders initiated a river enhancement and management plan that now involves Federal, State, and County agencies, farmers, industry, other property owners, regulatory agencies, and environmentalists. This multiagency and multijurisdictional process examines the entire length of the Santa Clara River and its 500-year floodplain. Specifically, the study includes the following components: river history, flood protection, water resources, biological resources, aggregate resources, cultural resources, and recreation.

The effort, thus far, has culminated into, a draft set of river-wide as well as reach-specific recommendations designed to foster a sustainable coexistence between man and the river. A final document is expected by the end of 2003.

Aerial Deposition Study

To better understand air pollution's contribution to water pollution, Public Works, together with Santa Monica Bay Restoration Project, Southern California Coastal Water Research Project, Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board (Regional Board) and UCLA, initiated a study to determine the effects of atmospheric deposition on the water quality of the Santa Monica Bay. This study is conducted in two phases with the first phase already completed. The purpose of the first phase is to characterize the airborne trace metals (heavy metals) deposited in Santa Monica Bay and to determine their sources, annual loads, spatial distribution or configuration, and the seasonal variations of the loads deposited in the Bay.

The second phase of the study is currently underway. Its purpose is to further resolve the pollutant sources, evaluate new constituents, such as nutrients and organics, obtain better data on coarse particulates, verify the deposition near certain defined sources, and determine the connection between watershed deposition and runoff loading. This phase of the study is expected to continue until December 2003.

Dominguez Watershed Management Master Plan

Public Works is the lead on creating the Master Plan for the Dominguez Watershed and it will be developed within the context of the DWAC. A consultant has been retained to do the actual writing of the Master Plan. The Master Plan is scheduled to be completed by July 2004. When complete, it will outline prioritized watershed management projects for the area.

Dominguez Channel

Machado Lake/Harbor Park

Public Works is currently a member of the Technical Advisory Committee that oversees the City of Los Angeles' work at Machado Lake. The City's Watershed Protection Division obtained a grant from the State Water Resources Control Board (State Board) to characterize the water quality of the lake and recommend solutions to improve the water quality and restore the beneficial uses of the lake. Public Works will continue to cooperate with the City of Los Angeles and other stakeholders in designing and implementing a plan to clean up and restore Machado Lake and Harbor Park.

Lessons Learned

Santa Clara Watershed

Unlike other urban watersheds in the County of Los Angeles, this watershed lacks the gross pollution problems that often serve as a catalyst for reform. While the Santa Clara River watershed does not suffer from chronic water quality degradation, due to growth and development in the area, biological resources are being impacted and some in the watershed are concerned with loss of habitat and impacts to endangered and sensitive species. Hence, without a major pollution problem to serve as a catalyst, we have come to recognize that our focus should be put on public education.

Because of the intense pressure for development, long-term watershed management in the region must involve the development community. Existing building and zoning ordinances were not written with watershed management in mind. Revisiting these ordinances should be a priority.

Dominguez Watershed

- The driving force in the watershed is water quality and upcoming TMDLs.
- There was and will continue to be strong interest from private industry in watershed planning in the watershed.
- Most of the cities in the watershed will wait for the County to take the lead.
- Any coordinated efforts in the watershed will need a strong, proactive leader.
- The environmental interest groups that are interested in the Dominguez Watershed are the smaller groups such as the National Audubon Society and the Southern California Wetlands Recovery Project.
- The larger environmental groups, who are active throughout the County of Los Angeles have not remained active in the Dominguez Watershed stating that they believed their time is better spent in other areas that are more directly relate to their missions.
- There is a considerable history of mistrust amongst the stakeholders in the watershed.
- Communication is very important. Even if there is no apparent response, stakeholders are interested in what is going on and desire to be kept informed on all levels.
- Setting up the structure, vision, mission, goals, and purpose for a watershed council take a long time.
- The Regional Board was initially very interested and has remained active in the DWAC. Their initial interest was strongly tied to utilizing the DWAC as the stakeholder group involved with their TMDL development activities.
- Stakeholders love to come up with ideas and work for other stakeholders (namely Public Works) to do.

Walteria Lake

Future

Santa Clara Watershed

Watershed Council

In the last few months, there has been renewed interest amongst some stakeholders to gather periodically to share information. Similar to the Los Angeles and San Gabriel Rivers Watershed Council, but less formal, the new group would met bi-monthly or quarterly to exchange information.

Dominguez Watershed

Completion of the Master Plan is the key. There is a considerable amount of grant money available for projects in highly-polluted, urbanized, or underprivileged areas. However, for most projects to be considered, they must come from a prepared stakeholder plan. The Dominguez Watershed meets many of the requirements for grant money except that there is no plan already in place. When the plan is completed in July 2004, multitudes of options for grant money should be available, especially for cities whose budgets cannot afford large watershed management projects. While overseeing the creation of the Master Plan, Public Works will stay involved in watershed-related efforts throughout the watershed.