
North Orange County Integrated Regional Watershed Management Plan



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since 2007, stakeholders within North Orange County (NOC), that area that encompasses the Santa Ana, San Gabriel, and Anaheim Bay-Huntington Harbor Watersheds, have been working collaboratively on studies, programs, and projects to address water quality, ecosystem restoration, and water supply. This document presents that effort: a framework for an Integrated Regional Watershed Management Plan for North Orange County. It describes stakeholder engagement and their the planning process, governance and finance structure options, goals and objectives, potential projects, project evaluation criteria, and management for climate change. The purpose of this framework is to facilitate effective continued collaboration on and create opportunities to leverage agency resources for solution-oriented water resource projects and programs within NOC.

History

North Orange County (NOC) encompasses the Santa Ana River Watershed, the Lower San Gabriel/Coyote Creek Watershed, and the Anaheim Bay-Huntington Harbor Watershed. NOC is bounded on the east by the Santa Ana Mountains and the Chino and Puente Hills, on the north by Los Angeles County, on the west by the Pacific Ocean, and on the south by Orange County's Newport Bay Watershed.

The watersheds within NOC drain about 1/3 of Orange County's area. The area houses 1.5 million residents and provides employment for 1 million people. As well, the area contains pristine montane, chaparral, riparian habitats providing shelter and forage for many unique species of flora and fauna. NOC's 35-miles of coastline includes many of the significant estuaries along southern California's coast, such as Bolsa Chica Wetlands, Huntington Beach Wetland, Talbert Marsh, and Seal Beach Natural Wildlife Refuge.

North Orange County has a diverse and rich history. Native Americans known as the Gabrielinos inhabited the region for hundreds of years. These Native Americans fished, hunted and gathered plants as sources of food. In the eighteenth century Spanish settlers came to the region and ranchos emerged as well as the missions. In 1848 Mexico ceded California to the United States and soon thereafter the Gold Rush brought an influx of new settlers to California, including NOC. Cities such as Anaheim, Santa Ana, Tustin, and Orange were formed in the late 1850's and 1860's. The discovery of oil in Brea in 1880 and improvements in transportation brought increasing numbers of immigrants from other parts of the state and from across the nation. And, the economic and industrial boom that followed WWII brought even more people to southern California.

Today, NOC is a highly urbanized area of the county with 80% of its land built-out. The area supports a unique technological and business infrastructure demonstrated by the diversity of industries – from medical

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devices to construction – as well as intellectual resources to support this diversity.

As with any community in California, water is a critical issue. Impacts of centuries of development in NOC on water resources are severe and include degradation of functioning ecological systems, surface and groundwater contamination, reduced local supply, ground water drawn down, reduced flood plain capacity, and increased flooding.

Currently, NOC's water supply originates predominately from imported sources, making the region subject to conditions and agencies outside of the region.

As water is the key element for sustaining NOC communities and economies, significant investments in water and sewer infrastructure have been made in the past to serve the area's water needs on a reliable basis. Water quality improvement efforts over the last decade have resulted in significant improvements in coastal water quality along the County beaches. To wit: the Heal the Bay 20th Annual Report (2010) states that Orange County's grades for year-round dry weather were among the best on record and well above the state average.

Reducing runoff and improving the water quality in streams and along the beaches is a key goal for the region. Coastal and surface water quality remains an important component of the region's IRWM planning.

Planning and investments to carry the region through the next 25-year planning horizon are critical and are central to preserving quality of life, flood control, urban runoff management, watershed management, water use efficiency, water supply and reliability, recycled water, habitat preservation, conservation and restoration, water quality protection and improvement, resource stewardship, and related water resource management strategies.

This IRWMP is designed to help NOC agencies, governments, and communities manage their water, wastewater, and ecological resources. The purpose of NOC stakeholders in developing this IRWMP is to identify potential projects intended to improve water quality and supply in order to investigate their feasibility, engage in long range water planning, to establish priorities among the proposals of the member entities and obtain potential funding.

As this IRWMP is implemented, the County, as agent of the State of California, will serve as a conduit for funding to the individual agencies proposing the projects. This IRWMP does not commit any resources to implementation of any project nor does its creation constitute a commitment by the County or any member entity to carry out any of the proposed projects. Determinations to proceed with individual projects and

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required environmental review under the California Environmental Quality Act, will be performed by the individual agencies prior to approval of funding.



The IRWMP supports state priorities that relate to the California Water Plan Update 2009, the CALFED Bay-Delta Program, the Department of Water Resources' Water Recycling Task Force Recommendations, the SWRCB's Recycled Water Policy, Governor Schwarzenegger's 20x2020 Water Conservation Plan of 2010, greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reduction goals of AB 32, the Water Desalination Task Force Recommendations, the California Ocean Plan, the California Watershed Action Plan, the TMDL List, the comprehensive Orange County Drainage Area Management Plan (DAMP), and the Regional Water Boards Watershed Management Initiative Chapters. The Plan does this through the integration of projects and programs that incorporate a wide range of water management strategies. Beneficial effects from implementation of proposed projects and programs will contribute to the goals and objectives of the local, regional and statewide priorities.