



SECTION 1 INTRODUCTION

Background

Per direction from the Orange County Board of Supervisors in June 2003, the OC Public Works Department led a task force of city managers and special district general managers, to develop a countywide Water Quality Strategic Plan. Based on current successes and challenges, the task force proposed a new governance model for water quality programs based on three Watershed Management Areas (WMAs) in Orange County. The WMA concept recognizes the need for a coordinated approach to resource management and capital improvement planning and it formalizes a partnership between the County, the Orange County Flood Control District, cities, and water and wastewater agencies. It builds upon the long-term cooperative model for managing the countywide municipal stormwater program as well as other desirable features.

From this water quality strategic planning effort, the County was designated to serve as a regional program administrator, with implementation in three geographic sub-areas of the County: the North, Central, and South Orange County Watershed Management Areas.

Regional Water Quality Steering Committee recommendation for WMAs:

- ◆ Continue the watershed approach at a manageable scale
- ◆ Are consistent with the likely approach of future storm water permits
- ◆ Facilitate meaningful public and private stakeholder involvement
- ◆ Allow for sub-area control of priorities
- ◆ Similar to Measure M structure (renewed Measure M is a local measure slated to provide funding for environmental projects and programs)
- ◆ Follow successful model of the Newport Bay Watershed Executive Committee and Management Committee
- ◆ Accommodate for differences in Regional Water Quality Control Boards
- ◆ Account for differences in existing infrastructure
- ◆ Promote partnership opportunities, especially between cities and districts
- ◆ Fit the logic of the Drainage Area Management Plan (DAMP)
- ◆ Allow for optimum use of existing and future funding sources
- ◆ Can be accomplished through interagency agreement

Similar to the WMA concept, Integrated Regional Water Management (IRWM) Planning is a more efficient and effective way to manage water resources. It allows for the regional prioritization of important watershed issues and for consensus to be reached on how to address those issues. Also, IRWM planning allows for the development of holistic solutions to problems; addresses issues at the source; and integrates projects and



programs throughout the region that have logical overlaps. Ultimately, IRWM planning promotes sustainable resource management.

1.1 Water Resource Management Challenges

As is the case with much of Southern California, the NOC region faces many water resources management challenges. Amongst these are the following:

- **Adequate, reliable water supply:** Although this region has significant groundwater resources it still receives approximately one-third of its water from imported sources. Environmental constraints such as drought, impacts from the Delta and greenhouse gas emissions related to water pumping are affecting the reliability of imported water supply. Our existing sources of imported water are also facing many challenges and so an objective for the region includes identification of water use efficiency strategies.
- **Growth, economic sustainability, recreation:** The region is continually growing which means that there is a greater demand for potable water, a greater amount of wastewater generated, and more need for recreational resources. Economic stability relies on implementing cost effective solutions to these growth related issues. Land use decisions play a key role in developing a sustainable region.
- **Water quality standards:** Water quality standards for urban runoff that stem from the Clean Water Act are becoming increasingly stringent. Local agencies in the region are challenged to meet the regulatory water quality standards in a cost effective manner to maintain lasting results.
- **Ecosystem impacts:** Urbanization is often accompanied by storm water and polluted urban runoff, wastewater spills, invasive species and erosion. All of which impacts ecosystems in the region. Functioning ecosystems offer a wide range of benefits for water supply, water quality and habitat and therefore should be rehabilitated and preserved for the future.



- **Habitat:** Habitat areas in the region include the following; Bolsa Chica wetlands, Seal Beach National Wildlife Refuge, Coyote Creek, Carbon Creek, Brea Creek, Fullerton Creek, Huntington Beach State Park and wetlands, associated beach and coastal shoreline habitat, Orange Coast River Park, an approximately 1,000-acre preserve at the mouth of the Santa Ana River, Santiago Creek parks, and the Santa Ana River mainstem.
- **Aging Infrastructure:** Outdated and deteriorating wastewater and water conveyance systems can cause leaks, sewage spills and have inadequate capacity to handle increased flows resulting in impacts to surface, groundwater and ocean water quality. Multi purpose projects that include the rehabilitation of water and wastewater infrastructure are important for improving water quality standards.
- **Climate change:** Climate change will have an affect on water resources, water supply availability for human and habitat need particularly. Addressing these issues now will help the region prepare for current and future impacts.

1.2 Purpose and Need for NOC WMA Plan

The purpose of the NOC WMA Plan is to maximize the utilization of local water resources and efficient use of all resources by providing for more effective collaboration through the application of multiple water management strategies and implementation of multi-purpose projects that will fulfill the needs of the region. By choosing to implement multi purpose projects this plan will help to address water supply, water quality, flood control, ecosystem restoration and climate change.

The North Orange County region prepared this WMA Plan to respond to the challenges described above. In order to support an integrated, sustainable region, each of these challenges needs to be considered in long term planning as well as in decisions to implement projects and modify policies. With a goal of implementing multi beneficial projects and programs the region hopes to achieve a suitable balance for addressing the challenges in the region.

Additionally, the NOC WMA Plan continues to expand communication not only between stakeholders, but also between agencies and agency departments. The NOC WMA Plan joint planning process is synergistic: planning will be more comprehensive and cohesive, and will result in the implementation of projects that are more cost effective and that produce more widespread results.

North Orange County Integrated Regional Watershed Management Plan

The NOC WMA Plan creates a foundation for this process, which includes defining objectives, strategies, project prioritization methods and specific implementation goals and plans. This is intended to be a living document that will be updated periodically to reflect accomplishments as well as changing water resource management issues.

