

WEST COUNTY COASTAL WATERSHED COORDINATING COMMITTEE

SUMMARY

Ocean water quality affects the quality of life of every citizen in the County of Orange, whether he or she is a surfer, boater, business owner, or someone who simply enjoys visiting the beach. Water quality is a multi-faceted concept including the components of urban runoff, harbor trash, and safe recreational ocean water.

Strong citizen involvement that motivates governmental entities is absolutely necessary to solve the severely degraded water quality. The water that drains into the ocean between the San Gabriel River and the Santa Ana River (known as the West County Coastal Watershed), is poorly represented by government, environmental, and private citizens' groups. This is in great contrast to the coastal section south of the Santa Ana River, which has a strong and very active committee to oversee water quality.

Many environmentally sensitive citizens' groups are intensely interested in this subject and are becoming more litigious with demands that the water quality problem be resolved in watersheds draining into the West County Coastal Watershed area.

The Orange County Grand Jury believes that the County of Orange should form a West County Coastal Watershed Coordinating Committee. This committee would be launched and guided by the Manager of Coastal and Historical Facilities of the Harbors, Beaches & Parks Division of the Public Facilities and Resources Department (PFRD). The County would coordinate and facilitate the organization of this committee until such time as the committee could stand on its own and select its own coordinator. The committee would address present water-quality problems as well as engage in long-term planning.

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

The 1999–2000 Orange County Grand Jury discovered that there is no strong, regularly scheduled committee composed of governmental, environmental, or citizens' groups to oversee the quality of water that empties into the Pacific Ocean between the San Gabriel River and the Santa Ana River. Therefore, in fulfilling its obligation to the citizens of the

County of Orange, the Grand Jury studied how best to implement such a coordinating committee.

METHOD OF STUDY

In order to understand the problem of a lack of a coordinating group in West County Coastal Watershed area, the Grand Jury interviewed local city, federal, state, and county employees as well as private organizations impacted by poor water quality in the above described area. Tours were taken of the harbors and watershed areas. Aerial surveys and photographs were also taken of the area of study. Printed information from both governmental and private organizations was reviewed and evaluated. The Internet was also used.

BACKGROUND

Two Orange County watersheds and coastal areas have organized coordinating committees (Newport Bay Coordinating Committee and the Aliso Creek Committee) that have been instrumental in addressing water-quality issues in their areas. The Newport Bay Coordinating Committee serves as a clearinghouse for more than fifty different organizations, agencies, and environmental groups that are interested in water quality. For example, Newport Bay Coordinating Committee has been instrumental in coordinating the efforts of the Army Corps of Engineers in their project of identifying and formulating a plan for cleaning up the Newport Back Bay. The Manager of the Coastal and Historical Facilities of Harbors, Beaches and Parks of Orange County chairs this committee. The Aliso Creek Committee has been instrumental in convincing the San Diego Regional Water Quality Board to issue an order to clean up the water in the Aliso Creek watershed.

The purpose of these committees is to be a clearing house allowing all interested organizations, agencies, and individuals to come together in a round-table forum. What they share is a vital interest in their community's water quality.

There are more than fifty different organizations, agencies, and environmental groups that are interested in water quality in the west county coastal area. The Manager of Coastal and Historical Facilities Division of Harbors, Beaches, & Parks should compile a list of those groups that would be interested and should be invited to such an organizational meeting.

FINDINGS

In accordance with *California Penal Code* Sections 933 and 933.05, responses are required to all findings. The 1999–2000 Orange County Grand Jury has arrived at the following findings:

1. Currently there is no regularly scheduled public (or governmental) committee that is dedicated to the enhancement of water quality for the watershed that drains into the coastal areas between the Santa Ana River and the San Gabriel River, known as the West County Coastal Watershed.

A response to Finding 1 is required from the **Board of Supervisors**, and requested from the **Chief Executive Office** and the **Public Facilities and Resources Department**.

2. Managing a watershed committee is a time-consuming endeavor. The size of the Coastal and Historical Facilities staff has been kept at a minimum since the Orange County bankruptcy.

A response to Finding 2 is required from the **Board of Supervisors**, and requested from the **Chief Executive Office** and the **Public Facilities and Resources Department**.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In accordance with *California Penal Code* Sections 933 and 933.05, each recommendation must be responded to by the government entity to which it is addressed. These responses are submitted to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court. Based on the findings, the 1999–2000 Orange County Grand Jury recommends that:

1. A West County Coastal Watershed Coordinating Committee should be established by Public Facilities and Resources Department to serve as a clearinghouse for all organizations and individuals and to operate as a round-table forum to facilitate the sharing of information between persons, agencies, and organizations with an interest in water quality in the West County Coastal Watershed area. The Director of the Public Facilities and Resources Department should review whether the Newport Bay Coordinating Committee has accomplished its goals and how a similar organization could act as the model for a West County Coastal Watershed Coordinating Committee.

A response to Recommendation 1 is required from the **Board of Supervisors**, and requested from the **Chief Executive Office** and the **Public Facilities and Resources Department**.

2. A managerial position should be added to the Coastal and Historical Facilities staff to aid in the formation and administration of the West County Coastal Watershed Coordinating Committee.

A response to Recommendation 2 is required from the **Board of Supervisors**, and requested from the **Chief Executive Office** and the **Public Facilities and Resources Department**.