



Stakeholder Working Group: Los Angeles River Flows Project

Background

The Water Boards, which include the State Water Resources Control Board and the Regional Water Quality Control Boards, are charged with protecting California's water resources and supporting the uses of these water resources, both human and ecological. These uses are sometimes referred to as "beneficial uses" and comprise the ways our rivers, lakes and other waterbodies are used, including for municipal drinking water supply, recreation such as swimming, fishing and boating, industrial use, and ecological uses such as providing various habitats for fish, birds, and other wildlife. In much of the state, treated wastewater is released into local streams and in some cases helps support some of these uses such as habitat and recreation.

The Water Boards are promoting water reuse and recycling to conserve the state's water resources. Reuse and recycling of treated wastewater can result in a reduction of instream flow. Wastewater dischargers that want to reduce stream flow for reuse and recycling must obtain approval from the State Water Board prior to reducing wastewater discharges. A key step toward obtaining approval is to demonstrate that the reduced discharge will largely not affect fish, wildlife, or other public trust resources (resources for the benefit of the public, such as recreation). As a result, the Water Boards are currently supporting the development of technical tools and approaches that define ecologically protective flows and the flow criteria that sustain specific species, habitats, and beneficial uses.

The need to better understand and establish flow requirements has come to the forefront along the Los Angeles (LA) River. The cities of Burbank, Glendale and Los Angeles have plans to recycle a portion of their wastewater, which would significantly reduce and perhaps eliminate instream flows in the LA River during the dry season. They have petitioned, or are planning to petition, the State Water Board to reduce flow to the LA River for this purpose. A 2017 UCLA report on its LA Sustainable Water Project concluded that full implementation of stormwater Best Management Practices (BMPs) with 100% recycling at Water Reclamation Plants (WRPs) could lead to an annual minimum flow approaching zero (Mika *et al.* 2017).

Project Scope

The State Water Board and the Los Angeles Water Board, in cooperation with local municipalities (including City of LA, LA County Department of Public Works, and LA County Sanitation Districts), have initiated the Los Angeles River Flows Project (Project) to better evaluate the cumulative impacts of these potential flow reductions. The Project will provide a science-based approach for assessing flow necessary to sustain beneficial uses. The desired outcome of the Project is to establish technically sound flow recommendations and an evaluation of the consequences of alternative flow scenarios for the LA River. This Project may also serve as a model for assessing similar situations in other river systems. It is anticipated that the Project will take two years to complete.

Stakeholder Working Group Objective

As part of the Project, the Water Boards will coordinate with stakeholders to communicate the technical approach and desired outcomes of the study. The Stakeholder Working Group (SWG) will provide a forum for input from stakeholders about community activities along the LA River and associated flow needs. This will allow affected parties to provide review and feedback for the project technical team to consider in subsequent draft recommendations. The SWG is being coordinated with ongoing community engagement efforts, such as the Los Angeles River Master Plan.

Participant Role and Expectations

The SWG will consist of four facilitated working meetings, with a group of 30-40 individuals, held approximately every six months throughout the two-year Project. The core participants will consist of municipal, flood control and recreation managers of the LA River and members of key agency and non-governmental organizations. These members will communicate Project developments to other community and local stakeholders.

An essential component of the SWG members' role will be to provide informed input on how different flow levels might impact their area of interest. SWG members will have the opportunity to review and comment on the technical elements as they are developed, including proposed management scenarios and modeling results. Their feedback will inform the technical work, which will be used to support policy development.

Reference

Mika, K., Gallo, E., Read, L., Edgley, R., Truong, K., Hogue, T., et al. 2017. *LA Sustainable Water Project: Los Angeles River Watershed*. UCLA: Sustainable LA Grand Challenge. Available online from <<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/42m433ps>>. Accessed February 26, 2019.