

# Ventura County Watershed Protection District



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Los Angeles Region  
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**SUBJECT: COMMENTS ON TENTATIVE RESOLUTION RETAINING THE CURRENT RECREATIONAL BENEFICIAL USE DESIGNATIONS FOR THE ENGINEERED CHANNELS OF THE LOS ANGELES RIVER WATERSHED**

Dear Dr. Amah:

The Ventura County Watershed Protection District (District) strongly supports the efforts of the Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board (Regional Board) to reconsider the application of recreational beneficial uses in the engineered channels of the Los Angeles River system, however, we do not support the Tentative Resolution (Resolution) as proposed.

The District owns and operates many engineered channels within the County of Ventura, and is named Principal Permittee and Co-Permittee in the Ventura County Municipal MS4 Permit. The Resolution pertaining to the Los Angeles River Watershed may set a precedent for potential future resolutions in watersheds in the County of Ventura which also fall under the Los Angeles Region Basin Plan.

We have reviewed the final version of Part I and draft version of Part II of the technical report, "Recreational Use Re-evaluation of the Engineered Channels of the Los Angeles River Watershed", as well as, the Tentative Resolution Retaining the Current Recreational Beneficial Use Designations of the Engineered Channels of the Los Angeles River Watershed. We appreciate the opportunity to comment on the Tentative Resolution.

Reducing bacteria concentrations to levels below water quality objectives in engineered channels is often very costly, with little benefit to public health. It is essential to avoid spending money where the benefits are non-existent or very small, and to focus and prioritize actions where the benefit to public health is greatest. However, prioritization and efforts towards cost-effective protection of human health are difficult when water bodies have designated recreational uses that do not reflect actual current and planned future

recreational uses. This is the case with the current blanket REC-1 designated uses in the Los Angeles River Watershed and other watersheds in the region. We submit the following comments and recommendations for consideration by the Regional Board:

**Comment No. 1:** The District supports the comments made by the California Stormwater Quality Association (CASQA), provided in a separate letter to the Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board. Specifically, the District finds that Regional Water Board staff is proposing to resolve that all engineered channels within the Los Angeles River Watershed are essentially equal in terms of existing or potential recreational uses, even though the data contained in Part I of the technical report "Recreational Use Re-evaluation of the Engineered Channels of the Los Angeles River Watershed" clearly indicate this is not the case. A telling example has been included in the CASQA comment letter as well.

The continued broad application of recreational use designations across all waterbodies, as proposed in the tentative resolution, appears to forgo the necessary analysis of individual waterbodies and their conditions in order to make that determination, and precludes targeting the investment of resources to areas where the uses exist (e.g., the mainstem of the Los Angeles River). This approach disincentives the ability of the stormwater community to develop innovative solutions in the tributaries to protect uses where they occur. Rather, each individual outfall in the tributaries will have to be considered for retrofit, a cost difference of many millions of dollars.

**Comment No. 2:** The District is currently considering a variety of multi-benefit projects for treating or infiltrating dry weather urban runoff and stormwater in Ventura County. However, a blanket REC-1 designation in all mainstem and tributary waterbodies, similar as the resolution proposed for the Los Angeles River, creates a significant disincentive to fund these projects. Replacing current REC-1 designations in tributaries where no REC-1 use occurs, by more appropriate designations (e.g. REC-2), would help these projects move forward.

For example, Camarillo Hills Drain is a major watercourse in the City of Camarillo in Ventura County, and portions are owned and maintained by the District. The channel flows through the City of Camarillo and discharges into Revolon Slough. The channel was inadequate to contain the  $Q_{100}$  flows, and a 30 Percent Design Study was conducted to determine flood related issues, but also to evaluate environmental concerns and recommend a preferred alternative.<sup>1</sup> A regional 225 acre-foot detention basin was investigated for reducing flow to Revolon Slough as part of an overall watershed strategy. The basin would reduce improvements needed to Revolon Slough downstream of Camarillo Hills Drain, and could be used for multi-benefit opportunities such as water quality or wetlands improvements. However, outside funding for the multi-benefit project

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<sup>1</sup> Ventura County Watershed Protection District, 2008. Camarillo Hills Drain 30% design completion study.

has not yet been secured in part because of concerns that water quality benefits would not apply to Reach 1 of Camarillo Hills Drain, an approximately 3 mile-long soft bottom channel with some improvements, upstream of the proposed detention basin/wetland. Other recommended improvements in Reach 2, related to increasing capacity, have already partly been completed.

A second example relates to the recently updated integrated watershed management strategy for Calleguas Creek<sup>2</sup>, setting guiding principles for future stream protection, including promoting more natural stream conditions and providing multiple benefits and opportunities. Stakeholders ranked highest a management strategy that includes regional basins, and will provide significant opportunity to incorporate multiple-benefit projects for environmental restoration, recreation, groundwater recharge, water quality, and sediment management. Through several refinements and discussions with stakeholders, five basins were selected out of 156 potential sites. Replacing current REC-1 designations upstream of these basins, by more appropriate designations where applicable (e.g. REC-2), would be a major incentive for including flow diversion and treatment/infiltration in the planning process.

**Recommendation:** Given the above considerations, the District recommends that the Regional Board **not adopt** a resolution at this time so that Board staff, in partnership with interested parties, can complete a more detailed analysis of the tributaries via a stakeholder process. Alternatively, given the significant distinction between the findings for the mainstem and the tributaries, the District recommends limiting a resolution to the Los Angeles River mainstem reaches, and postponing a resolution for the tributaries until the analysis can be completed.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the tentative resolution retaining the current recreational beneficial use designations of the engineered channels in the Los Angeles River watershed. Should you have any questions, please contact me at (805) 654-5051 or via email at [Gerhardt.hubner@ventura.org](mailto:Gerhardt.hubner@ventura.org).

Sincerely,



Gerhardt J. Hubner  
Deputy Director

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<sup>2</sup> Ventura County Watershed Protection District, 2010. Calleguas Creek Integrated Watershed Protection Plan II Management Strategy Study.