



Stakeholder Working Group: Los Angeles River Flows Project

Stakeholder Working Group (SWG)

Meeting #1

Friday, March 22, 2019

Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board (Regional Water Board) – Carmel Room

320 W. 4th Street, Los Angeles, CA

9:30 am – 1:15 pm

MEETING NOTES SUMMARY

Abstract: Meeting 1 of the Los Angeles River Flows Project Stakeholder Working Group (SWG) provided background and scope information on the project, and outlined the goals of the Water Boards in convening the group. Various team members described work to date then stakeholders provided substantive feedback on aspects of the effort related to work done to date, reach designations, and elements of the preliminary scenarios. The session closed with a discussion of next steps for the group including the commitment involved in becoming a member.

Key Topics:

- Background Information
- Project Scope and Work
- Feedback Received to Date
- Study Topics – Recreation, Biological Sources for Species and Habitats, Selection Criteria for Study Reaches, Proposed Management Scenarios
- SWG Charter
- Next Steps

See Meeting Notes Summary and Handouts for more information.

Meeting Materials are available at: https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/larflows.html

Attendees: See Attachment 1

List of Handouts and Meeting Materials:

1. Agenda
2. Presentation PowerPoint
3. SWG Charter

Action Items:

- Documents to be available in advance of the meetings (2-4 weeks in advance)
- Project Team to post all meeting handouts and meeting notes
- Group members to sign up for formal SWG participation
- Webpage to be launched
- Project Team to initiate AB52 Consultation as appropriate
- SWG members to advise of their ability to host remaining meetings

- Staff and group members to continue outreach to ensure community representation
- Staff to review Questions and Answers sections of meeting notes for a potential Frequently Asked Questions Information Sheet

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Order of Business:

1. Welcome & Greetings

The group was greeted by Renee Purdy and Shirley Birosik, of the Los Angeles (LA) Regional Water Quality Control Board (Regional Water Board) and Irma Muñoz, the Regional Water Board Chair. Meeting logistics were explained and the facilitator Lisa Beutler, Stantec, led introductions of all those in attendance.

2. Background Information

Jonathan Bishop, Chief Deputy Director, State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board) provided background information on the effort including the State Water Board’s aspirations for the effort and work to date. He explained that the need to better understand and establish flow requirements has come to the forefront along the Los Angeles (LA) River. This is time critical as the cities of Burbank, Glendale and Los Angeles have plans to recycle a portion of their wastewater that is currently discharged to the LA River, which could significantly reduce and perhaps eliminate instream flows in the LA River during the dry season when discharges from these wastewater treatment facilities make up a large portion of the river’s flow. Pursuant to section 1211 of the California Water Code (Wat. Code § 1211), they have petitioned, or are planning to petition, the State Water Board to reduce their wastewater discharge to the LA River for this purpose.

Goals for the project are to:

- Characterize aquatic life and recreational uses in the LA River

- Quantify flows needed to support uses
- Model how various flow scenarios would affect uses
- Develop a set of flow recommendations that optimize use support
- Incorporate stakeholder input throughout the project
- Serve as a model for similar situations

He noted that the SWG had been convened as the State Water Board wanted to interact with the stakeholders on the ground who would be directly affected. He also explained that the scope of this project is narrow: focused only on instream flows in order to inform the State Water Board's decisions on the wastewater change petitions. That said, they want to hear about other projects, so as not to preclude these in the deliberations. He acknowledged that it would be difficult to separate some of those efforts from the instream flow studies; however, that would be required.

3. Project Scope and Work to Date

Eric Stein from the Southern California Coastal Water Research Project (SCCWRP), on behalf of the full Project Team,¹ explained the technical scope of work, including support and funding, and described the approach being used. He explained he was assisting the State Water Board and the Regional Water Board, in cooperation with local entities (including City of LA, LA County Department of Public Works, and LA County Sanitation Districts), in evaluating the cumulative impacts of potential instream flow reductions. Using a science-based approach for assessing instream flow necessary to sustain beneficial uses, the work product will establish technically sound instream flow recommendations and an evaluation of the consequences of alternative instream flow scenarios for the LA River. Importantly, 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.

Work to date includes:

- Data compilation (recreational uses, species, habitats, environmental conditions)
- Mapping of aquatic life and recreational uses by reach
- Preliminary research to quantify instream flow-use relationships
- Initial work to configure the model
- Held first Technical Advisory Group Meeting
- Organized Stakeholder Working Group

He explained the workplan, including study questions which will consider species, habitats, seasons, instream flow metrics, scenarios, and management approaches. This included a description of the data sources and approaches he anticipated would be used in answering the study questions. More detail about his presentation is available in the session PowerPoint (Handout 2), available on the [project webpage](#).

4. Initial Stakeholder Feedback

Gilberto Ruiz, Stantec, explained that as part of the facilitation team he had engaged in 16 phone call interviews involving nine Public Agencies and seven NGOs and University representatives. He outlined that the goal of the call was to learn more about how familiar stakeholders were with the Project topics and technical issues and to hear stakeholder perspectives on topics likely to be covered in the Stakeholder Working Group meetings.

¹ The Project Team is the State Water Board executives and staff and technical consultants, including researchers and professional facilitators, with a formal role in the project.

In addition to questions about familiarity with the project, interview questions touched on issues which currently and/or in the future could affect the LA River with a modified flow regime, concerns and “Hot Topics.” Questions also elicited the interviewees’ definition of success for the LA River Flows Project, and advice to facilitators and conveners.

Interviewees identified a number of topics they believed would be relevant to the effort. This included:

- Historic Nature of River and Baseline Flows
- Origin and Ownership of Water
- Water Quality/Recharge/Stormwater Capture
- Projects & Mandates
- Biological Resources/Recreation
- Challenges/Opportunities
- Misc. Topics/Themes
- Basic Meeting Logistics

More presentation detail is included in the session PowerPoint (Handout 2), available on the [project webpage](#).

4a. Discussion

Group members were invited to ask questions or provide comments on the information provided in earlier agenda items. Offered thoughts included the following:

Topic	Question/Comment
Community Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Define “equity.” This can mean economic and social, so we need to be clear in this regard • Access for local community and issues of gentrification are important • Is public safety a concern at all? • Concerns about equity, community access, investment in marginally represented communities.
Habitat and species	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Hydrology drives biology.” • Aquatic/non-aquatic terms: what is the difference in those terms considering the natural, Southwest riparian regime?
Source of Flows	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Urban runoff - How much of that is a contributor to flow? How will more drought tolerant landscaping change that? • Concern that because the current LA River flows are dependent on imported water, setting a flow standard will further increase reliance on those imports
Climate Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Climate Change needs to be an issue of consideration • Was there an analysis of climate change in the beneficial use assessments? • As climate change occurs and habitats/resources shift, how is this project handling that? • Do we need to support the habitat of a species that would be naturally excluded by climate change? Need a clear answer for this. • Soon to be published climate change study from Southern California Coastal Water Research Project (SCCWRP); however, this study is focused on headwaters of the LA River, not the lower Los Angeles River.

Stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to include U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in SWG interviews, for perspective on clearing of vegetation, maintenance, etc. • Physicians for Social Responsibility: We are a resource in water equity discussion
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Other

- *Related to aquatic/non-aquatic terms:* the team clarified that aquatic life term refers to aquatic (instream) or riparian dependent species, while non-aquatic is referring to recreational
- *Related to public safety* – the team indicated that the concern with flooding is related. The questioner explained that the safety of the public is separate from damages from flooding and that this needs to be added to scope. Drownings were listed as one concern. It was also noted there are places on the Los Angeles River where recreation is an identified beneficial use, but it is not safe to recreate there.
- *Related to urban runoff* – the team explained that this (incidental flows from lawn irrigation, etc.) is an important consideration to capture.
- *Regarding a need to explicitly spell out operational maintenance* – the team answered they understood this would be a consideration.

5. Recreation Focus Group Overview

Yareli Sanchez, Council for Watershed Health, provided an overview of the recreational assessment she is conducting and described her source material and methods of analysis. She also shared highlights from a focus group conducted with stakeholders familiar with LA River recreational uses. She explained she is also conducting a survey (to be concluded in April) and noted that some of the Stakeholder Working Group participants had been involved.

5a. Discussion

A summary of the questions and answers follows:

Question/ Comment	Answer
Have there been any discussion about future uses?	There are reports regarding future projects and recreational uses from the Regional Water Board (Recreational Use Re-evaluation [RECUR project]).
Is there a map or GIS layer showing existing parks and have the owners been contacted?	The RECUR project compiled some information in GIS. Not to date, but owners have been contacted as part of the outreach effort.
There are future parks that are intending to take water out of the River. Have these been considered?	Information is being gathered regarding these projects.
Have local indigenous tribes been contacted to be part of the conversation?	Yes, reached out to tribes.
What sort of demographic information is being collected?	This is being collected from stakeholders.

How will impacts be presented (e.g., REC-2 (non-contact water recreation) impacts for Reach 1 are.... and so forth)?	Results would be presented as a reach-by-reach analysis presented in a table, using identified “indicators” for specific recreational uses.
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A summary of comments follows:

Topic	Comment
Community Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Equity needs to be considered, especially for the local community. Equity is a key term that needs to be considered. Setting the baseline is important since the River is a lot about “race and class” and these cannot be separated. Need representative community and their needs to be reflected.
Use & Non-Recreational Related Use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Flows need to consider community and tribal needs. Recreational uses (fishing is not just for recreation, but used for food, so need to consider this too). There may be other similar situations.
Outreach Options	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mujeres de la Tierra goes out to the community and talks to them about their viewpoint. In some instances, the community that lives there are not truly represented. Need to go out and canvass the neighborhood and find these people and speak with them (e.g., go to parks and speak with them). State Water Board noted that recreational outreach is not the purpose of this SWG, but it does encourage the Working Group members to go out to the community and bring their perspective on what we are trying to accomplish. It isn’t expected to be perfect, but it will help the process.

The Project Team noted that understanding uses and flows and how these are affected is important and modeling tools will assist in understanding this, but they may not address all questions. This limitation needs to be understood. However, the tools that come out of this can assist to address some of these questions. One focus is to develop a set of tools and then these can “live on” to assist with these questions.

6. Biological Data Sources for Species and Habitats

Eric Stein continued the presentation and discussion reviewing Biological Data Sources for Species and Habitats study elements. He explained species and habitats in the river reflect flows as of now and not historically. The assessment will focus on main channel, and tributaries will also be evaluated. He noted there may be opportunities to enhance habitat on tributaries in lieu of main-stem channel of the LA River and that there were two parts to the approach: species and habitat. He then noted other key data and information sources for the study are needed.

6a. Discussion

The SWG identified the following sources:

- Audubon – breeding bird and Christmas bird count
- City of LA Biodiversity Study
- Data gaps in southeast areas should be addressed. One thought was use of a citizen scientist to assist.
- A Park study was recently done by LA County.

- The Los Angeles River Master Plan Updates and associated planning efforts have a lot of species-related information.

One person explained their view that the tributaries have been long-ignored and disrespected and need to be part of the focus. They explained that this is what feeds the LA River (it’s like a tree with branches) and the study needs to consider hydrology and other key issues. They continued that the Clean Water Act should be a driver and suggested that the flood control system has contributed to the degradation. For this person the first priority needs to be a reassessment of the impacts and the proper emphasis is “restoration.” The speaker was concerned that State Water Board and Regional Water Board staff appear to have a limited view of the input they want on this effort.

State Water Board representatives responded that they agreed the system has been substantially altered, but the purpose of the convening was to address impacts and determine what affects might come from flow regime alteration. They did not find the issue was the Clean Water Act, but instead water rights. The Regional Water Board staff continued that their Board has taken a lot of effort to address the Clean Water Act, especially how beneficial uses and habitat might be enhanced or opportunities created. It was also noted the channel is there for protection.

Staff continued that a great deal of good work is occurring and efforts are being taken to improve the system. They also noted that UCLA and the Colorado School of Mines have studied the LA River extensively. These studies found there are no “black and white” issues, but there was need to consider tributaries in order to better represent conditions in the main stem of LA River. A summary of additional questions, comments and answers follows.

Question/ Comment	Answer
Will study go above Tillman?	No, except to consider upstream inputs to instream flow, the study will be evaluating the impacts of different flows on instream uses downstream from the three Water Reclamation Plants (WRP).
Will invertebrates and shorebirds be considered?	Yes, invertebrates are not a focal species, but information will be considered.
Will you look at how flows might affect wading birds? There are a lot of planning efforts for the mainstem and tributaries. As such would these be considered mitigation?	From a flow management perspective, these will need to be considered. Since we are creating a new concept, it’s unclear at this point, but we don’t want a “paper compliant” system. A balance needs to be struck.
Surveys are intensive but can have fluctuations due to sampling issues. We want to protect beneficial uses, but also be able to recycle water. When you look at beneficial uses, you need to look at endpoints (e.g., birds, algae, indices). How will you be using algal indices, as it relates to birds, etc.?	Two State assessment tools: California Stream Condition Index (CSCI) and Algal Stream Condition Index (ASCI) (both used as water quality metrics). Part of this work will take advantage of those indices and how to interpret them. We can use these for surrogate of water quality and also loosely for potential higher-level organisms. Might not be useful however, for “surrogate”, but some use may exist for these. Many species co-occur. Focus is on potential areas of the River that can be affected by change in flow regime, due to changes in wastewater discharges from WRPs.

Question/ Comment	Answer
Will sensitive species be included?	Yes, and will include co-occurring species too
Shorebirds that historically occurred in the area of the Long Beach channel are going need to be considered.	We will consider studies that have been conducted by others such as the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation.
Will study consider future restoration/habitat areas?	Will focus on existing habitat, but there are opportunities to enhance tributaries.
Will the model be addressing invasive and non-invasive species?	Answer: Yes. Model will be looking at this related to flow regime (e.g., bull frogs like ponded water, so if you change flow, you can alter this and reduce/eliminate this non-native species)
Can you tip the balance away from the non-natives?	Yes, by modifying the flows.

Other Comments:

- During past scoping meeting associated with the LA River, Climate Change was addressed in the tributaries, but there may be overlap.
- There is a difference between aquatic versus non-aquatic (e.g., fish versus least Bell’s vireo).
- Additional species were suggested for inclusion such as bats, frogs, steelhead, and the California kingfisher.

7. Selection Criteria of Study Reaches

Eric Stein continued his presentation with an explanation that the LA River needs to be divided into “reaches” in order to analyze it. The study focus is on reaches that are affected by stormwater and wastewater flows. Biology will need to inform the discussion. He also discussed the hydrology model. See Handout 2 for additional details on this presentation.

7a. Discussion

The group then offered input as follows:

Question/ Comment	Answer
Is this the right number of reaches (total is 10 on River and 2 on Rio Hondo)? How were tributaries chosen?	The decisions were based on the hydrological model.
You might want to consider using the 6 reaches identified in the Basin Plan.	Yes, but the Project Team needed more spatial resolution for analysis, so the reaches do not follow the Basin Plan.
Some areas have multiple jurisdiction.	Yes, will consider this

8. Proposed Management Scenarios

Eric Stein then provided an overview on the Proposed Management Scenarios. He explained the Project Team sought more information on restoration locations and there would be a future a SWG meeting dedicated to “scenarios.”

9. Presentation on the SWG Charter

Facilitator Lisa Beutler discussed the hope those present would continue their involvement and provide an overview of the SWG Charter. She emphasized that it was important that the SWG be representative of the community and asked the group's help in recruiting individuals to fill any perceived gaps in that representation.

She then reviewed elements of the SWG, with group members asking clarifying questions and the Project Team adding in as appropriate.

- *Related to participation* - Lisa explained there is a need for continuity among participants and noted the charter called for a commitment to attendance. She added that it was okay to have an alternate, but this person needed to be a regular attendee and stay up to date on discussions, for continuity. In this case the member and alternate can both attend sessions.
- *Related to resources* – The State Board has established a significant priority to the work of the group with Chief Deputy Director Jonathan Bishop serving as the Executive Sponsor. Staff contact information and other information will be made available to support the group's work. Presentations and other materials will be available on the LA River Flows Project web page: https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/larflows.html
- *Related to schedule and workplan* – four (4) meetings over a two-year period are anticipated.
- *Related to decision making* – this is not a formal decision-making body but to the extent the group would like to make recommendations, a consensus seeking process will occur (informal).
- *Related to Group Protocols* – A list of typical group protocols such as honor time, conversational courtesy, etc. are included in the charter.
- *Related to the group charge* – it was emphasized that members are expected to meet with their constituents and bring input back to the SWG. This is essential to ensure that the community is authentically represented in the discussions. Jonathan Bishop reiterated that, "If there are people that should be in the room, we need to hear about this so we can ensure they are invited."
- *Related to Input on the Draft Technical Products* - The SWG will be asked to provide input on the draft technical products developed by the technical team.

Lisa also explained that the Project Team hoped that a SWG member might be able to host meetings so that the group sessions could be held in different locations. One person indicated they hoped that remote participation would be possible and others suggested it would be nice to have a face to face options for meetings.

She explained group members would be offered an opportunity to sign up for membership in a follow-up survey.

10. Last Thoughts

Group members were offered an opportunity to offer last thoughts or ask additional questions. The following was provided.

- The City of Los Angeles just approved a 5-year agreement to work with Council for Watershed Health and would like to have some discussion about facilitating monitoring.
- An earlier slide in Eric Stein's presentation had water quality parameters. How was this determined? Eric answered that they looked at biological issues and trace metals (related to total maximum daily loads [TMDLs]).
- Be sure to include Department of Toxic Substances Control in the group.

- Seasonality should be considered. There should be awareness that this could impact one-time observations versus year-round assessments for species/habitat. Eric answered that the data for species incorporation 20-year information. Climate change is also being considered, including focal species.

11. Closing Remarks to SWG

The Project Team closed by explaining that there will be a series of topics to be discussed (see schedule from presentation). The technical team will be required to provide SWG members with materials in advance to ensure that there is adequate time to review. The project timeline is very tight since decisions from State Board need to be made and it's important to receive the SWG input in order to inform the Board decision making process.

The Project Team will rely on the SWG to get the word out about the option to join the SWG. The group will be meeting about every 6-months. The SWG really needs to get input and share what they are hearing from the broader group out in the community.

The Team also extended their thanks to the group for their attendance and generative input.

Attachment 1 – Attendance**Participants**

Amanda Wagner	Heal the Bay
Arthur Pugsley	Los Angeles Waterkeeper
Ashley Olmeda	Regional Water Board
Asif Sheikh	City of Burbank
Bryan Moller	Watershed Conservation Authority
Celine Gallon	Regional Water Board
Chris Solek	USACE
Dian Tanuwidjaja	Long Beach Water Department
Edward Belden	LA River Works- Mayor's Office
Elizabeth Hellier	FoLAR
Evelyn Cortez-Davis	LADWP
Francisco Pineda	Regional Water Board
Ginachi Amah	Regional Water Board
Gonzalez	Rivers and Mountains Conservancy
Hassan Rad	LASAN
Henry Graumlich	Calleguas MWD
Julia Gutierrez	LA River Works- Mayor's Office
Kaleen Juarez	Grown in LA
Lizette Hernandez	Physicians for Social Responsibility
Martha Tremblay	LACSD
Mary Ngo	CDFW
Mas Dojiri	LASAN
Melanie Tory	La City Attorney's Office/ LADWP
Nina Jazmadarian	Foothills Municipal Water District
Patrizia Hall	Long Beach Water Department
Pavlova Vitale	Regional Water Board
Rafael Villegas	LADWP
Richard Ruyle	Glendale Water and Power
Samantha Hauserman	FoLAR
Sarah Rascon	Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority
Shona Ganguly	The Nature Conservancy
Stephen Mejia	FoLAR
Tim Brick	Arroyo Seco Foundation

Water Boards Representatives and Consultants to Water Boards Representative, Consultants, and Project Technical Team

Eric Stein	SCCWRP
Erik Ekdahl	State Water Board
Gilberto Ruiz	Stantec
Irma Muñoz	Regional Water Board
Jenny Newman	Regional Water Board

Jonathan Bishop	State Water Board
Kristine Taniguchi-Quan	SCCWRP
Lily Weaver	State Water Board
Lisa Beutler	Stantec
Lori Webber	State Water Board
Renee Purdy	Regional Water Board
Shirley Birosik	Regional Water Board
Susana Lagudis	Regional Water Board
Tatyana Isupov	State Water Board

Session Notes Respectfully Submitted by:

- State Water Board – Lori Webber and Tatyana Isupov
- Facilitation Team - Lisa Beutler and Gilberto Ruiz (Stantec)

