



DATE: March 10, 2020

TO: WASC Chair & Members  
CC: LAC SCWP Staff

RE: **OurWaterLA Recommendations Concerning the Watershed Area Stormwater Investment Plan for 2019-2020**

OurWaterLA (OWLA) is a diverse coalition that has engaged communities, businesses, and organizations across Los Angeles County, building support to reinvent and reinvest in our water future using nature based infrastructure that provides community health benefits, environmental health benefits, and economic benefits. OWLA recommends that funding priority be given to the projects that best exemplify the goals of the Safe, Clean Water Program (SCWP), and that consideration should be given to reserving future funds for future exemplary projects.

## **FUNDING ALLOCATION FOR STORMWATER PROJECTS**

The Stormwater Investment Plans (SIPs) must achieve the fourteen programmatic goals clearly laid out in the SCWP Implementation Ordinance (Attachment 1), including the goals to improve water quality and contribute to attainment of water-quality requirements, as well as multiple additional community investments such as prioritization of nature based solutions, community engagement, equity, and quality jobs. Our top issues are shown below in bullet point format and described more robustly in Attachment 1.

### **Nature Based Solutions**

The prioritization of nature based solutions is a specific programmatic goal of the SCWP, and therefore must be reflected in the projects for the SIP.

### **Community Engagement**

A plan for future community outreach is not sufficient for true community engagement in a project. Priority should be given to projects for which local community engagement, designed specifically for the proposed project, has already been initiated.

### **Equity**

One of the most innovative aspects of the SCWP is the written requirements for the equitable distribution of community investments. When assessing the 110% benefit return on investments

for disadvantaged communities, it is important to clarify what type of benefits a project provides, and whether the proposed investments directly benefit the receiving community and verified by local community groups.

### **Quality Jobs**

At a minimum, funding through the SCWP SIP must be contingent upon providing direct community investments, such as high quality local job and training opportunities.

We recommend that all of these programmatic goals be considered when selecting projects for full or partial funding for the 2019-2020 SIP, and that consideration be given to reserving future funds for future exemplary projects. One opportunity to reserve future funding is to fund projects in phases, to get projects through initial project development, such as project design.

## **FUNDING ALLOCATION FOR SCIENTIFIC STUDIES**

There have also been proposals for funding through the SCWP Scientific Studies Program. The purpose of the Scientific Studies Program is to provide funding for scientific and technical activities, including, but not limited to, scientific studies, technical studies, monitoring, and modeling related to *stormwater and urban runoff capture and pollution reduction*.

OWLA recommends that no funding be allocated for the Regional Scientific Study to Support Protection of Human Health through Targeted Reduction of Bacteriological Pollution. We have serious concerns about the legitimacy of this proposed study. It has no hypothesis or clear methodology, and no scientific professionals were involved in the development of the study, as is required under the SCWP Scientific Studies Program when feasible.

This proposal is asking for nearly \$10 million region-wide over the next five years to target a specific source of a specific pollutant rather than providing multiple benefits, and to potentially weaken water quality objectives rather than improving our water quality. This proposed study will not support many of the program goals, listed in Attachment 1. Additionally, there are other potential funding sources for this study including the Stormwater Monitoring Coalition, which already has a similar study in its 5-year plan. **This nearly \$10 million should be spent to invest in our communities with multi-benefit stormwater capture projects.**

Further, for those WASCs considering the Wet Weather Zinc study, this proposal is asking for \$500K to potentially weaken water quality objectives, rather than improving our water quality. Funds should instead be spent on multi-benefit stormwater capture projects. The Safe, Clean Water Program is not the right funding source for this study because this study does not support many of the goals of the Safe, Clean Water Program or its Scientific Studies Program. There are other potential ways to achieve this type of recalculation, including working with the State Water Resources Control Board.

Thank you all for the considerable time and effort that you have contributed to the implementation of the Safe, Clean Water Program. We look forward to continuing our collaborative work with each of you, with the County of Los Angeles, and with our communities to most efficiently and effectively reinvest in our water future. Many of us, including WASC members, recognize that this is a complex process, and we would be remiss not to stop and strongly re-evaluate the context for making these critically important funding recommendations. OWLA core team members want to work with you to be part of the solution for meeting water quality standards by implementing multi-benefit projects. Thank you for your consideration of these recommendations.

Sincerely,

OWLA Core Team

## ATTACHMENT 1

### **Safe, Clean Water Program Implementation Ordinance: Section 18.04 SCW Program Goals.**

- A. Improve water quality and contribute to attainment of water-quality requirements.
- B. Increase drought preparedness by capturing more Stormwater and/or Urban Runoff to store, clean, reuse, and/or recharge groundwater basins.
- C. Improve public health by preventing and cleaning up contaminated water, increasing access to open space, providing additional recreational opportunities, and helping communities mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change through activities such as increasing shade and green space.
- D. Leverage other funding sources to maximize SCW Program Goals.
- E. Invest in infrastructure that provides multiple benefits.
- F. Prioritize Nature-Based Solutions.
- G. Provide a spectrum of project sizes from neighborhood to regional scales.
- H. Encourage innovation and adoption of new technologies and practices.
- I. Invest in independent scientific research.
- J. Provide DAC Benefits, including Regional Program infrastructure investments, that are not less than one hundred and ten percent (110%) of the ratio of the DAC population to the total population in each Watershed Area.
- K. Provide Regional Program infrastructure funds benefiting each Municipality in proportion to the funds generated within their jurisdiction, after accounting for allocation of the one hundred and ten percent (110%) return to DACs, to the extent feasible.
- L. Implement an iterative planning and evaluation process to ensure adaptive management.
- M. Promote green jobs and career pathways.
- N. Ensure ongoing operations and maintenance for Projects.

## Addendum

OWLA has worked in coordination with Los Angeles County staff as well as the communities they serve to create, pass, and implement the Safe, Clean Water Program (SCWP). In November 2018, Los Angeles County voters elected to pay an additional parcel tax to reinvest in their communities and address stormwater pollution region wide. As you make decisions concerning how to spend that revenue in the Stormwater Investment Plan (SIP), we urge you to consider the commitments made to the taxpayers when the SCWP Implementation Ordinance was adopted in July 2019.

As a region, we have been faced with the challenges of stormwater discharge for decades, and we now have the opportunity to fund the development, operation, and maintenance of new multi-benefit and nature-based stormwater capture projects to address stormwater pollution while also providing additional community investments. We must take advantage of this opportunity to take action against the discharge of polluted stormwater. However, the funding decisions made during this first round of funding allocation can have significant impacts on future funding availability, as new projects will be proposed each year.

### Nature Based Solutions

Projects should take into account local recreational needs, provide local support, and include education on both native plants and indigenous culture. Projects should consider climate adaptation and mitigation in their design and implementation. Project proponents should follow native landscaping best practices to plant native and culturally relevant species - especially engaging local indigenous leadership, as well as scientists and academic partners to ensure that natural space is created and enhanced based on the needs of local ecology, hydrology, geography, geology, etc.

### Community Engagement

There should be different outreach strategies for different communities depending on unique community types and needs, designed and conducted in coordination with community-based organizations with legitimate credibility in the communities they represent. At the very least, the project should have a detailed plan of how community engagement will be sustained throughout project development, implementation, operation, and maintenance.

### Equity

Examples of these investments include clean water, local hire, community engagement, access and safety around the Los Angeles and San Gabriel Rivers and their tributaries, field trips and educational opportunities, culturally relevant recreation, jobs and training, health benefits, habitat restoration, cooling, recreational access improvements, climate resilience and amplified community voice.

## Jobs

One of the many community investments discussed above is local hiring for the equitable distribution of funds and to help foster a sense of community pride and stewardship for local projects. Priority should be given to projects that utilize these kinds of direct community investments.