

Upper Los Angeles River

Watershed Area Steering Committee (WASC)

Meeting Minutes



Wednesday, August 7, 2024

2:00pm - 4:00pm

LA County Public Works Headquarters, 1st Floor (Courtyard), Conference Room C

WebEx Meeting

Committee Members Present:

Ernesto Rivera, LA Flood Control District (Agency)

*Art Castro, LA Department of Water and Power (Agency)

John Huynh, LA Department of Water and Power (Agency)

Ida Meisami-Fard, LA Sanitation & Environment (Agency)

Ernesto Pantoja, Laborers Local 300 (Community)

Miguel Luna, Urban Semillas (Community)

Edith de Guzman, University of California, Los Angeles (Community)

Veronica Padilla-Campos, Pacoima Beautiful (Community)

*Brent Maue, Pasadena (Municipal)

Patrick DeChellis, La Cañada Flintridge (Municipal)

Karo Torossian, Los Angeles (Municipal), Vice-Chair

Mark Lombos, Los Angeles County (Municipal)

Kenneth Jones, San Fernando (Municipal)

Adi Liberman, Environmental Outreach Strategies (Watershed Coordinator, non-voting member)

Carlos Moran, Council for Watershed Health (Watershed Coordinator, non-voting member)

Kristina Kreter, Council for Watershed Health (Watershed Coordinator, non-voting member)

Committee Members Absent:

Cathie Santo Domingo, LA Recreation & Parks (Agency)

Teresa Villegas, Los Angeles (Municipal), Chair

Rafael Prieto, Los Angeles (Municipal)

*Committee Member Alternate

See attached sign-in sheet for full list of attendees.

1) Welcome and Introductions

Karo Torossian, Vice-Chair of the Upper Los Angeles River (ULAR) Watershed Area Steering Committee (WASC), welcomed Committee Members and called the meeting to order.

Los Angeles County Public Works (Public Works) staff provided a brief WebEx tutorial in both English and Spanish and announced that any public comment made in Spanish will be translated to English. SCWP staff facilitated the roll call of Committee Members, and a quorum was established.

2) Approval of Meeting Minutes from March 21, 2024 and April 3, 2024

Public Works staff presented the meeting minutes from March 21, 2024, and April 3, 2024. Member Kenneth Jones motioned to approve the meeting minutes from March 21, 2024, and April 3, 2024. The motion was seconded by Member Ida Meisami-Fard. The WASC approved the March 21, 2024, meeting minutes with 7 votes in favor, 0 opposed, 5 in abstention, and 4 Members absent at the time of the vote (approved, see vote tracking sheet). The WASC also approved the April 3, 2024, meeting minutes with 8 votes in favor, 0 opposed, 4 in abstention, and 4 Members absent at the time of the vote (approved, see vote tracking sheet).

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3) Ex Parte Communication Disclosures

There were no Ex Parte communication disclosures.

4) Committee Member and Program Updates

Public Works staff provided an update, noting:

- The Regional Oversight Committee's (ROC) review of ULAR WASC's recommended Stormwater Investment Plan (SIP) will occur on August 14.
- In alignment with the recent progress report by the ROC and the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors' (Board) subsequent motion on the Progress and Adaptive Management of the Safe, Clean Water (SCW) Program, the collection of Infrastructure Program (IP) Projects will resume for the 2025 Regional Program Call for Projects. Scientific Studies (SS) and Technical Resources Program (TRP) applications were still accepted by the July 31 deadline.
- This will enable the SCW Program to prioritize critical efforts informed by all recent reports, recommendations, and discussions with the ROC and key interested parties, while also allowing potential project applicants the opportunity to refine and enhance their proposals, leverage additional funding, and engage more deeply with the community.

5) Watershed Coordinator Updates

Watershed Coordinators deferred updates to the next meeting to allow sufficient time for the agenda item 6.

6) Presentations and Discussion Items

a) Watershed Planning Workshop

i) *Introduction to Watershed Planning*

SCW Program Watershed Planning staff gave a presentation introducing Watershed Planning and their approach for development of Initial Watershed Plans. Upon inquiry, the SCW Program Watershed Planning staff clarified that the Watershed Plans will not be project-specific and will serve as an additional resource during SIP deliberations. Presentation slides can be found on the [SCW Program website](#).

SCW Program Watershed Planning staff's presentation outlined key planning milestones, outputs, timelines for engagement, community input, and how Watershed Planning will be integrated within the SCW Program.

ii) *WASC Feedback on existing plans & datasets for Watershed Planning*

Prior to the meeting, SCW Program Watershed Planning provided committee members a list of planning efforts, such as existing plans and data sets, that will be considered during the development of Initial Watershed Plans. SCW Program Watershed Planning staff requested input from Committee Members on additional existing plans and datasets that should be considered for the Watershed Planning effort. Watershed Coordinator Alonso Garcia shared that the Watershed Coordination team developed a list of additional documents, including the Tujunga–Pacoima Watershed Plan and Pacoima Wash Master Plan. Member Patrick DeChellis inquired about the County Water Plan listed, specifying if it includes plans for all the water purveyors. The County Water Plan was developed in consultation with 200+ water purveyors and is available for consideration and adoption by water agencies.

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Upon inquiry, SCW Program Watershed Planning staff shared that the Watershed Planning effort is coming from recommendations from the ROC and Board motions. The goal of the Watershed Planning effort is to take a proactive approach in identifying Watershed Area needs and opportunity areas to allow for more strategic investments for the Watershed Area in the future. SCW Program Watershed Planning staff noted that the recommended plans will be leveraged and used to inform future efforts.

The Committee recommended the City of Los Angeles Department of Water and Power's Stormwater Capture Master Plan and the City of Pasadena's Stormwater Master Plan.

Watershed Coordinator Kristina Kreter recommended that efforts related to schools, such as studies that consider nature-based solutions, heat island reduction, and greening benefits, should be considered. Watershed Coordinator Kreter recommended the Los Angeles Unified School District's (LAUSD) Greening Index as a resource for the Watershed Planning effort.

Vice-Chair Torossian recommended that flood maps and heat studies for various communities within the Watershed Area be considered for these efforts.

Member Miguel Luna inquired about incorporating the County's climate resiliency and vulnerability assessments that are currently in development. SCW Program Watershed Planning staff noted that Los Angeles County's 2021 Climate Vulnerability Assessment will be incorporated, and ongoing studies will be integrated into future planning.

Watershed Coordinator Carlos Moran inquired about watershed modeling and recommended Accelerate Resilience Los Angeles' (ARLA) *Using Watershed Science to Build Consensus and Increase Benefits of L.A. County's SCW Program* Report, which features a pilot watershed model of the Alhambra Wash. Upon inquiry, SCW Program Watershed Planning staff clarified that the Watershed Planning process would focus on watershed-specific strategies, with some regional commonalities.

Member Edith de Guzman suggested that recycled water projects should be considered, including the City of Los Angeles Sanitation and Environment's (LASAN) Hyperion 2035 Program, Operation NEXT, and the Southern California impact flows. Member de Guzman additionally recommended the California Environmental Flows Framework (CEFF) and the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) Institute of Environment and Sustainability's report that examines the feasibility of creating greenway projects in different parts of Los Angeles.

Watershed Coordinator Kreter recommended that water resiliency planning should incorporate Tribal priorities.

SCW Program Watershed Planning staff added that additional input can be submitted following the meeting using the [Watershed Planning Post-Workshop Input Form](#).

SCW Program Watershed Planning staff presented an overview of the WASC's funded projects from Fiscal Year (FY) 2020-21 through FY 2023-24, and their current statuses of performance measures and population indicators based on current discussions. SCW Program Watershed Planning staff shared that additional information about Watershed Planning metrics can be better understood by reviewing the recording of the Metrics and Monitoring Study (MMS) Information Session from July 25, which can be found on the [SCW Program website](#).

Watershed Coordinator Moran announced their departure from their current role as a ULAR WASC Watershed Coordinator and that Watershed Coordinator Alonso Garcia will take their place.

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iii) *SCWP Goals & Strategies Workshop*

Mike Antos and Hayat Rasul (Stantec, Watershed Planning) facilitated a workshop that revisited the SCW Program's 14 goals and solicited recommended strategies that are important to the Committee Members and the ULAR Watershed Area. The Committee reviewed the 14 SCW Program Goals from the SCW Program Ordinance and reflected on which goals should have greater emphasis for the ULAR Watershed Area.

The Committee discussed topics such as green jobs and shade, as it relates to public health, and shared reflections that these topics did not feel like a main priority of the SCW Program. The Committee also discussed the nature-based solutions goal, and noted it is an overarching, "umbrella category" for several topics.

Vice-Chair Torossian and Member DeChellis highlighted the innovation goal. Member DeChellis shared observations that innovation is being incorporated into the development of project applications, but more innovation can be encouraged for project ideas.

Antos asked the Committee if there were any factors that distinguish the ULAR Watershed Area from other Watershed Areas. Vice-Chair Torossian stated that the size of the ULAR Watershed Area is significant. Several Committee Members agreed and added that it is easier for the Watershed Area to achieve accomplishments related to the SCW Program goals since the Watershed Area's larger size provides more opportunities as compared to other smaller Watershed Areas. However, the Committee noted that, due to the Watershed Area's large size, it is also more difficult to accomplish goals on an area-wide basis.

The Committee discussed the ULAR Watershed Area's Disadvantaged Communities (DAC) in relation to the watershed area's population. Watershed Coordinator Moran noted that most disadvantaged communities in the ULAR Watershed Area are located within the City of Los Angeles, including South and Northeast Los Angeles. This influences the 110 percent investment for the DAC Benefit requirement for project considerations.

Member de Guzman shared that the ULAR Watershed Area has great potential for groundwater recharge and that prioritizing nature-based solutions might be more feasible in the ULAR Watershed Area than in other, more densely developed, or industrial Watershed Areas.

Member Mark Lombos noted significant water quality standards that have been identified for the Los Angeles River and highlighted potential challenges balancing SCW Program goals and project implementation with those standards. Antos addressed the challenge of balancing water quality goals with project implementation, emphasizing that projects may struggle to meet all criteria simultaneously. Antos mentioned that not every project may achieve all goals, but the Watershed Area's suite of projects can contribute to attaining all the goals.

The Committee participated in a workshop activity to identify priority strategies that should be used by projects and studies in the ULAR Watershed Area to achieve SCW Program goals in the next five years. Committee Members individually brainstormed strategies and wrote them on the notecards provided.

Antos and Rasul read the strategies submitted by the Committee Members and facilitated a discussion on organizing the strategies into relevant categories.

The final categories identified during the workshop were:

- a. Develop Interagency Partnerships

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- b. Deepen/Create Interagency Partnership to Maximize Water Reclamation and Enhance Program Goals
- c. Equity
- d. Public Health Protection in the Face of a Changing Climate
- e. Operations and Maintenance (O&M) Informed Projects
- f. Improve Water Quality
- g. Hardscape Redevelopment
- h. Scientific Studies
- i. Applications Including Green Workforce Development (Lasting)

Discussion regarding each category is captured below.

a. Develop Interagency Partnerships to Maximize Water Reclamation and Enhance Program Goals

Strategies related to this category highlighted the importance of partnering with LAUSD and others to collaborate with the City of Los Angeles' Climate Emergency Mobilization Office and the Office of Forest Management to set and achieve climate and water goals. The Committee also noted that engaging with Tribes and affiliated organizations was an essential strategy for successful project implementation. An additional strategy was increased investment into interagency collaborative projects.

b. Deepen/Create Interagency Partnership to Maximize Water Reclamation and Enhance Program Goals

Strategies related to this category included proposing projects that enhance water quality by leveraging existing local initiatives and investing in interagency collaborations to boost effectiveness and maximize diversion to sewer systems. Coordinating with agencies investing billions of dollars in advanced wastewater treatment, will integrate nature-based solutions and other improvements.

c. Equity

Strategies related to this category included developing and proposing projects in proportion to the needs of the different watershed areas while addressing historical issues, such as pollution and underserved communities. The Committee also mentioned prioritizing projects in severely disadvantaged communities and that demonstrate meaningful community engagement. Another strategy included that projects should integrate community input into their design and implementation processes, ensuring equity and meaningful involvement at every stage of project development.

d. Public Health Protection in the Face of a Changing Climate

Strategies related to this category included increasing shade and cooling by maximizing shade trees within project boundaries, accelerating the removal of hardscapes in underserved and highly urbanized areas, prioritizing the creation of green schoolyards, new park spaces, and providing educational opportunities in environmental stewardship. Other strategies aimed to complete green streets, reduce flooding, and improve water supply management.

Member DeChellis noted the importance of shade due to rising temperatures. Member de Guzman highlighted the need to prioritize nature-based solutions, noting that while these solutions are briefly mentioned, they hold significant importance. The strategies support investing in infrastructure, collaborating with community members to ensure projects offer tangible benefits, and aligning projects in the ULAR Watershed Area with climate resilience goals.

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e. Operations and Maintenance (O&M) Informed Projects

Strategies related to this category included requesting O&M plans for each project to validate that each considered project is comprehensive and reasonable, and to have project developers get a better understanding of maintenance costs before funding is provided.

Member Brent Maue noted the difficulty of finding skilled contractors for O&M and the importance of focusing on projects that are supported by comprehensive O&M plans. The Committee suggested that a detailed O&M plan in the application process could be included with the understanding that identifying anticipated costs of O&M are crucial for ensuring project sustainability. The Committee also recommended the need for better communication to improve the understanding of O&M.

Member Luna raised concerns about integrating O&M considerations with climate resiliency and noted the importance of anticipating environmental changes over the next 15 to 20 years and aligning projects with broader climate resilience goals.

Member Luna expressed concern that increasing O&M requirements might make it harder to implement projects in DACs, while potentially easing the process in more affluent areas.

The Committee discussed implementing a “warranty period” or “optimization period,” ensuring that projects are maintained within a two-year consideration actualizing costs. The Committee discussed optimization period aspects as it relates to the City of Los Angeles’ Proposition O requirements, and if these aspects should be applied to the SCW Program. Member Meisami-Fard noted the importance of keeping the SCW Program separate from Proposition O, noting that no true O&M occurs during the optimization period. Additionally, Member Meisami-Fard added that O&M should be a capitalizable activity, while the optimization period is typically included in the project’s construction budget and is not directly comparable to O&M expenses.

f. Improve Water Quality

Strategies related to this category included evaluating projects based on collective impact on overall water quality improvements rather than on individual project popularity and using the Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board pollution targets as a guide for selecting new projects, ensuring a focus on broader water quality goals.

g. Hardscape Redevelopment

Strategies related to this category included redeveloping abandoned areas, such as brownfields, and removing existing hardscapes to replace them with new, productive uses. The Committee highlighted the Bowtie Demonstration Project by The Nature Conservancy as an example. Member DeChellis noted that while most projects involve redeveloping existing areas, there is value in considering unused or abandoned spaces.

h. Scientific Studies

Strategies related to this category included applying MMS insights to project development, including quantifying non-tangible benefits. Other strategies included conducting an annual audit of green job creation to assess progress and effectiveness and aligning ULAR Watershed Area goals with Owens Valley to enhance local water security.

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i. Applications Including Green Workforce Development (Lasting)

Strategies related to this category included integrating workforce development into each project, including local hire requirements, and ensuring that new technologies not only fit local workforce needs but also create job opportunities. Another strategy that was suggested was to allocate budget line items for Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) and non-profit organizations to monitor community engagement and stewardship. Additional strategies included collaborating with the Conservation Corps for workforce development, partnering with organized labor for study funding, and developing relationships with junior colleges and universities to create a green jobs pipeline. Antos noted the importance of linking O&M funding with workforce development. The Committee also recognized the need to balance workforce clusters with project-specific goals.

Member Ernesto Pantoja highlighted the need for creating life-sustaining jobs and ensuring that positions provide meaningful livelihoods. Vice-Chair Torossian added that without proper investments in workforce development, the lifespan of projects could be limited. Member Maue discussed the City of Pasadena's Municipal Assistance, Solutions, and Hiring (MASH) initiative, which integrates job training into projects and could serve as a model for other Watershed Areas, like Rio Hondo.

Antos and Rasul reminded the Committee to submit additional comments in the [Watershed Planning Post-Workshop Input Form](#).

SCW Program Watershed Planning staff noted that the next SCW Program Watershed Planning workshop will occur in October and will cover how feedback was integrated into the Watershed Plans. SCW Program Watershed Planning staff will be present at each WASC meeting to provide regular updates.

7) Public Comment Period

SCWP staff did not receive any public comment cards by 5:00pm the day before the meeting.

Mark Hall (Greater Los Angeles County Vector Control District, Environmental Program Manager) suggested adding a strategy related to the SCW Program public health goal to protect against mosquito-borne diseases by requiring all stormwater projects to include mosquito minimization measures. Hall expressed support for these mosquito minimization measures to be verified by the local Vector Control District. Hall stated that although feasibility requirements mention mosquito control, there is no mandate ensuring compliance or verification. Hall stated that implementing this requirement would help ensure that projects effectively address mosquito issues and associated health risks.

8) Items for Next Agenda

The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, September 4, 2024, from 2:00 pm – 4:00 pm. See the [SCW Program website](#) for details. Items on the agenda include:

- a) Selection of the Chair, Vice-Chair, or Co-Chairs
- b) A presentation on the Review of WASC Roles and Responsibilities
- c) A presentation and vote on the Updated ULAR Watershed Area Strategic Outreach and Engagement Plan
- d) And a presentation by the Los Angeles Community Garden Council on the update of the previously funded Scientific Study (Community Garden Stormwater Capture Investigation)

9) Adjournment

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Vice-Chair Torossian thanked Committee Members and the public for their attendance and participation and adjourned the meeting.