



Regional Oversight Committee Memo

To: Safe, Clean Water Program
Regional Oversight Committee

From: Safe, Clean Water Program
Regional Coordination Team

Date: March 3, 2025

Reference: 2025 Biennial Report Recommendations from the Chairs of Watershed Area Steering Committees and Scoring Committee

Purpose & Background

At the February 12, 2025 Regional Oversight Committee (ROC) meeting, Committee members heard from the Chair of each Watershed Area Steering Committee (WASC) and Scoring Committee regarding findings and recommendations for the 2025 Biennial Report. This memo summarizes the common themes heard, including both successes in achieving Safe, Clean Water (SCW) Program goals, as well as challenges in goal achievement and recommendations for the future.

Many program elements referenced by the Committee Chairs are currently being evaluated and/or addressed through ongoing adaptive management efforts, including Stormwater Investment Plan (SIP) Guidelines and Watershed Planning efforts. SCW Program staff will assist the ROC in identifying and articulating relevant progress on adaptive management efforts to focus the 2025 Biennial Report recommendations.

SCW Program Goal: Improve water quality and contribute to attainment of water-quality requirements.

Theme: Looming regulatory deadlines

Multiple WASC Chairs discussed the pressure to support projects that meet imminent deadlines for stormwater quality compliance. The Rio Hondo (RH) WASC, for example, expressed concerns about potential delays in meeting Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) deadlines if Infrastructure Program projects were to be accepted biennially rather than annually, as smaller cities may require additional time to develop high-quality proposals. In the case that the Call for Projects (CFP) for Infrastructure Projects cannot be awarded annually, postponements could lead to LA Regional Water Quality Control Board (Regional Board) penalties for missing upcoming deadlines. Decisions about future funding pauses should consider the potential impact for Developers who are striving to meet stormwater quality compliance deadlines.

WASCs that span multiple Enhanced Watershed Management Programs (EWMPs), such as in the South Santa Monica Bay (SSMB), also noted the challenge to balance competing priorities for compliance with TMDL requirements when there are multiple EWMPs competing for funds. More guidance is desired to help WASCs address competing regulatory deadlines equitably.

In addition, the Upper San Gabriel River (USGR) WASC highlighted challenges with staff turnover at small cities, noting that some municipal applicants struggling with upcoming MS4 compliance deadlines, lack resources, especially as compared to their larger counterparts. Easily accessible technical support for potential project proponents would help expand the capacity of smaller cities to implement projects that achieve water quality attainment goals.



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SCW Program Goal: Increase drought preparedness by capturing more stormwater and/or urban runoff to store, clean, reuse, and/or recharge groundwater basins.

Theme: Watershed-specific Water Quality and Water Supply targets and criteria

Several WASC Chairs shared the difficulty in achieving Water Quality and Water Supply targets given their watershed's unique hydrology. The North Santa Monica Bay (NSMB) WASC and Central Santa Monica Bay (CSMB) WASC recommended reevaluating the weight of infiltration in the Scoring Criteria, as infiltration to a groundwater basin is not a feasible project strategy for some areas. The SSMB WASC similarly recommended that the Biennial Report focus on local water supply augmentation and flexibility in how Water Supply points are awarded as groundwater infiltration is not always a feasible strategy, particularly with respect to the Portuguese Bend Landslide in Rancho Palos Verdes. The Scoring Committee Chair noted that developing watershed-specific criteria is a key topic to investigate for the Biennial Report, along with clearer definitions for Water Supply. This could include modifying the Scoring Criteria accordingly with site-specific criteria of varying weights depending on Watershed Area.

The NSMB WASC highlighted concerns about the impact of wet weather projects compared to the bacteria they seek to treat and encouraged set-asides for dry weather diversion projects. This WASC also recommended incorporating diversion standard plan sheets for pipe sizes and flows and expediting interagency permit processes for dry weather diversions. The Upper Los Angeles River (ULAR) WASC noted a desire for more precise numeric targets for Water Supply and Water Quality Benefits and urges more regular interactions with groundwater masters and water purveyors to improve communication and consistency in the benefits brought forward.

SCW Program Goal: Provide [Disadvantaged Community] Benefits, including Regional Program infrastructure investments, that are not less than one hundred and ten percent (110%) of the ratio of the [Disadvantaged Community] population to the total population in each Watershed Area.

Theme: Investment in disadvantaged communities

Chairs from the CSMB WASC and the ULAR WASC highlighted successes with the funding allocations awarded to projects that benefit disadvantaged communities to-date. In these WASCs, the Stormwater Investment Plans' recommended funding within disadvantaged communities exceeded the target ratio.

SCW Program Goals: Leverage other funding sources to maximize SCW Program Goals; ensure ongoing operations and maintenance for Projects.

Theme: Funding availability and cost escalation

Cost escalations remain a concern for multiple WASCs as available funding becomes increasingly competitive and constrained. Several WASCs expressed the need to find solutions to address inflationary pressures and leverage external funding. Future operations and maintenance (O&M) requests were highlighted as an additional concern, as anticipated future O&M requests may outpace projected available funds. Funding set-asides were one suggested mechanism to address unknown funding needs caused by a variety of factors including: cost escalation, economic fluctuations, projects with longer-term implementation timelines, and projects that were previously funded for planning and design and returning to request construction or O&M funds.

SCW Program Goals: Invest in infrastructure that provides multiple benefits; provide a spectrum of project sizes from neighborhood- to regional-scale.



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Theme: Balance of diverse projects

Multiple WASCs highlighted successes in awarding funds to a wide variety of projects, including both wet weather and dry weather projects. The SSMB WASC, for example, has prioritized funding smaller scale projects with the intent of an equitable distribution of resources that maximize Community Investment Benefits, particularly given limited funding. The Santa Clara River (SCR) WASC has prioritized projects that work towards MS4 compliance, remove invasive species like Arundo, and improve ecological health.

Theme: Robust and community-focused engagement

WASC Chairs emphasized the strong community engagements efforts led by Watershed Coordinators, including working with community-based organizations and school districts, conducting multilingual outreach, delivering presentations, convening tours, and identifying and supporting potential Safe, Clean Water (SCW) Program project proponents.

Theme: WASC representation

While some WASCs highlighted diverse WASC membership as a strength, the USGR WASC has experienced challenges filling community stakeholder seats, which minimizes the valued input desired from community partners. In addition, watershed areas with many municipalities noted challenges with representing all cities through municipal WASC seats alone.

Theme: Watershed Planning opportunities

WASC Chairs highlighted the unique watershed characteristics and priorities identified through the Watershed Planning process underway. In the Lower Los Angeles River (LLAR) Watershed, priorities such as brownfield repurposing, school site projects, and water recycling emerged through the Watershed Planning Workshops. The Lower San Gabriel River (LSGR) WASC also identified Watershed Planning constraints such as scarcity of land for large project sites and municipal challenges with stormwater compliance.

While many WASCs have experienced successes in funding a diverse portfolio of multi-benefit projects that meet an equally diverse set of needs, several Chairs noted the difficulty in providing robust community benefits through projects driven by stormwater compliance. Increasing community-driven projects and community representation is a prioritized strategy across many areas of the SCW Program. As more project opportunities are identified through Watershed Planning, community engagement, and increased representation, further guidance is needed to manage competing needs and priorities.

SCW Program Goal: Prioritize Nature-Based Solutions.

Theme: New and preserved open space

WASC Chairs noted challenges with expanding and preserving natural habitats and encouraging the use of nature-based solutions. Chairs requested guidance to identify opportunities to use nature-based solutions to combat extreme heat, explore creative options for new green space in highly urbanized watersheds, and in areas with limited urban development, preserve open space and leverage natural hydrology for stormwater management.

SCW Program Goal: Implement an iterative planning and evaluation process to ensure adaptive management.



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Theme: Delays in project completion

The WASC Chairs observed that while some projects awarded in Year 1 (Fiscal Year 2020-21) are nearing the construction or completion stage, many projects face delays caused by permitting and CEQA timelines. The USGR WASC additionally highlighted challenges with staff turnover at small cities, and that some municipal applicants are struggling with feasibility study requirements, reporting processes, permitting steps, or other delays caused by low capacity and resources. Several Chairs noted that the timeline between the call-for-projects deadline and the final Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors' approval can take 12-16 months, creating an additional barrier in delaying project timelines.

In addition, the Scoring Committee expressed difficulty evaluating the different types of Infrastructure Program Project submittals: design, construction, and operations & maintenance (O&M). The Committee believes projects at different stages of development requesting funding for different phases warrant different application requirements and different scoring approaches.

To mitigate these hurdles, the WASC and Scoring Committee Chairs recommended the SCW Program consider options to streamline the application process, expedite the timeline for Board approval and disbursement of funds, and reduce reporting requirements. In addition, better understanding the delays caused by permitting or other regulatory approvals may lead to strengthened technical support.