Safe, Clean Water Program

Watershed Planning
Draft Initial Watershed Plans: Technical Info Session
August 12th, 2025
Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

General Questions

- **Will Scientific Study proposals be expected to work in the priority areas?**
  - Opportunity Areas are primarily designed to support project siting. For scientific studies, alignment with identified data gaps will be encouraged.
- **How are self-reported values from the Reporting Module being validated?**
  - An important element of the Watershed Planning process will be checking Performance Measure values that are reported by Developers and Municipalities and published through the Planning Tool. The Planning Tool will remain in Beta phase through 2025, partially to allow for the ongoing review of reported Performance Measure values. Also, to increase the accuracy of tracking progress toward targets, WQ and WS benefits are modeled by the Planning Tool rather than fully relying on reported load reduction and capture values.
- **Are the Targets for WQ and WS benefits 'countywide' in and outside of the SCWP or are those Targets SCWP specific?**
  - The WA targets in the Initial Watershed Plans are SCWP specific.

Water Quality

- **How were the pollutants of concern (POCs) decided upon?**
  - The Improve Water Quality planning theme uses E. coli, total phosphorous and total zinc for Water Quality (WQ) targets, which are the three most common "limiting pollutants" in Watershed Management Programs across the region. By using these three (3) pollutants for WQ targets, the Plans are inherently aligned with the region's WMPs. In addition, trash, PCBs, and DDTs are included as Performance Measures at the project-tracking level. Details regarding the methods for calculating WQ target can be found in Appendix H.2 of the Initial Watershed Plans.

- **Is the target the Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL)?**
  - The LA region is subject to ~40 different TMDLs for a variety of pollutants. The TMDLs use a variety of water quality targets, which also vary by freshwater versus marine water. For the Initial Watershed Plans, a set of concentration benchmarks for E. coli, total phosphorous and total zinc, was used to develop WQ targets within the 'Improve Water Quality' planning theme. By using benchmarks, a set of consistent regional pollutant load reduction targets could be developed. While these benchmarks aren't always equivalent to the concentration thresholds in the TMDLs, they are used to set consistent load reduction targets across the County that will substantially contribute to attainment of the region's TMDLs. Advanced modeling with the Watershed Management Modeling System (WMMS2) was used to estimate the portion of pollutant loading in each Watershed Area (WA) that occurs when the benchmarks are exceeded, and that loading is the basis of WQ targets.
  - Details regarding the methods for calculating WQ target can be found in Appendix H.2 of the Initial Watershed Plans.

- **How was the target modified for Safe, Clean Water Program (SCWP) and why is it not just the TMDL if the targets are aspirational anyway?**
  - A foundational goal of the SCWP is to improve water quality and contribute to attainment of water quality requirements (Goal A). The formulated WQ targets are simple metrics to facilitate investments that address water quality while also providing additional multiple benefits. The region's Watershed Management Programs have conducted detailed analyses to estimate the extent and cost of implementation to achieve Countywide water quality standards. Given the fact that total estimated costs of the Watershed Management Programs exceed the funding available from the SCW Program, the WQ targets have been developed to substantially contribute to attainment of water quality requirements, in collaboration with other available funding resources. To estimate the SCW Program contribution to countywide WQ targets within the 'Improve Water Quality' planning theme, the estimated WMP implementation costs in each WA were estimated and the percent of that cost that equates to available SCW funding in the WA was calculated. That percentage was multiplied by the total pollutant loading in each WA that occurs when benchmarks are exceeded to calculate the SCW Contribution to countywide WQ targets, and the corresponding WQ targets for each WA.
  - Details regarding the methods for calculating WQ target can be found in Appendix H.2 of the Initial Watershed Plans.

- **For the WQ target, which numeric benchmarks were used? From where and how were they selected?**
  - The WQ benchmarks used to calculate WQ targets in the Improve Water Quality planning theme are 0.1 mg/L for total phosphorous and 150 ug/L for zinc (bacteria time series are a current data gap to be considered during adaptive management–an example benchmark for E. coli would be 320 MPN/100mL). These benchmarks were chosen because they coarsely align with the concentration limits used by many of the region's TMDLs.
  - Details regarding the methods for calculating WQ target can be found in Appendix H.2 of the Initial Watershed Plans.

- **How are 'already constructed' Projects incorporated into the target and baseline (both SCWP funded and non-SCWP, large scale infrastructure and WQ compliance projects)?**
  - The baselines for the Improve Water Quality planning theme include both funded and constructed SCW Program Projects. Non-SCW Program Projects built prior to 2019 are implicitly included in the WMMS2 modeling time series used to calculate WA needs and targets under the Improve Water Quality planning theme.
  - Details regarding the methods for calculating WQ baselines can be found in Appendix H.1 and methods for calculating WQ targets can be found in Appendix H.2 of the Initial Watershed Plans.

- **What projects are in the baseline and how are they represented? Will there be a way to incorporate Non-SCW Program Projects? How is nesting of projects incorporated?**
  - See the answer above regarding which projects are included in baselines, and how previously-constructed and currently-planned non-SCW Program MS4 projects were accounted for in calculations of WQ targets. With the approach to targets, tracking and assessment of the WQ targets under the Improve WQ planning theme can be focused on project implementation by the SCW Program, rather than necessitating accounting and tracking of project implementation by all the various implementation programs across the County. That being said, during adaptive management there may be opportunities to assess the progress of non-SCWP programs toward achieving the countywide load reductions beyond the SCWP Contribution. Details regarding the methods for calculating WQ baselines can be found in Appendix H.2.1 and methods for calculating WQ targets can be found in Appendix H.2 of the Initial Watershed Plans.
  - Nesting, or the effect of siting projects upstream and downstream of each other, is accounted for in the WQ baselines calculated for the Improve WQ planning

theme. By accounting for nesting when modeling WQ benefits provided by already-funded and constructed SCWP projects, more accurate estimates of the total WQ benefits delivered by the SCWP are provided. Details regarding the methods for calculating WQ baselines and associated modeling can be found in Appendix H.2.1 of the Initial Watershed Plans.

Water Supply

- **What percentage of annual stormwater is quantified as water supply?**
  - The percentage of annual stormwater capture that is quantified as water supply depends on the definitions in the 2025 SCW Program Interim Guidance, which defines the fates of captured water that count as new supply. Each project will be evaluated with respect to these guidelines.

- **Why was the 300K countywide target not used?**
  - The 300k ac-ft of capture is a countywide target that will be achieved with efforts driven under the SCW Program and other programs including the LA County Basin Plan, IRWMPs, and MS4 Program using both centralized and decentralized facilities. The SCW Program primarily delivers decentralized facilities (e.g., decentralized regional stormwater capture facilities rather than centralized spreading grounds). These other non-SCW programs were evaluated and the SCW Program contribution was calculated at 110k ac-ft. The SCW Program contribution was calculated to be conservatively high to provide some margin of safety for achieving the 300k ac-ft countywide target.

- **How did you get from 300K to the individual watershed targets?**
  - Appendix H.3.2 provides details on the calculations of targets for the Increase Drought Preparedness planning theme.

- **How are ‘already constructed’ projects incorporated into the target and baseline (both SCWP funded and non SCWP)?**
  - When calculating the SCW Program contribution for targets under the ‘Increase Drought Preparedness’ Planning Theme, the amount of stormwater captured by recently implemented and planned non-SCW Program Projects was estimated using data from the MS4 Program and the IRWMP. These programs account for a majority of decentralized projects built or planned in the region that will contribute to attainment of countywide WS goals.

- **How is large scale infrastructure (spreading grounds, dams) included in targets, opportunities, strategies?**
  - Existing centralized facilities are incorporated into capture targets under the Increase Drought Preparedness planning theme through the Net Countable Supply layer, which accounts for existing capture and quantifies that potential for providing new, additional stormwater capture. For example, the Net Countable Supply upstream of major spreading grounds in the Upper San Gabriel River (USGR) WA is generally low, and thus the targets for creating additional water supply in USGR WA are lower than those for other WAs. Similarly, the opportunity for water supply capture upstream of centralized (spreading ground) facilities is considered relatively low for Opportunity Areas. Note that increasing storage in spreading grounds and dams could be considered to be an important contributor to achieving SCW Program targets under the Increase Drought Preparedness planning theme, and strategies for considering O&M to remove sediment/increase storage in centralized facilities are considered in Chapter 5. Appendix I provides details on the approach to developing opportunity mapping layers.

Community Investment Benefits

- **In terms of Nature Based Solutions, are there ideas circulating about habitat connectivity or riparian connectivity where possible?**
  - The ‘Net Area of Habitat Created, Enhanced, Restored or Protected’ opportunity layer considers habitat area buffers, linkages and confluences, and unprotected areas through the LARMP layer. Also, "Net Area of Habitat Created, Enhanced, Restored or Protected" is one of the 20 Indicators in the Initial Watershed Plans, so projects and programs that provide connectivity could contribute to WA targets.
- **How does Watershed Planning integrate the ‘Community Strengths and Needs’ survey data into the Initial Watershed Plans?**
  - One of the 20 Indicators is "Proportion of Projects Addressing a Community Concern" which will link to the CSNA data.