

MEMORANDUM

TO: Safe, Clean Water Program Regional Oversight Committee
FR: ROC Water Supply Working Group: Carl Blum, Art Castro, Liz Crosson, Mark Gold, Maria Mehranian, Ester Rojas, Michael Scaduto, Bruce Reznik
DA: October 13, 2023

RE: Recommendations for Achieving Water Supply Objectives of the Safe Clean Water Program

As the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, the Regional Oversight Committee (ROC), and the Los Angeles County Flood Control District (LACFCD) conduct the first Biennial Review of the Safe, Clean Water Program (SCWP), it is imperative to consider the program in the context of the three overarching goals of the 2018 Measure W initiative:

- 1) Improve water quality
- 2) Increase drought preparedness by capturing more stormwater and/or urban runoff
- 3) Improve public health through community investment benefits

Since its implementation, the SCWP has demonstrated its value in protecting the watersheds of the region through the development and maintenance of critical water quality projects throughout the nine watersheds. Specifically, the SCWP has provided an overdue mechanism for funding and implementing projects that were part of previously developed planning documents and/or shovel ready. Now, the SCWP must evolve into its next phase to reach bolder, more specific milestones for water supply, water quality, community benefits, workforce development and education. This Biennial Review is a point of reflection and provides SCWP leadership the opportunity to recognize these successes for water quality while attempting to refine the program to better achieve its multiple objectives. This memo focuses on the need to set water supply targets to increase Los Angeles County's resilience to climate change.

The ROC Water Supply Working Group reviewed program activities to date as well as feedback from several interested parties and non-governmental partners. After several discussions, the Group concluded that setting measurable targets for stormwater capture and refining elements related to water supply is necessary to deliver the results that garnered the trust of over 69% of voters in 2018. Thus, we provide the following recommendations to include in the Biennial Review and for further refinement by the ROC, in partnership with the LACFCD.

- Set a regionwide water supply target of 300,000-acre feet of additional stormwater capture by 2045. Work with WASCs, regional agencies and community organizations to identify and develop projects. Focus initial efforts in the Upper San Gabriel River, Upper Los Angeles River, and the Central Santa Monica Bay watersheds because of their demonstrated aquifer recharge potential. This should not preclude development of water supply, specifically capture and reuse and/or wastewater recycling augmentation, in other watersheds. The ROC will work with the County, WASCs, and others to help develop prioritized recommendations to cost-effectively optimize multi-benefit, large-scale water supply projects by mid-2024.

- Clarify that claiming water supply benefits requires an applicant to demonstrate that the stormwater captured is new water and will be available for regional water supply. The 300,000 acre-feet target deadline should be temporally aligned with the 80% local water by 2045 target in LA County's OurCounty Sustainability Plan and draft LA County Water Plan.
- This focused effort on water supply should initiate a larger review of the Regional Program's current Scoring Criteria as a "one size fits all" approach. Each watershed has unique opportunities and constraints. An evaluation of watershed specific goals, objectives, metrics and targets would allow project applicants to focus on projects that will meet the goals and objectives of each watershed and yield projects that are more likely to be successful and maximize program benefits.
- Develop a program within the SWCP that incentivizes large infrastructure improvements and investments that have the potential to multiply water quality and water supply benefits. The County cannot rely exclusively on a pay as you go approach to developing and implementing water supply projects. A comprehensive finance plan must be developed by mid-2024 and it should include mechanisms for long-term financing with SCWP funds to facilitate building larger projects, strategies to maximize federal and state grants and low interest loans, and potential private and local agency collaborative partnerships to build, operate and maintain new projects.
- Build new collaborative funding and management partnerships with U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), LA Metro, school districts, Metropolitan Water District, Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, and other institutions to advance the goals of the SCWP.