
BACKGROUND

1. BACKGROUND

A. INTRODUCTION

This document is a management plan for the Compton Creek Watershed, intended to provide an assessment of existing environmental conditions, establish goals and objectives for restoration of Compton Creek and the watershed, identify methods to achieve the identified goals and objectives, and develop a water quality monitoring plan for the Creek. A natural planning boundary, a watershed is the area drained by a single creek and its tributaries. For Compton Creek, this Watershed Management Plan ("Plan") addresses an area of approximately 42.1 square miles in which more than 700,000 people reside, where the effects of urbanization on water quality, habitat, and open space have been extensive.

The Watershed Management Initiative (WMI) is a process through which the Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board (LARWQCB), as well as other Regional Boards throughout the state, attempts to integrate various surface and ground water regulatory programs as much as practicable, promotes cooperative, collaborative efforts within individual watersheds, prioritizes issues, and applies sound science in watershed management. The LARWQCB has identified watersheds or watershed management areas (WMAs) in the Region (coastal Los Angeles and Ventura Counties), prioritized management issues, and proposed watershed management strategies as described in the WMI (LARWQCB 2004), which is updated as needed. For each WMA, the plan provides detailed summaries of water quality problems and management issues.

A watershed management approach typically encourages the development of comprehensive, collaborative strategies for management and enhancement of environmental resources, rather than focus solely on single-purpose projects or site-specific solutions to water quality problems. The identification of watershed solutions at the local level (such as those articulated in this Plan) are intended to complement larger scale programs and projects for the major watersheds (e.g., the Los Angeles River) as part of the overall WMI effort to create an integrated region-wide solution to address the shared, interrelated problems and opportunities of urbanized watersheds in the Los Angeles region. This approach also discusses open space recreation needs and identifies projects that can be easily implemented, for example bike trails along creek and channel rights-of-way

The Compton Creek Watershed ("Watershed") is located in the southern portion of the Los Angeles Basin, as shown in Figure ES-1 in the Executive Summary. The Watershed includes most of the City of Compton, portions of the cities of Los Angeles, Lynwood, and South Gate, portions of the unincorporated communities of Athens, East Rancho Dominguez, Florence-Firestone, Rosewood, Walnut Park, and Willowbrook in Los Angeles County, and very small parts of the cities of Carson, Huntington Park, and Long Beach. Compton Creek drains to the Los Angeles River, which then empties into San Pedro Bay in the Long Beach Harbor.

In recent years, various groups, cities, and agencies have worked to transform Compton Creek into a valued community asset, improve and expand open space, optimize water resources, preserve and restore habitat, and create a network of trails and bike paths. Some of these efforts have been informally coordinated, in recognition of the potential to extend benefits beyond the borders of individual cities, create opportunities to leverage benefits, and maximize funding resources. This Plan builds upon these efforts and seeks to generate interest in these issues and encourage broader participation in watershed planning. This Plan is intended to support and inform ongoing planning efforts, as well as provide a framework for future projects that are consistent with the goals of

the Plan. This Plan also provides a basis from which to attract outside funding for projects that are consistent with a comprehensive plan for the Watershed.

The central element of this Plan is a compendium of methods, mechanisms and projects intended to improve water quality, expand open space, and improve the quality of life for Watershed residents. This Plan does not attempt to address every environmental, economic, or social issue that may warrant attention in the Watershed. Additional planning at both the regional and local levels may be necessary to improve such conditions. The vision of the future articulated in this document may require decades to be realized. But if cities, neighborhoods, community-based organizations, nonprofits, and agencies work and plan together, the Compton Creek Watershed can grow greener, water quality can be improved, open space can be expanded, habitat can be created, and the quality of life for residents can be improved.

This document is organized as follows:

(1) Background, the context for the plan

(2) Existing Conditions, a description of the physical and environmental conditions of the watershed

(3) Goals and Objectives, responses to real and perceived environmental and economic problems in the watershed

(4) Recommended Actions, a discussion of a range of potential actions that will improve water quality, expand open space and improve community conditions

(5) Watershed Management Strategies, a description of specific strategies to improve water quality and create open space linkages to Compton Creek

(6) Monitoring Program, a proposal to augment existing monitoring programs and assess progress towards improving water quality

(7) Opportunities for Stakeholder Commitment, with suggested responsibilities for the actions identified in the Plan and potential funding mechanisms

(8) Next Steps, including a proposed implementation timeline and milestones

(9) References

(10) Appendices, including a Glossary of Terms and a summary of Best Management Practices

B. PLANNING FOCUS AND CONTEXT

During initial settlement of the Watershed, interest focused on meeting the demand for water: first with surface supplies, then groundwater. As development increased, the focus shifted to protecting farms, homes, and businesses from flooding and draining local water bodies to reduce the threat of disease. As water supply and flood protection needs were met and development continued, focus shifted to improving the quality of waters that were ultimately discharged to the Los Angeles River through a system of highly modified creek and tributary channels, most of which were lined with concrete. To improve the quality of life in the Watershed, there is increasing recognition by agencies that planning must expand beyond water quality to include open space, habitat, and sustainable economic development.

A watershed is the area drained by a single river and its tributaries. Despite this clear spatial identity, watersheds are not the only natural planning boundary. Groundwater basins cross under watersheds and coastal ecosystems fold over ridgelines. Political and jurisdictional boundaries in the watershed add complexity. A sound ecological approach to planning must consider the relationships between human and natural systems, overlapping physical and biological systems, and social, economic, and political systems. Since imported water is an important element of Southern California's water supply, this imported water affects the hydrology of local streams. Thus, management of the Compton Creek Watershed not only has the potential to affect Compton Creek, but can also affect remote watersheds. Watershed planning makes clear the interconnections between the upstream reaches in the foothills and our downstream cities, the beaches and the health of San Pedro Bay.

Planning at watershed and subwatershed scales necessarily involves consideration of the natural cycles of climate and water that interact with humans at points where watershed resources are actively being managed, both above and below the ground. This includes the intertwined concerns of flood protection, water resources, water quality, protection, and enhancement of habitat, open space for passive and active recreation, and strategies to encourage sustainable future development.

To appreciate the context for this Plan, a chronological overview of some relevant plans and planning efforts related to open space, water quality, and habitat in the Watershed follows. This Plan may build upon, complement, or further advance those plans and concepts.

▣ Parks, Playgrounds, and Beaches for the Los Angeles Region

The most significant and far-reaching of the early open space plans in the Los Angeles basin was proposed in 1930, by the team of Olmsted Brothers and Harland Bartholomew and Associates, who together had developed master plans for the Los Angeles County highway system and a state park system. The Olmsted-Bartholomew plan, entitled *Parks, Playgrounds and Beaches for the Los Angeles Region*, recommended a network of parkways to connect the mountains, rivers, parks, and beaches. Parkways along the rivers and creeks were intended to reduce the need for structural flood protection features. To remedy the deficit of park space that existed in 1930, the plan proposed a total of 71,000 acres of parkland south of the San Gabriel Mountains. Unfortunately, due to timing (at the start of the Great Depression), cost ($231 million at that time), and other issues, the Olmsted-Bartholomew plan was quickly shelved and largely forgotten for many years. The centerpiece of that plan, a network of open spaces connected by parkways along the creeks and rivers, remains the path not taken. While this plan is a great historical planning document, it did not address water quality or resource issues.

▣ Los Angeles Basin Water Quality Control Plan

The Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board updated its *Water Quality Control Plan, Los Angeles Region: Basin Plan for the Coastal Watersheds of Los Angeles and Ventura Counties (*"Basin Plan") in 1994. The Basin Plan is designed to preserve and enhance water quality and protect the beneficial uses of all regional waters. It is subject to a triennial review process, which has resulted in updates to various sections of the Basin Plan.

Information on the Basin Plan is available at http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/losangeles/html/meetings/tmdl/Basin_plan/basin_plan.html.

▣ Los Angeles River Master Plan

The County of Los Angeles adopted a Master Plan for the Los Angeles River in 1996, which "…provides for the optimization and enhancement of aesthetic, recreational, flood control and environmental values by creating a community resource, enriching the quality of life for residents and recognizing the river's primary purpose for flood control" (*Los Angeles River Master Plan*, County of Los Angeles Department of Public Works, 1996). The plan incorporated substantial stakeholder input and recommended environmental restoration, new trails, and connections to existing trails, tree plantings, signage, murals, and economic development opportunities. Subsequent to the Plan's development, landscape, signage and maintenance guidelines have also been developed. As the Los Angeles River Master Plan also identifies projects along Compton Creek, the Master Plan is relevant to the Watershed. In addition, the landscape, signage, and maintenance guidelines may also have applicability along the open channel portions of the Creek.

Information on the Master Plan is available at http://ladpw.org/wmd/watershed/LA/LA_River_Plan.cfm.

▣ Los Angeles Region Contaminated Sediments Task Force

In 1997, Governor Wilson signed into law SB 673 to establish a multi-agency Los Angeles Region Contaminated Sediments Task Force (CSTF) to develop a long-term management plan for dredging and disposal of contaminated sediments (in the Los Angeles and Long Beach Harbors) and consider aquatic and upland disposal alternatives, treatment, beneficial re-use, and other management techniques. The draft final plan was completed in October 2004 and includes a goal to promote and implement region wide efforts at source reduction through watershed management and thereby minimize future needs for contaminated sediment management. The CSTF also suggests that a regional authority may be needed to systematically incorporate contaminated sediment source identification and control into watershed management efforts. As sediment from the Watershed is discharged into the Los Angeles River and then the Long Beach Harbor, the recommendations of the CSTF are relevant to the Watershed.

The report of the CSTF is available at http://www.coastal.ca.gov/sediment/sdindex.html.

▣ City of Los Angeles Integrated Plan for the Wastewater Program

In 1999, the City of Los Angeles began work on an Integrated Plan for the Wastewater Program (IPWP) to address the interrelationships between water supply, wastewater, and stormwater. Based on a dual track approach of information gathering and stakeholder outreach, a list of policy recommendations was developed, which include development of new wastewater treatment facilities at "upstream" locations, expand use of recycled water, increase water conservation, increase the diversion of dry-weather urban runoff for treatment, and increase the amount of stormwater that can be captured and beneficially used. The IPWP is the first element of an Integrated Resource Plan (IRP) for the City of Los Angeles, which will address wastewater, water supply, and stormwater runoff, and may include identification of program elements and control measures to improve stormwater quality. Preparation of an Environmental Impact Report on the IRP began in the summer of 2004 and is anticipated to be completed by the summer of 2006. As a large part of the upper Watershed is within the City of Los Angeles, the IRP is relevant to the Compton Creek Watershed.

Information on the IRP is available at http://www.ci.la.ca.us/SAN/irp/index.htm.

▣ Wetlands of the Los Angeles River

The California Coastal Conservancy documented current wetland resources in a report entitled *Wetlands of the Los Angeles River Watershed* (2000), which identified ten sites that have potential for near-term restoration, including De Forest Park (Long Beach), Victoria Park (Torrance), Harbor Park (San Pedro), Dominguez Gap (Long Beach), Hazard Park (Los Angeles), Taylor Yard (Los Angeles), Lower Arroyo Park (Pasadena), Cahuenga Spreading Grounds (Glendale), Sepulveda Basin (Van Nuys), and Upper Bull Creek (San Fernando). Although the report does not address Compton Creek, it does provide examples of wetland restoration that may be relevant to the earthen-bottom portions of the Compton Creek channel.

▣ Los Angeles County NPDES Permit

In 2001, the Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board renewed the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permit for stormwater discharge in Los Angeles County, designed to protect the beneficial uses of water bodies in Los Angeles County by reducing pollutants in stormwater. This permit was originally issued in 1990 by the Regional Water Quality Control Board and previously renewed in 1996. The permit covers 3,100 square miles in the Los Angeles basin and spans several watersheds, including Compton Creek, with the County of Los Angeles and 85 incorporated cities in the County as co-permittees. The permit includes a number of conditions requiring permittees to reduce pollutants in urban runoff through programs that address (1) public education, (2) industrial/commercial facilities inspections, (3) public agency activities, including removing illegal connections to storm drains, (4) construction activities, and (5) new development and redevelopment. The permit is scheduled for renewal in 2006 and may incorporate recommendations from local watershed plans. Thus, this Watershed Plan is relevant to NPDES permits within the Watershed.

▣ Common Ground, from the Mountains to the Sea

The California Resources Agency, the San Gabriel and Lower Los Angeles Rivers and Mountains Conservancy, and the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy completed *Common Ground, from the Mountains to the Sea* (2001), which covers the dual watersheds of the Los Angeles and San Gabriel Rivers, and thus includes Compton Creek. The plan articulates a series of guiding principles for watershed restoration and identifies opportunities and strategies for the two conservancies to implement strategies to improve water quality, expand public open space, preserve and restore habitat, and coordinate planning across watershed boundaries. The guiding principles articulate a range of goals for water, land, and planning which are relevant to the urbanized watersheds of the Los Angeles region.

Common Ground is available from the RMC at http://www.rmc.ca.gov/plans/intro.html.

▣ Sprawl Hits the Wall

The Southern California Studies Center of the University of Southern California published *Sprawl Hits the Wall* (2001), proposing a region-wide approach for a sustainable approach to development. The report recommends that the region grow "Smarter," "Together," "Greener," and "More Civic Minded" and thus provides useful goals for the Watershed.

▣ Southern California Wetlands Regional Restoration Strategy

In 2001, the Board of Governors of the Southern California Wetlands Recovery Project, a partnership of public agencies working cooperatively to acquire, restore, and enhance coastal wetlands and watersheds between Point Conception and the International border with Mexico, adopted a Regional Restoration Strategy which identified specific wetland restoration objectives for each county in the Southern California region. Although the lower Los Angeles River Watershed is only generally discussed in the strategy, the wetland vegetation in the earthen-bottom portion of the Compton Creek channel may be a good candidate for restoration.

Information on the strategy is available at http://www.scwrp.org/regional_strategy.htm.

▣ RMC Open Space Plan, Phase II

In 2002, the Phase II Final Report for the Rivers and Mountains Conservancy's Open Space Plan was completed. It reported the recommendations of several thematic Working Groups that focused on seven "subsequent plans" identified in Common Ground, including a Rivers Parkway Plan, Tributary Plans, Trails and Bike Paths Plan; Mountains, Hills & Foothills Plan; Habitat Conservation Plan; Historic and Cultural Landscapes Survey; and a Monitoring and Assessment Program. Subwatershed plans (discussed below) are expected to provide the foundation for developing other subsequent plans: the River Parkways Plan, and the Monitoring and Assessment program.

In addition, the RMC's Green Visions Plan is underway, under the auspices of the USC Center for Sustainable Cities. The Green Visioning Plan will encompass three of the other subsequent plans: the Trails and Recreational Access Plan, the Habitat Conservation Plan, and the Mountains, Hills & Foothills Plan. Information on these plans is available at the RMC website noted above and from the Green Visions website http://www.greenvisionsplan.net.

▣ 303(d) List of Impaired Water Bodies

The Clean Water Act requires a biennial assessment of water quality (the 305(b) report) resulting in a list of impaired water bodies (the "303(d)" list). Impaired waters are those not meeting the water quality objectives set for them by the State and Regional Boards. The list of impaired water bodies in California, which includes Compton Creek, was last updated in 2002 (and adopted in February 2003) and provides the basis for identifying the Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs) for the pollutants of concern identified on the list of impaired water bodies. Although TMDLs for nutrients and trash in the Los Angeles River have already been established and approved by the State and EPA, TMDLs for metals and bacteria for the Watershed have not yet been established.

▣ Grounds for Renewal: The Revitalization of Compton Creek

In 2003, Zach Freedman, a landscape architecture student at UC Berkeley, completed a master thesis project that suggested opportunities to naturalize portions of the creek and restore historic tributaries. The study describes the context for revitalization, discusses historical development, and proposes three phases for creek restoration. The first phase, creation of a trail system along the Creek, has already begun. The study suggests that the trail be extended into the upper portions of the Watershed and connect to the LARIO bike trail along the Los Angeles River. The second phase proposes the establishment of native habitat on opportunity sites along the creek corridor. The third phase would entail the establishment of the Compton Creek Greenway, to link

the opportunity sites and the creek channel into a liner open space features. The study envisions the long term restoration of the creek as a naturalized channel, providing opportunities for earthen-bottom sections with adequate space for the creek to meander, providing habitat for a variety of riparian and terrestrial species. Although the identified concepts create a bold future vision, the need for substantial land acquisition and the potential loss of existing residential and commercial uses pose substantial barriers to implementation.

▣ Alameda Corridor Open Space Opportunities

The Alameda Corridor is a below-grade transportation corridor that is designed to lessen truck congestion at the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach, and on the roadways of southeastern Los Angeles County. Its role is to carry containerized cargo from ships in the port to rail facilities east of Downtown Los Angeles and points beyond. The Corridor is routed through the industrial core of South Los Angeles County on the right of way of a previously existing rail line.

In 2004, several students from Woodbury University completed a plan for the Alameda Corridor entitled the Green Outreach Program (GOP). The GOP covers the length of the Alameda corridor and adjacent opportunity sites within the Compton Creek Watershed. The GOP takes vacant, unused, and underused spaces and assigns proposed active and passive recreational uses, educational, agricultural, and vending uses to them. Connectivity over the corridor is proposed to be improved with pathways and public amenities and adjacent parks, corridors, and community gardens.

▣ Subwatershed Plans

The State Water Resources Control Board funded watershed plans for Rio Hondo, Ballona Creek, Dominguez Channel, Arroyo Seco and the Upper San Gabriel River (including Walnut and San Jose Creeks), which have all been completed. The County of Los Angeles Department of Public Works (LACDPW) has developed the Sun Valley Watershed Plan to address chronic flooding in the Sun Valley Watershed through multi-purpose projects. A watershed plan for Coyote Creek (a tributary to the lower San Gabriel River), with funding from the Army Corps of Engineers, State Water Resources Control Board, Orange and Los Angeles Counties and cities within that watershed is in process. Watershed plans are also underway for the Tujunga Wash, under a grant from the California Bay-Delta Authority's Watershed Program. In addition, a second phase of the Arroyo Seco Watershed Restoration Feasibility Study will soon be underway through a partnership between the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, LACDPW, and other local partners. Together with the Plan for Compton Creek, these plans localize the concepts of watershed restoration and represent a regional strategy to improve water quality, enhance local water supply, improve habitat, expand open space, and improve our communities.

▣ Compton Creek Regional Garden Park Plan

The City of Compton has made it a priority to enhance Compton Creek and drafted a concept plan to build a bikeway and equestrian trail, plant trees, and install various parks and educational facilities along the creek. The 3.3-mile bikeway was completed in March 2005. Road bridges over the creek will ultimately be re-designed and rebuilt to accommodate the bike and horse trails.

▣ Compton Creek Garden Park Master Plan

The Master Plan process begun in 2005 will analyze current conditions within the creek boundaries and relationships between larger hydrologic and open space systems. This analysis will include a summary of previous studies and planning efforts within the Creek boundaries and adjacent open space.

The Master plan will develop concepts to maximize benefits between the Creek and the community. Design concepts will include the following elements:

- Pedestrian, bicycle and equestrian trail systems
- Development of trail heads
- Water quality improvements
- Adjacent park improvements
- Trail and open space linkages
- Potential land acquisition for additional parks and open space
- Habitat restoration
- Educational curriculums
- Volunteer investment opportunities
- Implementation of sustainable strategies
- Identification of potential funding sources
- Implementation of watershed improvement concepts

All of these elements will build upon the analysis and concepts developed in the Compton Creek Watershed Plan.