

Ballot Measure Is Urged to Fund Water Cleanup

L.A. officials propose the \$500-million bond, as they face federal mandates to eliminate pollution and bacteria from their waterways.

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Hit with a federal mandate to clean up water flowing from Los Angeles storm channels into the ocean, lakes and streams, city officials proposed Wednesday to ask voters in November to approve a \$500-million bond measure to build filtration plants and other projects.

Backers of the measure, which was announced at City Hall, said they were confident that voters would decide to pay slightly more in taxes to keep the city's waterways and beaches free of pollution and bacteria.

"I think it would pass because the protection of the beaches and river and ocean waters is something people care about," said Chief Legislative Analyst Ron Deaton, who drafted the proposal at the request of City Council members.

The council must act by July 15 to begin the process of putting the measure on the ballot. Key council members said Wednesday that they support putting the measure before voters.

"It will be a tremendous opportunity to pay for projects that will go a great distance to clean storm-water systems throughout the entire city that lead out into the ocean," said Councilwoman Jan Perry, chairwoman of the council committee that oversees environmental issues.

Deaton also asked the council Wednesday to include a separate fee in the measure to raise \$25 million annually for the cleanup effort's operational and maintenance costs.

The city faces 67 requirements to clean area waters, including mandates to reduce trash, nitrogen and bacteria in the Los Angeles River and Ballona Creek, which flows into Santa Monica Bay.

Council President Alex Padilla said he expected to support putting the measure on the ballot and believed his colleagues would do the same.

"The public has to understand we are facing higher and stricter state mandates, federal mandates and requirements on our storm-water system," Padilla said.

However, Padilla, citing the recent turmoil over a proposal to raise water rates, asked Deaton to develop a way to clearly inform the public of the bond measure's cost as well as its benefits.

If approved by two-thirds of voters, the bond measure would add \$56 annually to the property tax bill of a home valued at \$350,000, Deaton told council members. The operations and maintenance fee, which might be part of the same ballot measure, would be phased in, but would eventually add another \$21 a year to the average residential

property tax bill upon completion of the facilities.

The proposal drew concern from Jim Alger, a leader of the Northridge West Neighborhood Council and an organizer of the successful effort to scale back a recent water-rate increase.

"I'm very, very skeptical of anything that asks for more money," he said.

The key to reducing pollution in the river and bay is to catch the trash, bacteria and other pollutants before they reach the major waters, Perry said. Expanded street-sweeping is part of that, but new filtering technologies are also proposed.

Among other things, the ballot measure would pay for a treatment facility to reduce trash, metal and bacteria in the Los Angeles River; cisterns to recycle storm water for use in irrigating greenways and fields; a system to divert water through catch basins and gravel pits into groundwater supplies, and installation of screens and other mechanisms to remove trash from the river and city lakes.

Other funds from the bond measure would be used to develop cisterns, wetlands and treatment plants to manage wet-weather bacteria runoff at Santa Monica Bay.

Mark Gold, executive director of Heal the Bay, said he was encouraged by the proposal because it would provide not only filtration technology but park space to address the problem.

"The people of Los Angeles care a great deal about their parks and water," he said.