

# Chapter 7 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

## 7.1 Introduction

No policy that does not rest upon some philosophical public opinion can be permanently maintained.

—Abraham Lincoln

The Tujunga/Pacoima Watershed has incredible diversity and untapped potential. An integrated watershed approach to land use and natural resource conservation can generate enormous benefits, making the watershed a more sustainable place to live, work, and recreate. But jurisdictional complexity, a disintegrated budget approach, and the single-purpose missions of most public agencies complicate these possibilities.

To address the range of opportunities in the Tujunga/Pacoima watershed and facilitate a transition to green infrastructure, the following policy recommendations focus on the major issues identified in Chapter 2 (State of the Tujunga) and reflect the goals and objectives articulated in Chapter 3 (Goals & Objectives). The intent is to provide specific policy recommendations that foster enlightened planning, robust resource conservation, regular infrastructure maintenance, improved agency coordination, and expanded funding opportunities. Additional detailed recommendations are provided in the State of the Tujunga report

## 7.2 Land Use

The western model of growth is intrinsically toxic. It uses huge resources—energy and materials—and generates enormous waste ... it remains many steps behind the problems it creates. We have no choice but to reinvent the development trajectory.

—Sunita Narain

Current city and county land use policies facilitate diffuse development patterns and generally fail to consider watershed resources. To realize the vision identified by stakeholders, a major shift in thinking and action is required. The Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) Compass Growth Vision Report (SCAG 2004) suggests that all future growth in the SCAG region can be accommodated on only two percent of the land area. New development and redevelopment should be coupled with the provision of new parks and naturalized open space to serve the existing and expanded population, and concentrated in existing neighborhood centers and along active transit corridors, particularly at transit stations. As density is increased in select locations, incentives should be concurrently provided to capture under-utilized sites for use as new parks and protect greenfield sites. Development should be restricted in sensitive areas such as existing native habitat, potential habitat restoration areas, hillsides, agriculturally-zoned areas, pervious soil areas, and historic floodways. The cities and county should revise their general plan policies to be consistent with these concepts. The City of Los Angeles should develop and adopt a watershed element of the General Plan and a Stream Protection Ordinance. The City of Los Angeles should prohibit the sale of surplus properties in the watershed and prioritize their use as multi-benefit projects that include the capture and infiltration of stormwater.

### 7.3 Water Supply

Children of a culture born in a water-rich environment, we have never really learned how important water is to us. We understand it, but we do not respect it.

—William Ashworth

Research strongly indicates that we are moving into a period of sustained drought. The Mayors of Los Angeles and San Fernando should make a declaration of drought, triggering mandatory water conservation measures.

Substantially more snowmelt and rainwater runoff could be recharged through expansion or reconfiguration of spreading basins and the expansion, reconfiguration, or re-operation of upstream dams augmenting local supplies and reducing demand on distant sources. The County and the City of Los Angeles should complete their study of groundwater recharge enhancement in the San Fernando Valley and implement all feasible recommendations. This should include consideration of gravel pit acquisition as their operations phase out and their incorporation as detention, and/or infiltration facilities.

Groundwater cleanup strategy and procedures in the San Fernando Valley should be reassessed to expedite the return to service those portions of the groundwater basin that are currently out of service due to pockets of contamination. Cost-benefit analyses should measure cleanup costs against water supply benefits, taking into account the large quantities of stormwater and treated wastewater that could potentially be recharged, versus the incremental cost of imported water. Expanded recharge may also require collaborative interagency agreements and procedures that take into account adjudicated water rights.

The expanded utilization of recycled water could reduce reliance on imported sources, but regulatory concerns and public perception have limited the use of this valuable resource. Use of recycled water in some locations is limited by access to this source. The City of Los Angeles should aggressively implement the Integrated Resource Program for recycled water and the related Go-Policy Directions. This program should include (1) distribution lines that create “purple corridors” and improve access to potential users; (2) incentives for use of recycled water in new development and retrofit of existing development; (3) verification of the feasibility of using recycled water for groundwater recharge that addresses technical and regulatory concerns; (4) a vigorous outreach and education effort to address public concerns; and (5) consideration of the use of recycled water to support vegetation in restored washes, taking into account historic seasonal flows and the plant communities adapted to those conditions.

Reducing outdoor water use significantly reduces overall water demand, but design standards and building codes don’t always include the full range of water conservation measures, particularly for landscape irrigation. The cities and county should review and revise building and planning codes to encourage a range of water conservation measures and reduce irrigation water demand, including the use of greywater systems, smart irrigation controllers, and native and other climate-appropriate plants. Public agencies, including Caltrans, should mandate the use of native landscaping and smart irrigation controllers for all public facilities.

Development standards typically permit coverage of a large portion of a lot, reducing the potential for detention and infiltration of stormwater. The cities and county should review and revise building and planning codes to limit the portion of lots that can be covered by development or impervious surfaces, prohibit dry-weather runoff from leaving sites, require on-site retention of stormwater instead of discharge to the street and storm drain, incentivize greywater systems, and encourage infiltration and/or storage and reuse of stormwater for irrigation. The county and cities should remove all unnecessary pavements in street and parking medians, integrate porous pavements into sidewalks, gutters, and street programs, and require porous pavements in all new public facilities and large private developments greater than 1 acre

The Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) owns and operates significant land holdings in the watershed that have potential to beneficially manage stormwater as well as meet wider community needs

for active recreation. LAUSD should work with the City of Los Angeles and DWP to update their sustainability guidelines to include to capture, infiltration and/or reuse of stormwater on-site, and develop joint-use agreements for community access to recreation facilities.

#### 7.4 Stormwater Quality

We all live downstream.

—David Suzuki

Current TMDL programs focus on a single suite of contaminants (e.g., metals) which typically results in single-purpose projects and programs. The Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board should coordinate development of a suite of TMDL regulations to foster integrated action, which should incorporate stakeholder-led processes such as CREST.

Runoff from urban development contains many contaminants which compromise the quality of downstream channels and water bodies. Capturing, storing and/or infiltrating runoff where it falls, or cleansing it before discharge could greatly enhance the quality of stormwater runoff and reduce TMDL implementation costs. Mandates and/or incentives should be implemented to prohibit dry-weather runoff and to capture and infiltrate stormwater on private sites or store and reuse it for irrigation. Neighborhood scale multiple-objective projects should be developed to detain, cleanse and infiltrate stormwater, using public rights-of-way, available surplus public sites or newly acquired sites. In addition, public parks, schools, colleges, transportation rights-of-way, and utility corridors could be reconfigured to detain, cleanse and infiltrate stormwater, or where appropriate stored in cisterns for later use. Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board should revise future stormwater permits to encourage integrated actions to enhance stormwater quality, and the cities and county should revise their general plans and their planning and zoning codes to reflect this new integrated approach to stormwater quality management.

#### 7.5 Public Safety

Any river is really the summation of the whole valley. To think of it as nothing but water is to ignore the greater part.

—Hal Borland

The flood management strategy implemented in the last century contained three basic elements: storage reservoirs to detain runoff, channelized streams to quickly convey runoff downstream, and debris basins in the mountains to reduce sediment deposition in the Los Angeles and Long Beach Harbors. A more integrated approach to flood management could enhance water supply, improve runoff water quality, enhance habitat, and provide recreational opportunities and reduce potential flood risks. The Board of Supervisors should ask the Legislature to reconstitute the Flood Control District as a Watershed Management District with a mission statement and organizational structure that provides more equal emphasis to watershed management, water conservation, and flood management.

The county, the cities, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers should develop a new comprehensive flood management plan for the watershed that includes (1) changes in the configuration, operation, and maintenance of existing flood facilities; (2) naturalized stream channels that enhance infiltration, create habitat, and provide recreational opportunities; (3) a sediment management strategy that supports the natural assimilative capacity of streams; (4) new multiple-purpose sites along the floodways of the Tujunga and Pacoima washes that provide habitat, recreation, and stormwater management; (5) new stormwater detention and infiltration facilities on publicly-owned sites; and (6) on-site stormwater infiltration on residential and commercial properties. In conjunction with this plan, the cities and county should revise their general plans to establish a long-term program to acquire land along floodways from willing sellers at fair market value along Tujunga Wash, Pacoima Wash and tributaries which would maintain neighborhood integrity

while assembling parcels for multiple benefit public uses, including habitat, recreation, and stormwater detention, cleansing, and infiltration.

As bridge retrofits occur on the Tujunga and Pacoima Washes, they should be designed to accommodate, at a minimum, continuous greenway bicycle and pedestrian paths, and facilitate the future restoration of functional floodways.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers participation in ecosystem restoration and integrated flood management projects is greatly influenced by a definition of the “waters of the United States” which confers jurisdiction to the Corps based on the commerce clause of the constitution. Recent Supreme Court rulings have reduced the breadth of Corps jurisdiction and have been based on concepts grounded in the hydrology of the Eastern U.S. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers should complete development of and institute a definition of Waters of the United States specific to Southwestern streams.

## 7.6 Parks and Open Space

The importance of parks cannot be measured, but most other important things in life cannot be measured either: Friendship, beauty, love, and loyalty are examples. Parks and other pedestrian places are essential to a city’s happiness.

—*Enrique Peñalosa*

Access to parks and open space varies significantly throughout the developed portions of the watershed. Easy access to parks is strongly correlated with lower rates of obesity, diabetes, and other childhood and adult-onset diseases, creates opportunities for all residents to include exercise as a key element of a healthier lifestyle, and can reduce air quality impacts associated with travel to these places. Although improved access to parks could benefit watershed residents, this issue extends across the San Fernando Valley and much of the Los Angeles metro region. The cities, the county, and the state should develop a regional open space plan, in coordination with non-profit land conservation organizations, that establishes an integrated strategy with acreage targets, location criteria, timelines, and funding mechanisms to increase the amount of, and access to, public open space, especially in underserved areas and along watercourses, while providing appropriate public safety measures.

New parks should function as multiple-objective projects that balance recreation and habitat uses, detain, cleanse, and infiltrate stormwater, and reduce peak flood flows when feasible. Priorities for recreational uses should be based on local demographics and access. Priority access to new parks should promote pedestrian, bicycle, and sustainable transit linkages. Priorities for designating habitat areas within parks should be based on sensitivity, connectivity, habitat quality, and related criteria. The regional public open space plan should provide policies to balance these uses by means of a stakeholder process. The cities and county should revise open space elements of their general plans to reflect these criteria for new parks and open space and retrofit existing parks to incorporate ecosystem services (or green infrastructure) as standard elements of all parks.

## 7.7 Habitat & Native Vegetation

In the end, only a profound philosophical shift in how we view our relationship to the natural world can assure that we halt our plunge into a biologically barren future.

—*Kenny Ausubel*

The need to preserve and restore functional ecosystems requires more than the conservation of pockets of habitat and or expansive areas of native vegetation. Instead, a landscape-level approach must be used which reflects the composition and functions of the aquatic, riparian, and terrestrial ecosystems that encompasses groups of species, plant communities, and ecosystems while recognizing the need for rare and endangered species conservation and management.

Much of the open space in the watershed lies within the National Forest and will continue to be subject to the management policies and programs of the Forest Management Plan. However, the foothills between the national forest and developed areas face increasing pressure for development and much of the habitat along the washes and tributary streams has been lost. The regional open space plan (discussed above) provides an opportunity to restore native vegetation and where appropriate, functional habitats and biological/wildlife corridors, to reduce habitat fragmentation and loss and restore the potential for those lands to serve as functional ecosystems. Public agencies should mandate the predominant use of native plants for public properties and incentivize the use of locally-derived native and other climate-appropriate plants on private property, to extend opportunities for native species to reestablish their historic range.

The proposed restoration of washes and tributary streams will require the development of a program that balances the intent to create or restore habitat (including removal of invasive species) with the need to maintain flood protection. In conjunction with the Army Corps of Engineers and appropriate resource management agencies, the County of Los Angeles should develop criteria for incorporation of native vegetation of different species and sizes within streambeds and floodplains, which would allow for periodic inundation and disturbance under flood conditions and occasional maintenance to preserve functionality.

## 7.8 Coordination & Planning

The scarcest resource is not oil, metals, clean air, capital, labor, or technology. It is our willingness to listen to each other and learn from each other and to seek the truth rather than seek to be right.

—*Donella Meadows*

To establish a regular ongoing process for interagency communication, cooperation and collaboration, the existing steering and technical advisory committees that guided this plan should be extended for implementation of the watershed plan. The County and the cities of Los Angeles and San Fernando should jointly support continuation of, and provide technical support to a Tujunga/Pacoima Watershed Group to guide implementation of the plan. This group should include a steering committee, technical advisory committee, and an inter-agency working group, provide regular opportunities for stakeholder input and participation in decision-making, and public notice of all meetings. The group should work closely with senior staff of U.S. Senators and Representatives, state Senators and Assemblymembers to forge a clear consensus on watershed issues and funding priorities at state and federal level. The committee should develop model agreements that establish maintenance responsibilities for interagency multiple-objective projects.

To effectively implement watershed-based planning, a regional approach to deal with the interrelated issues of land use, water supply, public open space, public health, flood management, and water quality needs to be promoted. The Southern California Association of Governments should incorporate the Local Government Commissions Ahwahnee Water Principles into their work on the Compass Growth project, and jointly provide specific recommendations to foster informed decision-making, including assistance to elected officials and staff to facilitate their understanding and communication of a watershed-based approach.

The City of Los Angeles established Neighborhood Councils so that city government would be more responsive to local needs, and to promote public participation in the decision making and problem solving processes. The Neighborhood Councils have a tremendous opportunity to communicate local needs and desires to adopt and implement watershed-based planning principles and demand that individual project proposals respond to the needs of the watershed. To better inform the councils of the potential opportunities, the California Department of Conservation should fund development of a Watershed Planning Guide for Neighborhood Councils in the city of Los Angeles.

Public outreach and education efforts should be intensified to build public understanding and support for watershed management, including targeted programs for elected and appointed officials, and the general

public (ratepayers and voters). With assistance from the County and the cities, the California Department of Conservation should fund a targeted public outreach effort in the watershed to inform and engage elected officials and the general public. The Los Angeles Unified School District should adopt and implement the watershed curriculum for k-12 schoolchildren included in the State of the Tujunga Report.

## 7.9 Funding

In the Western United States, water flows uphill to money.

—*Glen Sanders*

In recent years, voter-approved bonds have been the primary source of funding to implement watershed projects. Bond monies are insufficient for the task at hand, are inconsistently available, and typically cannot be utilized for maintenance of projects. Stable long term funding for land acquisition, capital improvements and maintenance and operations of multiple-objective watershed projects must be developed, which may include user fees and property taxes, and consolidation of funding currently allocated to disparate departments and programs.

The City of Los Angeles should reallocate the profits from the Department of Water and Power currently given over to the City's General Fund to a new program that invests in sustainable water supply and energy infrastructure.

The City of Los Angeles Community Redevelopment Agency should fund the projects (identified in Chapter 4) that are located within the Community Redevelopment Area.

The Metropolitan Water District should fund sustainable, environmentally sound water projects in the Tujunga/Pacoima Watershed consistent with the provisions of SB 60 (Statutes of 1999), which require consideration of groundwater recharge and replenishment, watershed management, habitat restoration, and environmentally compatible community development utilizing the resource potential of the Los Angeles River—including stormwater runoff.

U.S. Senate & Congressional representatives should work to provide the USEPA with additional funding to address groundwater contamination, and work to provide the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers with funding for Ecosystem Restoration projects in the watershed.

A public outreach and education campaign should be developed through stakeholder participation to build understanding and support maintenance of green infrastructure, restored floodplains and naturalized streams. Following that campaigns launch, the County of Los Angeles should implement the proposal for a ballot measure to bring a funding plan for a multi-purpose watershed infrastructure program to the voters.