San Diego River Conservancy

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January 5, 2005

Ms. Elizabeth Giffen
County of San Diego, Department of Planning & Land Use
9325 Hazard Way
San Diego, CA 92123 MS 0326

Dear Ms. Giffen:

San Diego River Conservancy Comments on San Diego River Watershed Management Plan (November 2004)

On behalf of the San Diego River Conservancy, I appreciate the opportunity to comment on the Draft San Diego River Watershed Management Plan and offer the following observations and recommendations. "Big picture" comments are presented below followed by comments on specific sections.

Define Watershed Planning

The vision statement and set of principles are good, but I recommend that you also define what "watershed planning" means and why you are doing it. You may wish to consider the following definition:

Watershed planning is intrinsically linked to land use planning. Watershed planning can be defined as the development and implementation of land use policies, programs, and practices designed to protect all of the land, water, and biological resources and associated beneficial uses in an entire watershed from anthropogenic activities. Land use policies/decisions govern human activities on the lands within the watershed. The human activities in turn directly impact the water resources within the watershed. The quality and quantity of land and water resources determine which biological communities and other beneficial uses of the land and water will be supported and to what extent.

The land use policies, programs, and practices within a Watershed Plan should seek to address all of the important anthropogenic issues within the watershed including aquatic and terrestrial habitats and ecosystems, water quality, water supply, flood protection, urban development, transportation, housing, recreation, economic development, wetlands, etc. The watershed should be evaluated as a whole and the issues should be looked at simultaneously and in a holistic fashion. If issues are looked at individually and one at a time, it is easy to loose sight of important "cumulative impacts" and risk inadvertently solving one problem only to create

another. The watershed planning process should examine the relationships, consequences, connectivities, cumulative impacts, and opportunities associated with these issues.

Take Responsibility for Consequences of Land Use Policies / Recommend Changes to the General Plan

The Watershed Plan should assess and take responsibility for the cumulative long-term consequences of past land use policies and practices on the land, water, and biological resources within the watershed. After recognizing past successes and mistakes, the plan should recommend appropriate changes. Watershed planning should identify what we have done well and what we done poorly. What should we be doing and where should we be doing it? Where and how should we build? What should we not be doing? Where should we not build? What values and functions did the watershed have that have been lost? Be specific and cite examples of problems and opportunities.

Watershed planning is not worth doing if it doesn't make a difference. The Watershed Plan must recognize problems resulting from past land use policies and practices and recommend changes to address those problems. In other words **the General Plan should not be seen as "sacred and untouchable".** It should be seen as dynamic document that can and should be changed to reflect lessons learned and increased understanding of processes and consequences. Land use practices which have resulted in the degradation of the watershed resources should be abandoned and replaced with new ones that will restore and protect the watershed.

Adopt Land Use Policies that Protect Watershed Resources

Modify the General Plan to include land use policies and practices that protect the land, water, and biological resources of watersheds. For example,

- Prevent future development in the flood plain.
- Prevent filling in or otherwise degrading wetlands and riparian habitats (preserve and where possible, create or restore wetlands and riparian corridors).
- Prevent further physical modifications to the river (channelize, dam). Restore natural flow regime where possible.
- Protect and restore natural watershed functions
- Require minimum buffer zones, setbacks, slope development restrictions, fewer parking spaces, and clustering (compact development) to protect habitat.
- Minimize future hardscaping. Replace existing hardscape where feasible.
- Modify project approval processes. Include conditions of approval in development permits that protect watershed resources. Revise environmental review processes.
- Avoid conversion of areas particularly susceptible to erosion and sediment loss (e.g., steep slopes, highly erodible soils) or establish development guidelines to protect sensitive areas).
- Require pollution prevention and source control best management practices in addition to treatment (structural) best management practices to reduce pollutant loading from land uses to receiving waters.

Incorporate Protective Land Use Policies into Early and Long-term Recommendations
Consider replacing, or augmenting, existing lists of recommended actions throughout Plan with items from the list of policy statements above.

Review SANDAG's Regional Growth Management Strategy Recommendations
Review SANDAG's Regional Growth Management Strategy, Water Quality Element dated November 1997 containing recommendations on urban development and water quality protection. Consider incorporation into Watershed Management Plan.

Exercise Municipal Authorities and Powers
As the primary land use authorities, municipalities have significant power to effect change. We recommend that you use this authority to adopt and enforce land use policies and practices that protect watershed resources over the long-term. As written, the Plan appears to avoid acknowledging certain existing municipal authorities. For example although the municipalities have the authority to prevent future hydromodifications within their jurisdictions, the Watershed Management Plan indicates that "future hydromodification of the watershed may continue unless guidelines or policy changes are adopted to give the SDRWQCB the ability to prohibit or restrict these activities in the future." (page 29, 3rd paragraph).

On page 41 it states "currently, none of the entities or management groups existing within the SDRW has the responsibility or authority to spend resources in such a broad, watershed-based coalition, one that may require them to deviate from their existing land use plans." It should be noted that the San Diego MS4 Permit requires municipalities to have a mechanism to conduct land use planning on a watershed basis with neighboring jurisdictions.

Under Groundwater Management Recommended Action (2nd E1 on page 61), continued regulation and oversight of septic tank waste discharges by the Regional Board. The municipalities can and should participate in this regulation and oversight.

Under Groundwater Management Recommended Action (5th E1 on page 61), continued oversight and regulation of urban runoff by the Regional Board. This responsibility is shared between the municipalities and the Regional Board. The Regional Board must enforce its NPDES permits (MS4, industrial and construction permits) which serve as its legal authority. In addition the municipalities must also enforce their complementary storm water ordinances, which serve as their legal authority.

Implement Public Workshop Recommendations
Page 3 of the Plan documents the highest priority watershed planning needs and expectations identified during the public workshops and their relative rankings. Many of these concepts are excellent and should be pursued (e.g., reduce or eliminate development in the flood plain, limit growth to protect water and habitat quality; establish buffer zones, encourage water

conservation, acquire land to create wetlands, etc.). Yet it appears that many of these recommendations are either not discussed or not emphasized in the balance of the Plan.

Most Significant Threats to Watershed (page 6, top pf page)
I would recommend characterizing the River's major threats/problems as related to either (1) urban development; or (2) hydromodification, both of which have several characteristic components. Urban development is associated with the conversion of natural pervious ground surfaces to hardscape and an increase in population and commensurate increase in pollutant sources. This conversion and population increase translate to an increase in the volume and velocity of runoff and an increase in pollutant sources and loading. Hydromodification should be defined as physical changes to the River itself such as channelization (straightening and confining flow), installation of dams, and streambank and shoreline erosion.

Invasive Exotic Species
Page 64 states that the ubiquitous presence of exotic species has been the greatest single factor resulting in habitat degradation. The text needs to point out that the presence of exotic species is not a random occurrence for which no one need take responsibility. Instead it should be noted that invasive exotics are present due to anthropogenic conditions. The invader's seeds are typically initially introduced by humans (often times by the improper disposal of landscape wastes). They colonize quickly. Hydromodification (physical alterations to the River) and urban development stress the native species and provide additional habitat for invaders. Over time the invaders become well established and displace the natives.

Emphasize What "Can" be Done Instead of What "Cannot"
The Plan, especially Recommendations Section 4, seems to have somewhat of a negative tone and focuses on the limitations and impediments to action and change, rather than on what actions can be taken and how can hurdles be overcome. I recommend shifting the focus from what can't be done to what can be done to protect watersheds.

Hydromodification is Distinct from Urban Development
Page 44 Section 4.3. Although your broad definition of hydromodification is not incorrect, I think it is helpful to view hydromodification and urban development as separate problems. Be sure to define both terms and list the components of each. Keeping them distinct is important to ensure that appropriate and separate solutions/recommendations are developed for each. The recommendations 4.3.3. and 4.3.4 (regarding impervious surfaces) are not appropriate solutions for hydromodification. Limiting hydromodification is the best solution for hydromodification. Limiting impervious surfaces is one solution for urban development. This section should be broken into two separate sections on water quality (hydromodification and urban development).

Repetitious Text

The Plan seems to contain a lot of repetitious text which should be eliminated and replaced with a more comprehensive discussion of the issues (e.g., section 3).

Include Description of Statewide Ambient Monitoring Programs, SWAMP and GAMA
Describe statewide surface water and groundwater ambient monitoring programs with standard QA/QC protocols and data repository. Pg 47

Include a Glossary
For clarity, all important terms, concepts, and regulatory permits and programs, etc. should be defined (e.g., watershed, hydromodification, MS4 permit, beneficial uses, water quality objectives, standards, Total Maximum Daily Load calculation, section 401 certification, Clean Water Act Section 303(d), applied water. What is the purpose of and distinction between WURMPs and JURMPs?

Page 4 section1.2.1 (Regulations and Regulatory Reports)
You may want to cite the MS4 permit and its purpose.

Page 7 table 2-1
Provide in acres and miles.

Page 9 second paragraph
I recommend that the text list the Section 303(d) pollutants and the Monitoring List pollutants for entire watershed here. Can they also be added to the Figure 1-4?

Page 10
List Section 303(d) and Monitoring List pollutants for San Diego Management Area.

Page 6, bottom of page
Add: River flows year round due to dry weather urban runoff flows and groundwater.

Page 18 (bottom of page) and Page 19
What is "municipal permit"? What is its purpose? What does it regulate? Rewrite middle paragraph on WURMPs and JURMPs and SUSMPs. I'll be happy to assist.

Page 20 bottom of page
Provide citation for three categories of impervious cover report. Define sensitive, impacted and non-supporting.

Page 22-27
Check for accuracy and explain calculations. Is El Capitan Population 17,762 and Area 120,753? Density equals 1 person/acre? Page 15. Explain your comment about population over-emphasized and amount of land inflated. Add grand total acres to all impervious surfaces tables.

Page 31. MEC Report Conclusion
I have some concerns about this conclusion. The Lower portion of River is Section 303(d) listed for bacteria, so the River mouth likely contributes to Ocean Beach water quality.

Page 32-35
Delete redundant text.

Page 38-39
Include public access to data.

MSCP Working
Pg 51 top paragraph. I don't think it is correct to state that MSCP, *by all accounts*, appears to be working to acquire and protect habitat. I'm not sure this conclusion has been categorically accepted by all. In any event, Municipalities should consider acquisitions.

Where is page 56?

Page 64 top
Eliminate duplicate text.

Page 66 top
Restore missing text.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to provide comments on the draft Watershed Management Plan.

Sincerely,

Deborah S. Jayne
Executive Officer