Council for
Watershed Health

October 12, 2011

Honorable Fran Pavley, Chair, Senate Subcommittee on Urban Rivers
Honorable Felipe Fuentes, Chair, Assembly Select Committee on the Revitalization of the Los Angeles River and Pacoima Wash

Subject: Joint Hearing – "Progress and Opportunity: The Future of the Los Angeles River and its San Fernando Tributaries"

Senator Pavley and Assemblymember Fuentes:

On behalf of the Council for Watershed Health, I want to thank you for hosting a joint hearing on the revitalization of the Los Angeles River and Pacoima Wash.

The resurgence of the Los Angeles River Watershed is of the utmost importance to the Los Angeles region and the Council for Watershed Health. The Council's work is guided by our Vision 2025, which envisions a Los Angeles region recognized as a model of sustainable urban watershed management, with clean waters, reliable local water supplies, restored native habitats, ample parks and open spaces, integrated flood management and revitalized rivers and urban centers.

Currently, the Council for Watershed Health has two programs focused on the ***Los Angeles River Watershed: Los Angeles River Watershed-Wide Monitoring Program (LARWWMP)*** and the ***Elmer Avenue Neighborhood Retrofit Monitoring Program***. I would like to take this time to tell you about these programs and how they benefit and further the revitalization of the Los Angeles River.

Los Angeles River Monitoring

First implemented in 2008, the objectives of LARWWMP are to increase awareness of the importance of issues at the watershed scale and improve the coordination and integration of monitoring efforts for both compliance and ambient conditions. The program improves overall cost effectiveness of monitoring efforts in the watershed by reducing redundancies within and between existing monitoring programs by addressing five specific questions of interest to our stakeholders:

1. What is the condition of streams in the watershed?

2. Are conditions at areas of unique interest getting better or worse?

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3. Are receiving waters near discharges meeting water quality objectives?

4. Is it safe to swim?

5. Are locally caught fish safe to eat?

We completed the first round of sampling in 2008 by looking at water quality, toxicity, bioassessment, and physical habitat conditions. We measured fecal indicator bacteria (FIB) at popular lake and river recreation areas to determine the safety of swimming (question 4) and concentrations of mercury and other toxics from fish collected at popular angling sites to determine fish consumption safety (question 5).

Results illustrate differences in stream condition, particularly water quality and habitat condition, in the upper (un-developed) portions of the watershed compared to the concrete-lined lower watershed. We observed few exceedances of water quality standards in receiving waters near permitted discharges and FIB bacteria standards at public swimming areas. Contaminant concentrations in fish tissues have helped identify species that exceed state consumption thresholds and will be used by the state to determine where fish advisory postings might be needed.

If there is a takeaway from LA River Monitoring Program, it is that an integrated watershed monitoring program can provide important context in our efforts to revitalize the Los Angeles River and its tributaries.

Elmer Avenue Neighborhood Retrofit

The long-term Los Angeles Basin Water Augmentation Study (or WAS), begun in 2000 through the actions of Dorothy Green, showed that capturing stormwater and urban runoff is a safe and effective way to create clean drinking water for our communities through infiltration on a neighborhood-scale. Out of that study we and our partners developed the Elmer Avenue Neighborhood Retrofit Project, a truly complete "green street" that is revolutionizing the way we think about the interaction between land and water.

Elmer Avenue demonstrates a variety of strategies, both on public and private property, under street infiltration galleries, open bottom catch basins, bio-swales, rain barrels, permeable pavers, climate appropriate landscapes, and even solar street lights to solve flooding, water quality, and water supplies issues. The construction of the first phase of the project was completed in June 2010, to show how a neighborhood can safely capture rainwater and add it to the San Fernando Aquifer. Taken together, the community improvements help to capture or save a lot of water – more than the entire block would use in an entire year.

The second phase of this project will further enhance the community, creating a green, walkable mid-block Paseo while addressing runoff from an additional 20 acres, allowing

rainwater from more than 60 acres of land to safely make its way back into the aquifer – the way nature intended.

Elmer Avenue continues to be an active **research** project of the Council for Watershed Health and our partners. Pre- and post-construction monitoring provides additional data on the feasibility of decentralized infiltration for groundwater recharge. The Council is tracking the multiple benefits of the project (water quality, water supply, costs, performance, habitat function, and additional benefits) to develop lessons learned for future projects in the region.

The list of our partners and funders for these projects is long, and includes federal, state, and local agencies: U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, Los Angeles Watershed Protection Division, Los Angeles Bureaus of Sanitation, Street Services, and Street Lighting, Metropolitan Water District of Southern California, City of Santa Monica, County of Los Angeles Department of Public Works, TreePeople, University of California, Riverside, Water Replenishment District of Southern California, California Department of Water Resources, State Water Quality Control Board, Strategic Growth Council, and Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy.

We would ask that you support ongoing monitoring efforts like these, which provide important data that allows for improved public policy. Thank you again for supporting the revitalization of the Los Angeles River.

Sincerely,

Nancy L.C. Steele, D.Env.
Executive Director

About us: *The Council for Watershed Health is southern California's trusted hub for essential watershed research and analysis, uniquely able to influence and inform public policy by convening forums and trainings and conducting applied research that is reliably fair, objective and rooted in science. From our beginnings to today, we have sought to facilitate a consensus approach to enhance the economic, social, and ecological health of our region's watersheds through education, research, and planning. Our shared goals are to achieve regional sustainability through integrated natural resources management and improve policies and practices by working together to achieve Vision 2025.*