

IRVINE RANCH WATER DISTRICT POLICY POSITION  
COUNTY-WIDE URBAN RUNOFF GOVERNANCE AND FUNDING

Revised: June 3, 2005

Issue Summary:

In order to maximize the efficiency and effectiveness of measures to address county-wide urban runoff issues, regulators and the public are seeking to optimize the coordination of work and identify new sources of funding as needed.

Background:

In the time since the closure of beaches along the central Orange County coast in the summer of 1999, efforts to improve the quality of the water along watercourses and beaches in the County have increased significantly. While the county and cities are legally responsible for improving surface water quality in accordance with the Clean Water Act and the county-wide municipal stormwater permit, it is clear that other entities can contribute their expertise and funding for efforts within their purviews. For example, independent water and wastewater districts can participate in this effort through diversion and/or treatment of dry weather urban runoff, and through water conservation programs. Non-governmental organizations can participate by providing public education and community support.

Going forward, better coordination of these efforts is critical to facilitate economies of scale, develop more complimentary programs, and focus resources on regulatory priorities. Also, with public agency budgets stretched to their limits, there is little or no discretionary funding available for compliance with new regulatory requirements. Thus, many agencies have expressed a need to seek new public funding sources, which could include user fees, parcel taxes, or property taxes, many of which require voter or landowner approvals.

The County of Orange has taken the role of leader/facilitator in interagency discussions of both governance and funding related to urban runoff. The following are the principles that IRWD promotes as the County and other organizations pursue this issue.

Policy Principles:

- No new layers of government or entities should be established to address urban runoff issues. The emphasis should be on better coordination of agencies' resources and a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities.
- The existing San Diego Creek Watershed Committee should be used as a model for application throughout the County. This type of structure is advantageous because it:

- Requires no new governmental entity;
  - Maintains a politically and institutionally supportable separation of powers and individual funding sources from the participating agencies; allowing for agencies to fund separate programs
  - Involves appropriate stakeholders at both the staff and non-governmental organization level (through the Management Committee) and elected official level (through the Executive Committee);
  - Lends itself to cooperative funding arrangements through inter-agency funding agreements;
  - Provides an appropriate mechanism to allocate and manage any newly established county-wide funding source; and
  - Can be implemented almost immediately.
- For purposes of coordinating, implementing and funding urban runoff treatment efforts, the county is most logically divided into three Watershed Management Areas: North, Central and South. Each of these areas has its own distinct physical, institutional, and regulatory characteristics. Each area should be governed by a committee structure, similar to that used in the San Diego Creek watershed.
  - If a new county-wide funding source requiring a vote is pursued, efforts to promote the proposal to the public should not proceed before a list of projects/uses and quantitative funding needs has been established. The other essential provision that needs to be in place before a fundraising drive is initiated is how the funds will be overseen, which leads to the need to identify a feasible and supportable governance structure.
  - After a conceptual governance and funding structure is developed by staff of the various agencies and non-governmental organizations, a comprehensive review process should be implemented to receive elected official input from stakeholder agencies prior to the Orange County Board of Supervisors finalizing the proposal. In addition, early regulatory agency and public input should also be sought.