

Background

In early 2009 SANDAG approached the County of San Diego, Watershed Protection Program (County), to assist them with developing the water quality enhancement element of a potential Quality of Life Funding Strategy. This request was based on research conducted by SANDAG which indicated that water quality was a key region-serving area both underfunded and lacking a dedicated funding source. In response to that request, the County convened a broad cross section of stakeholders to support them in the effort, and the Water Quality Working Group (WQWG) was formed. During the first meeting in 2010 the WQWG established its mission and set the direction for its processes:

“The mission of the Water Quality Working Group is to provide input to the San Diego Association of Governments Quality of Life Stakeholder Working Group and assist in the development of a regional water quality needs assessment and priorities.”

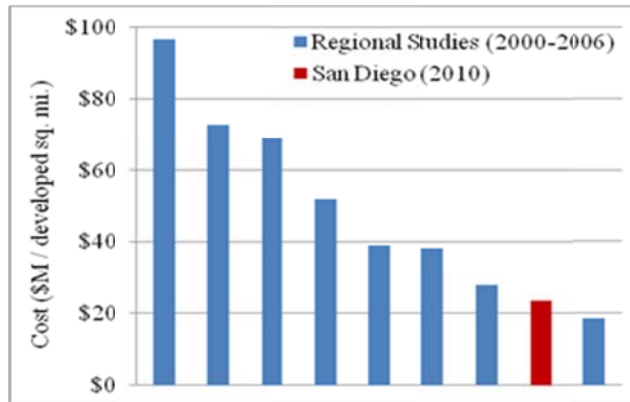
To that end, the WQWG has met on a monthly basis, developed a Water Quality Planning Framework, a summary of the region’s water quality needs, a process and approach for ranking and prioritizing cost-effective regional water quality programs and projects, and a rough order of magnitude cost estimate for addressing water quality needs within 40-years. Knowing that any funding measure will not fulfill the 40-year projected cost need, the WQWG is also developing a strategy and approach for providing cost-effective solutions in a manner that will prioritize funding of programs and projects to assure the highest return on investment and assure any local funding is leveraged to attract multiple funding sources.

Water Quality Planning Framework

The purpose of the Water Quality Planning Framework (Framework) developed by the WQWG is to help focus their ongoing dialogue regarding regional water quality, and to set quantifiable goals towards which a cost-estimate could be developed. The Framework was developed based on the Regional Board’s *Water Quality Control Plan for the San Diego Basin* and State Water Resources Control Board’s *Water Quality Control Plan for Ocean Waters of California*. It recognizes that there are stringent existing and emerging water quality regulations that are currently not being achieved in the majority of our Region’s watersheds, as well as the importance of clean watersheds, beaches and oceans to the economy of the San Diego Region.

Defining the Regional Need: Water Quality Needs Assessment and Cost Estimate

The preliminary 40-year cost estimate to achieve the goals defined in the Framework described above is \$24.9 billion (in present day dollars). The assumptions and method used to develop the cost estimate will be presented to SANDAG in the Draft Needs Assessment and Cost Estimate being prepared by the WQWG. This cost is comparable to several other studies developed to estimate the underfunded water quality needs for other urban areas throughout California over the past 15 years.



Range of cost estimates for water quality improvements per square mile in California

While local jurisdictions already fund their stormwater quality programs on an annual basis to a level which equates to approximately \$4.9B over 40 years, the WQWG is concluding that this level of funding is not adequate to address the goals of the Framework. The current programs are generally limited to National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit compliance activities (i.e., non-structural programs including education, enforcement, monitoring, and two watershed activities per watershed each year), primarily due to funding constraints. Stormwater quality regulations are continually emerging, and many new TMDL¹ requirements are scheduled to be implemented in the San Diego Region in the next five years. These regulations will require additional programs and projects and additional funding not currently dedicated or generated from existing funding sources. Thus, regional water quality programs targeted at stormwater and urban runoff management will remain underfunded. There continues to be a need for additional funding to support existing efforts (e.g., education and outreach programs, monitoring and data collection, strategic planning efforts), operation and maintenance of existing best management practices (BMPs), as well as, funding of future nonstructural and structural BMPs to achieve water quality objectives for the Region.

Prioritizing Process

Understanding that any funding measure implemented would not fulfill the 40-year projected cost need, the WQWG is also developing a strategy and approach for providing regional cost-effective solutions, regardless of the amount of funding available over the planning horizon. The WQWG recognizes that receiving “unconstrained funding” is not likely. The WQWG is therefore developing a process for ranking and prioritizing programs and projects, so any amount of funding put toward stormwater management through a local/regional funding strategy will make a substantive impact toward achieving the goals set forth in the Planning Framework. The proposed prioritization process currently includes the following three categories of criteria:

¹A Total Maximum Daily Load, or TMDL, is a calculation of the maximum amount of a pollutant that a waterbody can receive and still safely meet water quality standards.

Qualifying Criteria – Each project would first be evaluated using the Qualifying Criteria included in the Framework. These criteria would ensure that the project fell within the scope of the Element (i.e., addressing the water quality of water resources impaired by urban runoff and/or storm water runoff).

Screening Criteria –Each project would be screened for eligibility for funding under the Quality of Life Funding Strategy using the four screening (or “element”) criteria developed by the SANDAG Stakeholder Working Group (SWG).

Ranking Criteria –Programs and projects that pass these first two stages would undergo ranking and prioritization using the ranking (or “program”) criteria. Although program and projects would not be penalized for being single purpose, additional points would be given for demonstrable ancillary benefits and/or integration with other regional activities.

Leveraging Local/Regional Funding

In recognition of the concern that the funding need is great, the WQWG is promoting the concept of leveraging any funding developed from local sources to attract other funding, including federal, state and private. The Framework encourages solutions which provide “Ancillary Benefits” and achieve multiple objectives. These benefits are defined as community amenities such as parks, trails and open space that can also serve as water quality treatment facilities. Many federal and state programs encourage and award grants and other funding opportunities for these multi-benefit programs and projects. Some encourage collaborative efforts and rank programs and projects higher for partnering with other agencies.

Obtaining much-needed local, dedicated funding will also demonstrate a local commitment to achieving regulatory goals and objectives, which will not only enhance efforts to attract state and federal funding partners, but may also help to stave off third-party lawsuits or regulatory fines associated with non-compliance.

Next Steps

The WQWG has expressed their appreciation for the opportunity to present their preliminary findings to the Stakeholder Working Group, and is looking forward to receiving guidance about additional information the SWG might find useful in determining the appropriate policy choices to consider for this element.