

Middle San Dieguito Watershed Field Trip
Notes
October 28th, 2004

1st Stop: Overlook of Lake Hodges Lakebed and Evergreen Nursery

Discussion covered runoff containment practices used at local nurseries. No water is allowed to leave nursery properties during non rain events. Many nurseries utilize recycle/reuse irrigation systems to contain runoff. Some grant funding is available to nurseries to assist in runoff containment. Time release fertilizers are also used to control Nitrogen.

Most of the residents and businesses use well water in the San Pasqual Valley. Since the Basin is closed, water quality has gotten saltier over time. Water high in salts slows the growth of many nursery plants. Removing salts from water is one of the most expensive aspects of water treatment and also creates issues relating to brine disposal.

Issue: Groundwater quality is degrading over time, treatment is expensive.

Another issue that was discussed was management of vegetation within the lakebed. Cattle historically grazed in the lakebed, controlling growth of vegetation. Grazing was halted in the mid to late 90s, and vegetation has rapidly reestablished. Currently the lakebed is full of large willows and other vegetation. The City of SD is concerned that when the lakebed is finally flooded, vegetation will decompose and release organic materials and nutrients back into the water column, creating drinking water quality concerns. However, the area has slowly grown into a valuable wildlife habitat for endangered species, and the city would face major permitting and regulatory issues if the vegetation were removed before re-flooding the lakebed. The yellow billed cuckoo was sighted in the area in the mid-90's. Previously, this bird has not been seen locally in over 30 years. Bobcats, deer, and mountain lions also utilize the area. Currently, the City is not proposing any activities here.-If the lake is re-flooded, then they will deal with water quality concerns at the treatment plant.

Issue: Vegetation in Lake Hodges lakebed is wildlife habitat, but will cause water quality concerns upon flooding.

The City has plans to reevaluate the operation of Lake Hodges. They plan on changing the operations to ensure that lake levels remain more stable in the future. The following four factors need to be balanced when considering the appropriate way to operate the lake: (1) Emergency Storage, (2) Seasonal Storage, (3) Pump Storage (Olivenhien /Electricity), (4) Capturing Local Runoff.

Another issue discussed was cultural resources in the Valley. The SP Valley is home to many prehistoric Native American archeological sites including Piedras Pintadas and the Singing Rock (location unknown) and the Harris Site. In addition, the Valley also

contains numerous examples of Rock Art, grinding stones, and many other artifacts.

Issue: Cultural resources in the valley need to be protected.

Interstate 15 is going to be expanded in the future. The expansion includes plans for a high water wildlife passage underneath the 15. There are also plans to create a suspension bridge that will connect pedestrian/bike trails across Lake Hodges. When full, Lake Hodges has the capacity to hold 29,000 AF. Before the rains, the lake was holding 4,900 AF. Afterwards, this number only increased to 5,100 AF. This illustrates how this particular watershed takes a long time to fully saturate and doesn't produce a lot of runoff. **Issue: Habitat connectivity and trail connectivity for human use needs to be maintained.**

2nd Stop: San Dieguito River Park Trailhead

The Mulehill trail is a total of 17 miles. The Santa Maria Creek, which begins in Ramona, runs adjacent to the trail at this location. The Santa Isabel Creek runs though the North side of the Valley.

Several creeks in the area flow year round due to urban runoff. These include Felicity Creek, Kit Carson Creek, Green Valley Creek, and Moonsong Creek. Although the flows are low, they are high in pollutants. Burnt materials from the Paradise fires caused flows in Guejito Creek to be charcoal black. In general, storm flows in the creeks are brown, but clear up quickly. **Issue: Water Quality in creeks is degraded from urban runoff and post-fire runoff.**

Cloverdale Creek Restoration is a number one priority of the Habitat Plan. One strategy is to allow goats to eat pepperweed and then to spray the remaining shoots.

11,000 acres of land in the Valley is owned by the City. A goal of Vision Plan 2020 is to protect the Valley from additional development and to maintain its current rural character.

3rd Stop: Verger Dairy on Bandy Canyon Road

Financial and regulatory issues facing small dairies are making it more and more difficult to continue operations. This is partly due to the fact that the price of milk hasn't increase significantly in over 40 years. In 1952, there were over 155 dairies in SD County; currently, there are only 6-7 left, of which 2 are located in the SP Valley. Most dairy operations have moved north and must be large to be cost effective. **Issue: Dairies face financial and regulatory pressures.**

The SWRCB won't allow the Verger Dairy to milk more than 500 cows. A third of the feed for the cows comes off of the pasture. Cows used to graze in the adjacent creek, but they have fenced off the area and now invasive species are coming back into the creek.

This dairy won an award for Best Environmental Practice. They have two ponds that collect wash water, which is then used for irrigation. Solids are used as fertilizers. In the summer, Mr. Verger grows Bermuda grass, interspersed with Rye. He has to irrigate when the weather is dry.

The City of SD routinely samples water from the monitoring wells. Additionally, the SWRCB receives a sample, which they test for nitrates.

Farmers in the Valley lease their land from the City. Some are currently having trouble getting their leases renewed, placing them on month to month leases. If agricultural practices in the valley are to be maintained, then the leasing process needs to be improved. **Issue: Leasing process must be improved to maintain agricultural character of region.**

Farmers in the valley provide their own water. Wells are costly (\$50,000+/-) and can dry up. Manganese in the groundwater can cause lines to clog quickly.

4th Stop: Whitman Ranch

Santa Ysabel Creek runs through the property. There are many invasive species in the creek, including peppertree, *Arundo sp.*, tamarisk, and eucalyptus. Organic materials from fires upstream have been carried down into the creek bed.

There are 400 acres of citrus grown on Whitman Ranch. Drip irrigation is used, and fertilizers are distributed in the irrigation system to minimize runoff of nutrients and to maximize uptake by the trees. Fruit on the trees takes 1.5 years to mature, and is currently hand picked. Each tree requires approximately 40-50 gal/day of water.

5th Stop: Orfila Winery

The winery is the only tenant in the valley that buys water directly from the City. The City installed a well and charges approximately \$350/AF.

The Wine Institute produced a book entitled "Code of Sustainability" which discusses methods that wineries can use to be environmentally friendly. Orfila Winery was mentioned in the book. They worked with Fish and Game to develop practices that promote environmental protection, and have received F&G grant funding. Instead of tilling, they mow between rows. Round-Up is sprayed between vines to prevent weed growth. The winery is not organic, but they try to minimize the use of pesticides and herbicides as much as possible.

The winery has three settling ponds that collect and infiltrate wash water. An overflow ditch surrounds all of the ponds. They believe the system was over engineered, but they were required to install it.

The owner of the winery is overwhelmed by the amount of regulations imposed on his business and has decided not to expand his winery.

Issue: Extensive regulatory requirements make it difficult for many valley residents to continue to conduct their businesses.

Attendees	
Name	Affiliation
Cathy Cibit	City of San Diego Water Department
Suzanne Michel	Wetlands Recovery Project
Lynne Baker	Endangered Habitats League
Melanie Craig	MEC-Weston
Lisa Kay	MEC-Weston
Jeff Pasek	City of San Diego Water Department
Craig Adams	San Dieguito River Valley
Steve Dime	San Dieguito Lagoon Committee
Dave Meyer	Rancho Bernardo Planning Group & District 5
Mark Whitehead	WPGG Chairman
Bob Collins	City of San Diego
Bob McCullough	City of San Diego
Bruce Posthumus	SDRWQCB
Matt Witman	San Pasqual Valley Planning
Arlene Dea Deeley	City of San Diego

Nancy Appel	Agriculture
Elizabeth Giffen	County of San Diego
Jacqueline Winterer	Friends of San Dieguito River Valley