



...A United Voice for the Santa Ana River Watershed

OWOW STEERING COMMITTEE

REGULAR MEETING MINUTES

FEBRUARY 27, 2025

Committee Members	
<u>Santa Ana Watershed Project Authority Representatives</u>	
Gil Botello, Convener, San Bernardino Valley Municipal Water District	Present
Philip E. Paule, Eastern Municipal Water District	Absent
<u>County Supervisor Representatives</u>	
Vicente Sarmiento, Orange County Board of Supervisors	Absent
Amanda Carr, Orange County Public Works (OC Alternate)	Present
Karen Spiegel, Riverside County Board of Supervisors	Absent
Edward Coronado, Riverside County Board of Supervisors (Riverside Alternate)	Present
Jesse Armendarez, San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors	Absent
<u>County Municipal Representatives</u>	
Vacant, Orange County Municipal Representative	N/A
Wes Speake, Councilmember, City of Corona	Present
Vacant, San Bernardino County Municipal Representative	N/A
<u>Business Community Representative</u>	
James Hessler, Director of West Coast Operations, Altman Plants	Present
<u>Environmental Community Representative</u>	
Garry W. Brown, President, Orange County Coastkeeper	Absent
<u>Regional Water Quality Control Board Representative</u>	
William Ruh, Regional Water Quality Control Board	Present
John Scandura, Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB Alternate)	Present
Others Present	
<u>SAWPA COMMISSIONERS:</u>	Fred Jung, T. Milford Harrison
<u>SAWPA STAFF:</u>	Jeff Mosher, Marie Jauregui, Pete Vitt, Rachel Gray, Rick Whetsel, Sara Villa, Shavonne Turner, Zyanya Ramirez
<u>OTHERS PRESENT:</u>	Carly Pierce, Western Municipal Water District; Christy Suppes, Orange County Public Works; Craig Foster, City of Santa Ana; Jesse Streeter; Manny Escamilla, Orange County; Thomas Bunn, Lagerlof LLP;

The OWOW Steering Committee meeting was called to order at 11:00 a.m. by Gil Botello, Convener, at the Santa Ana Watershed Project Authority, 11615 Sterling Avenue, Riverside, CA 92503.



1. **CALL TO ORDER | PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

2. **ROLL CALL**

3. **PUBLIC COMMENTS**

There were no public comments; there were no public comments received via email.

4. **ITEMS TO BE ADDED OR DELETED**

5. **CONSENT CALENDAR**

A. APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES: NOVEMBER 21, 2024

MOVED, approve the Consent Calendar.

Result:	Adopted by Roll Call Vote
Motion/Second:	Ruh/Speake
Ayes:	Botello, Carr, Coronado, Speake, Hessler, Ruh
Nays:	None
Abstentions:	None
Absent:	Armendarez, Brown, Paule, Sarmiento, Spiegel

6. **INFORMATIONAL REPORTS**

Recommendation: Receive for information.

A. **PROPOSITION 1 ROUND 1 PROJECT HIGHLIGHT: RAITT AND MYRTLE PARK PROJECT (SC#2025.1)**

Rachel Gray presented Craig Foster, NPDES Manager, from the City of Santa Ana. Mr. Foster provided a presentation titled *Raitt & Myrtle Park Project: Proposition 1 IRWM (2019)* contained in the agenda packet on pages 9-29.

Foster presented the Raitt and Myrtle Park Project (also knowns as the Ed Carruthers Park Project). He highlighted the city's efforts to manage stormwater in the Anaheim Bay, Santa Ana River, and Newport Bay watersheds. The project, which was funded by a \$1.675 million Proposition 1 Round 1 grant, includes a 1.2-acre park with an underground stormwater infiltration system, two bioretention basins, drought-resistant landscaping, educational signage, and recreational features. The park is designed to capture runoff from both the park and surrounding 10-acre neighborhood, with an estimated annual stormwater capture of 5.3 acre-feet. The project aims to reduce pollutants, enhance water quality, and provide community benefits.

Foster discussed the technical aspects of the project, including design details for the bioretention basins and underground infiltration system, and construction photos showing the system installation. The project is located near disadvantaged communities, contributing to local quality-of-life improvements. [Monitoring data from 2024](#) indicates the project's success, with an estimated 5.7 acre-feet of stormwater infiltrated, surpassing expectations. The stormwater capture system removed significant pollutants, including ammonia, copper, total suspended solids, and bacteria, reducing pollutants by 81% from flowing into Newport Bay.

Committee member Scandura commended the presentation on the Raitt and Myrtle Park Project and expressed interest in visiting the park. He asked Foster about the handling of excess runoff, referencing a past instance where 5.7 acre-feet of runoff occurred, surpassing the design capacity of 5 acre-feet per year. Scandura inquired whether the excess runoff could still be treated by the system or if it would flow into the neighborhood. Foster clarified that the park is designed to capture up to 1.75 inches of rain within a 24-hour period. During storms exceeding this capacity, such as 2-inch or 3-inch storms, the



excess runoff bypasses the park and flows into the city's storm drain system, eventually reaching Newport Bay.

Committee member Carr praised Foster and the City of Santa Ana for their work on the Raitt and Myrtle Park Project, specifically highlighting the park as an exemplary multi-benefit project. She commended the integration of water quality benefits with recreational features, such as the skate park, which enhances the community in ways that extend beyond the primary water quality focus. Carr emphasized that while many park users may not be focused on water quality, they still benefit from the park's green space and amenities. She expressed that this approach aligns well with the goals of the Integrated Regional Water Management (IRWM) program and praised the city's efforts.

Convener Botello congratulated Foster and the City of Santa Ana for the success of the Raitt and Myrtle Park Project, praising its public relations, water quality, and water capture benefits. He inquired about the public's response to the park, to which Foster shared that feedback has been very positive, highlighting the transformative effect of the park on the community. Botello also asked about the project's return on investment, and Foster explained that a consultant had analyzed several multi-benefit projects, revealing a cost-benefit ratio of 1.06 for the Urban Magic Johnson project, indicating a one-year return on investment. Botello encouraged Foster to share the project at conferences, and Foster confirmed that the project has received multiple awards and been presented at the California Stormwater Quality Association (CASQA) Annual Conference.

This item was for discussion purposes; no action was taken on Agenda Item No. 6.A.

B. SANTA ANA RIVER WATERSHED CLIMATE ADAPTATION AND RESILIENCE PLAN ENGAGEMENT (SC#2025.2)

Jeff Mosher discussed the declining prospects of Integrated Regional Water Management (IRWM) funding, noting that future allocations are expected to decrease significantly. Although a proposed Natural Resources Bond includes \$100 million for IRWM, only about \$12 million may be available for the Santa Ana River Watershed. To adapt, SAWPA pursued and was awarded a grant from the Governor's Office of Planning and Research to develop a Climate Adaptation and Resiliency Plan (CARP), which will be tied to the One Water One Watershed (OWOW) program to maintain Steering Committee oversight. This approach aims to position the watershed for future grant opportunities related to climate resiliency, even if they are not directly linked to IRWM.

Committee member Speake expressed uncertainty about how Proposition 4 funding will be allocated, as state agencies like DWR and the Department of Natural Resources are still determining the distribution. He acknowledged that while securing \$12 million for the Santa Ana River Watershed would be beneficial, there is competition from other regions, particularly those affected by recent fires in Los Angeles. Speake expressed confidence in SAWPA's ability to secure grants but emphasized the importance of maintaining connections at the state level to advocate for funding consistent with past allocations.

Committee member Carr shared that she recently participated in a two-day lobbying trip to Sacramento with representatives from seven counties, including San Bernardino and Riverside, where they met with legislators and staff to discuss IRWM funding. The group was encouraged to submit a follow-up letter with recommendations on how current IRWM funds could be distributed effectively and address other funding needs. Ms. Carr plans to coordinate with Jeff Mosher and Christy Suppes from the County of Orange, who has been involved with the IRWM Roundtable of Regions, to draft the letter. She emphasized



that IRWM has been highly successful and that existing relationships and structures should be utilized rather than overlooked in broader funding initiatives.

Rachel Gray provided a presentation titled *Santa Ana River Watershed Climate Adaptation and Resilience Plan – Engagement* contained in the agenda packet on pages 35-47. She reported that SAWPA developed a strategy to supplement the One Water One Watershed (OWOW) Plan with a Regional Climate Adaptation and Resilience Plan (CARP) to address climate risks and vulnerabilities, develop adaptation strategies, and enhance resilience within the Santa Ana River Watershed. The plan will include a portfolio of potential projects, promote equity outcomes for underrepresented communities, and foster partnerships to increase regional resilience. Following a competitive RFP process, Woodard & Curran was selected as the consultant to lead project administration, public agency engagement, resiliency metrics development, and digital platform creation. The consultant's approach focuses on inclusive community and tribal engagement through workshops and surveys and will utilize digital tools for communication and outreach. Next steps include developing work plans and engagement strategies to ensure a community-informed planning process.

Gray welcomed feedback from the Committee members regarding community engagement. Committee member Carr shared insights from Orange County's Stormwater program, highlighting successful community engagement through community-based social marketing concepts. She recommended that the consultant team explore similar approaches, noting the success of the [Overwatering Is Out campaign](#), which encourages residents to reduce irrigation runoff by sharing their actions on a community map, fostering a sense of collective effort and social media engagement. Carr also suggested including Orange County's Climate Action Plan and the climate team, led by Tara Tisopulos, as potential partners in the planning process.

Committee member Scandura suggested engaging with the Santa Ana Regional Water Quality Control Board staff, as they have developed a racial equity plan that includes identifying vulnerable and tribal communities. He noted that staff members are actively working on this effort and recommended collaborating with them to gather ideas on which stakeholders to approach and engage with.

Convener Botello acknowledged the magnitude of the undertaking, noting that San Bernardino Valley Municipal Water District recently completed its CARP, which took approximately two and a half years. He expressed the Committee's willingness to provide support as needed.

This item was for discussion purposes; no action was taken on Agenda Item No. 6.B.

C. SANTA ANA RIVER WATERSHED CLOUD SEEDING PILOT PROGRAM: YEAR 1 VALIDATION APPROACH (SC#2025.3)

Jeff Mosher introduced the next agenda item regarding cloud seeding and the ongoing validation process. He explained that it is not being conducted this winter due to the burn scars from the previous summer. Mosher emphasized the importance of transparency in SAWPA's efforts and highlighted that the purpose of the pilot program is to validate the effectiveness of cloud seeding. He noted that Rachel Gray's briefing would provide an update on the validation progress, acknowledging that it is a complex, ongoing process within the four-year pilot, and that the findings shared are still preliminary.

Rachel Gray provided a presentation titled *Santa Ana River Cloud Seeding Pilot Program Validation Approach* contained in the agenda packet on pages 51-73. She stated that the



four-year pilot program, uses ground seeding units, with no aerial seeding involved. The goal is to validate the benefits of the program and communicate its progress to interested parties. Funding is provided by several watershed agencies and Proposition 1, which also covers operations, validation, and surface water modeling.

Due to fire damage in the watershed, operations were suspended for Year 2 but are expected to resume in the upcoming winter season. The Desert Research Institute (DRI) is handling the independent validation of the program, which includes reviewing operations, conducting snow chemistry testing, and analyzing precipitation and stream gauges to understand the program's benefits.

During Year 1 (November 2023 - April 2024), 12 storms were reviewed to assess whether operations were successful. The review showed that the program operated effectively, although there were discrepancies in the hours the seeding units were active compared to the actual conditions needed for successful seeding. Snow chemistry testing revealed inconclusive results, indicating the need for additional sampling.

In terms of the precipitation analysis, a relationship was developed between control and target gauges, with preliminary results showing an increase in precipitation in some areas, particularly in the northeast and southeast target zones. However, not all areas showed benefits. The results for Year 1 suggest a potential 20,000 acre-feet benefit, with a cost of approximately \$20 per acre-foot, making cloud seeding a cost-effective method. However, additional data over the four years is needed to make a definitive conclusion.

Further analysis of the extra-area effect showed that there was no negative impact on surrounding areas outside of the watershed. Additionally, stream gauge analysis is still ongoing, and preliminary results indicate that stream flow may provide clearer insights into the program's impact.

Overall, while there are promising results, more data is needed to fully validate the program's effectiveness. The analysis continues, with a focus on refining sampling methods and extending the validation period.

Convener Botello requested that the final report include metrics and an assessment of the consultants' capacity, along with a cost analysis to determine if the program provides good value for the investment. He stressed the importance of addressing social media criticism in the report. Botello acknowledged the community's concerns about stormwater capture and cloud seeding, particularly in drought years, and supported the use of stream flow measurements, given the warmer storms that may not result in snow but still contribute to stream flow.

Committee member Carr raised a question about evaluating whether precipitation landed in areas where it could be captured, particularly when identifying potential increases in acre-feet. She suggested that it would be helpful to show or assess this aspect, acknowledging that not all precipitation can be captured where it falls. In response, Gray confirmed that they are working on a surface water model exercise to track the additional flow and determine where it ends up.

This item was for discussion purposes; no action was taken on Agenda Item No. 6.C.

7. GENERAL MANAGER REPORT

Jeff Mosher provided an update on several ongoing initiatives. He reiterated that CARP remains one of SAWPA's highest priorities, with a grant and consultants in place for the next



12-18 months, during which they will continue to update the OWOW Steering Committee at each meeting.

He also mentioned that they are working on a regional approach to invasive species, utilizing leftover Proposition 13 funds for removal projects, and plan to engage multiple stakeholders to develop a plan for the best use of these funds in the watershed. In response, Committee member Carr expressed interest in collaborating on Arundo removal in Orange County, sharing that her "Team Arundo" handles regional permitting and would like to involve her mitigation team in this effort.

Lastly, Mosher noted discussions with Convener Botello regarding the possibility of an in-person meeting or tour later this year, with ideas to be brought back for further consideration.

8. CHAIR COMMENTS/REPORT

Convener Botello expressed his gratitude to everyone for attending the meeting and emphasized his hope that the committee would take a leading role in securing and utilizing the hundreds of millions of dollars available for innovative projects in the watershed. He stated that SAWPA, through this committee, should be the primary leader and convener in these efforts, and he anticipates great progress over the next few years.

9. COMMITTEE MEMBERS' COMMENTS

No additional comments.

10. REQUEST FOR FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

There were no request.

11. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting ended at 12:25 p.m.

APPROVED: May 22, 2025

Signed by:

Gil Botello

Gil Botello, Convener

Attest:

Signed by:

Zyanya Ramirez

Zyanya Ramirez, Executive Assistant II