

## **CHAPTER 4 - SUMMARY OF COORDINATION, PUBLIC VIEWS, AND COMMENTS**

### **4.1 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

Public involvement is a process by which interested parties and affected individuals, organizations, and government agencies, are consulted and included in the decision-making process of a planning effort. The purpose of public involvement is to ensure that the Corps programs are responsive to the needs and concerns of the public.

The history of public involvement with the stakeholders of Aliso Creek watershed extends back to the first public workshop held for the reconnaissance-level San Juan and Aliso Creeks Watershed Management Study in March 1996. The following year, the Aliso Creek Watershed Stakeholder Group (ACWSG) was formed. The group is comprised of representatives from local government agencies, water and wastewater districts, environmental interest groups, and the interested general public. The ACWSG is to serve as a clearinghouse and coordinating group to improve understanding of watershed and water quality issues and to advise project proponents on priorities and opportunities in the Aliso Creek watershed.

Extensive public and agency coordination continued through the feasibility-phase effort for the Aliso Creek Watershed Management Study, completed in October 2002. Following the completion of that study, the sponsor, OC Watersheds, has continued coordinating and holding periodic meeting forums with the ACWSG.

### **4.2 PUBLIC WORKSHOP**

A co-chaired public scoping meeting was conducted in May 2009 to inform the public of the ecosystem restoration feasibility study and to solicit public input. Additionally, an overview of the NEPA/CEQA compliance regulations was presented along with the announcement of the initiation of the public scoping period. The intent of the scoping process was to encourage participation in the environmental review process from public agencies, interested parties and the general public in the identification of the key issues and concerns relevant to the scope of the environmental compliance documentation.

### **4.3 PUBLIC CONCERNS**

A number of public concerns have been identified during the course of the Corps reconnaissance study and the Public Workshop. The public and agency concerns formed the bases of the initial problem and needs statements addressed in this report. A description of the prevalent concerns has been summarized as follows, in no particular order:

1. Cultural Resources – More than 20 prehistoric archeological sites are located within ¼ miles of Aliso Creek, of which 10 are located in very close proximity to or along the creek. The sites include remains of villages. The preference would be for the resources to be preserved in place and left undisturbed. Two sites meet the criteria for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. The Aliso Creek Bridge spanning Pacific Coast Highway is considered a historical feature and is located in the study area.
2. Habitat and Endangered Species – Much of the study area is located within the Aliso and Wood Canyons Wilderness Park, which supports many of the typical and unique landscapes of California, including coastal sage scrub, chaparral, native grassland and oak woodland. These precious resources must be protected from impacts from urbanization. There are 29 special status species that have the potential to occur in the aquatic, riparian, wetland and upland habitats in the study area due to the presence of suitable habitat and recent observations, including 10 listed species (threatened and endangered), and 19 California species of special concern. Species associated with the Aliso Beach environment should also be considered.
3. Ecosystem Degradation – Over-urbanization has been greatly responsible for ecosystem degradation of the Aliso Creek watershed, especially in the highly impacted lower portion, from the effects of increased stormwater and dry weather runoff and associated urban pollutants.
4. Flooding and Infrastructure Damage – Flooding damages have resulted to structures on lands prone to flooding from Aliso Creek. The extent to development in the watershed has contributed to larger flood flows. Erosion and undermining from large flows have damaged infrastructure.
5. Invasive Species – Invasive non-native species are decreasing the habitat value in the watershed. A long-term invasive control plan and funding source should be identified as part of a potential project.
6. Poor Surface Water Quality – Aliso Creek is on the Section 303(d) list of impaired water bodies for coliform bacteria, phosphorus, and toxicity. Threat to public health is a concern. Aliso Beach was closed an average of 16.5 days per year due to contamination from broken sewage pipes, urban runoff, and stagnation of creek water. Adverse impacts to ocean ecosystems should be addressed.
7. Fish Passage – Existing fish passage should be analyzed, and fish passage standards from the California Salmonid Stream Habitat Restoration Manual should be integrated in alternatives formulation.

8. Compensatory Habitat Mitigation Sites – Past sites within the study area should be identified and any direct impacts from a proposed project and regulatory implications need to be disclosed and addressed.
9. Estuarine Restoration – Assess potential restoration of estuarine area, including natural functioning of sand bar, to historic ecological conditions. A possible former flood shoal area of the estuary is currently used for beach public parking and passive recreation. Due to the complex nature of the estuarine regime and multiple land owners, some stakeholders feel any potential estuarine planning process and project should be separate from any restoration efforts on the mainstem creek. The tidewater goby, a Federally-listed Endangered Species, occurred historically at the mouth of Aliso Creek, but has not been found there since 1976. The current estuary is experiencing siltation issues due to upstream scouring.
10. ACWHEP Structure – The ACWHEP is a mitigation bank project that utilized a constructed grade control structure (headworks) to divert surface flows through irrigation lines to downstream planted riparian terraces. Storm flows have undermined and ruptured the irrigation lines. The structure has aggravated channel incision downstream and associated channel instability and habitat degradation, and is a barrier to wildlife migration. The structure must be periodically maintained following major storm events to preclude undermining and potential loss. This includes adding grouted stone along the downstream face and sides. The top of the structure serves as an auxiliary permanent vehicle crossing for the SOCWA facility. Address opportunities to either remove ACWHEP or to replace it with a structure that is more stable and aesthetically consistent with the Wilderness Park.
11. Utilities and Access Roads – The SOCWA service road on the west side of Aliso Creek provides access to the Coastal Treatment facility located in lower Aliso Canyon on the east side of Aliso Creek. An unimproved service road also runs on the east side of Aliso Creek. Most of the existing utilities are on the east side of the creek. Limiting service road access to the east side of the creek should be evaluated. Also evaluate alternatives to relocate utilities and service road away from the creek. OC Parks staff utilizes a portion of the west access road.
12. SUPER Project – The SUPER project is a conceptual plan developed by the County of Orange and water/wastewater agencies. The plan conceives of integrating components of stream stabilization with grade control structures, water quality treatment upstream of Pacific Coast Highway of dry weather flows and beneficial reuse, utility protection, and ecosystem restoration. Public comments received specifically mentioning the SUPER Project were, in general, opposition. Prevalent arguments against the SUPER project are lack of in-stream water quality benefits upstream, end-of- pipe treatment plant near the mouth of Aliso Creek, and need for large quantity of drop structures for stream stabilization within the study area without addressing potential reduction of runoff flow frequency, duration, and volume from upstream development.

13. Control of Urban Stormwater and Dry Weather Discharges – Altered hydrology from upstream cities in the watershed, combined with pollutant sources that accompany urbanization, lead to water quality, stream channel, and habitat degradation. The ecosystem restoration project should work in conjunction with the implementation of a proposed MS4 Permit program that addresses pollution prevention, upstream source control, and treatment-control BMPs.
14. Detention/Retention Basins – Investigate on- and off-line detention/retention basin opportunities to address reduction of stormwater and dry weather discharges. Include consideration to the Dairy Fork confluence area.
15. Treatment Wetlands/Biofiltration – Investigate water quality improvements for dry weather flows at storm drain outlets to creek through creation of wetlands/biofiltration projects. Evaluate effectiveness of recent water quality enhancement projects conducted by the County.
16. Diversion of Runoff Flows Underground or for Treatment/Reuse – With water shortages an issue and the growing need to import more, consider aquifer replenishment to augment local supply, and treatment for reuse. Local treatment plants would require upgrading however. Opinions regarding resale of reclaimed water were often not favorable. Also consider large scale cistern strategies. Off-line creek flow diversion to the Chet Holifield Federal Building parking lot was mentioned for cistern catchment and percolation; geotechnical considerations would need to be addressed.
17. Oxbow Reconnection – Investigate opportunities to reconnect abandoned oxbow features to the active channel and/or floodplain to increase habitat function.
18. Mallard Marsh – A small, well-established marsh in Wood Canyon, one of very limited marsh habitat sites in Orange County. Address opportunities to expand size, reconnect flow regime, and utilize urban flows as a water source. The potential project limit of 1,000 feet was cited as a constraint.
19. Ocean Ecosystem Degradation - Assess impacts of poor water quality associated with Aliso Creek stormwater plume to ocean natural resources, and recommend alternatives for rehabilitation of coastal lost habitat, such as kelp reforestation, and reintroduction of lost species.
20. Sand Source Depletion for Coastal Sand Replenishment – Sand delivery capacity from Aliso Creek must not be compromised, and any creek restoration alternatives must allow for an equilibrium for coastal replenishment to persist.
21. Levels of Intervention for Creek Restoration Alternatives – A wide range of approaches were recommended for analysis ranging from minimal or no intervention and non-structural approaches to restoration to meet the historic floodplain. Points that were also made

included: minimization or no manmade structures, a self-sustaining and natural system; low maintenance requirements; consideration to changes in future hydrology; stability of manmade structure issues; and use of biotechnical approaches to streambank stabilization.

22. Creek Reach through Golf Course – The Aliso Creek Inn and Golf Course is privately-owned. The current feasibility study should not exclude this reach from restoration recommendations, especially its interrelationship with the estuary, beach, and coastal waters.
23. Climate Change and Sea Level Rise – Effects of sea level rise and impacts to the study area need to be evaluated, especially in terms of sediment supply needs to the coastal regime.
24. Loss of Recreational Experience – The aesthetic natural beauty of the Wilderness Park has been impaired by degradation issues and storm damage caused by the creek. Poor water quality impacts the recreational experience at Aliso Beach.

#### **4.4 STAKEHOLDERS WORKSHOP**

An all day public workshop on stream restoration techniques and opportunities for Aliso Creek was held on May 13, 2009. A presentation was given by a Corps ecosystem restoration expert of the Engineer Research and Development Center (ERDC). The Corps and OC Watersheds led a tour of the project area. The presentation and tour were open to interested members of the public.

#### **4.5 INSTITUTIONAL INVOLVEMENT**

Study Team: During the feasibility study, staff from the OC Watersheds, Federal, State, Regional, and local interests participated in the Study Task Force and the study team, as described in Chapter 1 of this report.

Agency Participation: During the feasibility study, coordination with the USFWS was conducted in accordance with the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act. The Corps met with the USFWS and the CDFG in May 2009 for an informal meeting to discuss the project area and survey methodologies and tour the project site. Additional informal meetings have been held to discuss the biological reports prepared for this study.