Ventura River Watershed Council
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May 7, 2015

Ventura County Board of Supervisors

800 South Victoria Avenue

Ventura, CA 93009

Subject: Update of the Ventura County General Plan: A recommendation for a comprehensive review of the County’s water-related goals, policies, and programs.

The Ventura River Watershed Council offers the following comments for your consideration about the scope of the upcoming General Plan update.

The Watershed Council is a broad-based stakeholder group that has been meeting since 2006 to facilitate and support efforts by individuals, agencies, and organizations to maintain and improve the health and sustainability of the Ventura River watershed for the benefit of the people and ecosystems that depend upon it. In March of this year, the Council completed a three-year process to produce a comprehensive watershed management plan for the Ventura River watershed. The Council is part of the regional Watersheds Coalition of Ventura County (WCVC), which oversees the Integrated Regional Water Management (IRWM) planning and implementation efforts across the County.

First, it should be acknowledged that while most of the language in the current General Plan was crafted back in 1988, much of that language has proven to be remarkably insightful. Relative to other local jurisdictions, the General Plan and related land use policies have served the county well in the protection of biological resources, agricultural lands, and water resources. These early policies earned the County of Ventura a reputation as a leader in local land use planning.

But today, 27 years after the last comprehensive General Plan update, water management issues have evolved and become even more pressing and complex:

* We write this letter in the fourth consecutive year of drought when the long term adequacy of groundwater and surface water resources has become a major public concern;
* Lake Casitas is moving into record low water levels;
* weather systems seem to be changing;
* the regulatory environment has become considerably more complex and challenging;
* the continued existence of agriculture⎯one of the County’s valued land uses⎯is seriously threatened in some areas, presenting important land use questions that will affect watersheds;
* designs and technologies for rainwater capture and infiltration, and water-use efficiency and conservation have advanced significantly; and
* the benefits of integrated watershed-based planning are now much better understood.

Given the elevated importance of water resource management and related issues, and that so many of the General Plan’s goals, policies, and programs are now out-of-step with contemporary issues and approaches, the Ventura River Watershed Council urges the Board of Supervisors to undertake a comprehensive update of water-related goals, policies, and programs in the County’s General Plan and Area Plans.

At this early juncture, we offer the following general recommendations:

The General Plan should recognize watersheds as a water management framework and strongly support the important integrated and collaborative nature of water resource planning and management. Opportunities to explicitly integrate the considerable work and expertise of local watershed groups and their watershed plans into the land use planning process should be considered. The interdependent nature of water supply, water quality, flooding, biological resources, and related issues should be made explicit in the General Plan. This effort should be closely coordinated with the WCVC and their IRWM planning efforts.

The General Plan should emphasize the leadership role that the County can play in terms of fulfilling *regional* water planning and management needs. For example, there is a need for more regional data collection, analysis, and distribution⎯such as for ongoing regional water supply and demand monitoring. This could be accomplished through regular updates to the 1994 Ventura County Water Management Plan, which contained much of this regional data and was developed by the Planning Division.

We invite you to take advantage of the Ventura River Watershed Council meetings during your General Plan update process. The Council represents an established stakeholder group, meetings are well attended, and our participants are generally educated about water issues and engaged at the meetings.

We look forward to working with you on the General Plan update.

If you have any questions, please contact Lorraine Walter, Ventura River watershed coordinator, at lorraine@ovlc.org.

Thank you for considering these comments.

Sincerely,