

One Water, One Watershed: A Plan calls for a New 21st Century Water Ethic
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Drought historically announces economic down turns. It is true again. How long can your business and your customers survive without sustainable reliable clean water? How long could you survive if water cost two or three times more? Are you willing to pay for the marginal cost of the last acre foot purchased, pumped and treated? What if your City or County needed to because of these economic times pass on to you the real cost of managing runoff? This runoff, urban slobber, is from over watering our lawns throughout the watershed. When this run off reaches the beach, public health has to post the beach closed due to bacterial contamination. Not only does this disappoint beach goers, but has a powerful negative impact on the economy.

The water districts in the Santa Ana River Watershed work very successfully to insure we enjoy reliable water. But it has become very costly. A new 10mgd desalter could run \$63 million. New water from the North will run \$1,000 an acres foot, if you can get it. A family uses about an acre per year. A new recycling plant will cost \$30-35 Million. Every district is looking for funds to finance new water so that when we turn on the tap, high quality water always flows. This same water also flows off our yards, down the streets and into gutters, collecting toxicity as it goes. And those responsible for water quality are also good professionals with a mission to protect beaches among other things from contamination. Perhaps they are planning a dry weather treatment plant near the ocean to capture all this runoff and treat it before it can reach the beach. This plant will cost \$20 Million. This cost must also be passed on and of course the water quality is also looking for funds to finance their project.

But imagine for a moment that instead of each water district and the county water quality people solving their own problems independently at a tremendous cost, lets say over 100 million, they came together to discuss how the watershed could be managed differently to solve these old problems and save a lot of money, especially money we don't have.

OWOW is the opportunity to do just that and never has there been a more important time than now. With a fiscal crises and a water crises, now is the time to set aside our specific job titles, become citizens of the Watershed, collaborate across boundaries, and create a new shared vision of how the Santa Ana Watershed works in order to enjoy a sustainable water supply, improve water quality, manage storm flows, all the most affordable way possible. This is a requirement of and the promise of Prop 84, chapter 2 Integrated Regional Watershed Management Plan. The State of California using Prop 84 chapter 2 and SB 1 as a catalyst have created a framework for addressing Integrated Regional Watershed Management Planning and have established a financial incentive for watersheds to do this hard work. There is \$114 million for the Santa Ana River Watershed. Sounds like a lot but it is only really a few drops.

We started by focusing on the symptoms that were in front of us. It has not rained much, not nearing enough, we are growing rapidly and as we do so, we interrupt how water replenishes our aquifers, the water that is imported from the delta is reduced and at risk for further reductions, and the Colorado is in a drought and our reservoirs are all down. We are facing expensive water quality clean up throughout the Watershed. Our water leaders in the 20th Century did a miracle of a job diversifying our water portfolio to plan for this these events, but we really did not expect that they would all happen at once, we have the perfect drought and a fiscal crisis to boot!

OWOW is an iterative process which began 40 years ago at SAWPA. In this regard we have the advantage of being proactive and experienced. This watershed more than any others has been characterized by award winning innovations and leads the State, the Nation and sometimes the world in innovations both in integrated planning and in the projects they created. Now the next generation, OWOW is on all stakeholders, not just the big five water wholesalers. Not just the water industry, all sectors are invited.

Last time we did this we had a few very bright hardworking scientists, engineers and consultants develop a draft plan and then using shuttle diplomacy, marketed it to all the interested stakeholders, tweaking it along the way.

This time we decided to invite all interested people to come to the table and bring all their resources and their water challenges with them. Rather than becoming paralyzed in trying to consider too many options or get overwhelmed by issues beyond our direct sphere of influence, we organized our water world into ten pillars:

- Water reliability
- Water quality Improvement
- Water use efficiency
- Flood Risk Management
- Climate Change
- EJ
- Water and Land Use
- Environmental Habitat
- Parks, Recreation and Open Space
- Recycled water

Each pillar was led by an expert from the watershed and they in turn invited others experts and those passionate about water from through out the watershed to further the dialogue. All this work was done by volunteers, consultants, experts, and everyone else. Pillars did this work outside of the formal responsibilities of their day jobs, it is under other duties as assigned. They were generous with their time, energy and expertise much of which was after hours. I hope they found it as rewarding as I find it valuable.

We asked them to check their identity, affiliations, districts, county or city or anything with a boundary at the door. We asked them to think of themselves only citizens of the Santa Ana River Regional Watershed, and to suspend assumptions and balance advocacy and inquiry to foster a collective intelligence. All other loyalties, agendas and priorities were to be secondary to those of the holistic view of the Santa Ana River regional watershed. We knew that we were asking a lot. And it did not happen right a way. It takes practice to suspend our individual orientations and to adopt a new one. So to quote our Governor, “we blew up our boxes” and adopted only one, that of the whole watershed.

While the OWOW process is managed by SAWPA staff and funded by the SAWPA Commission, it grows out of the collaboration around the table.

The Pillars leaders and stakeholders are actively engaged in the work activities of the owow initiative.

The OWOW Steering Committee, made up of strong opinion leaders, comes from all corners of the watershed and represents Cities and Counties, the water industry, the Environmental community and

development. The Steering Committee directs and guides the work of the Pillars, it sets priorities, principles and values and recommends the final plan to the SAWPA Commission.

The SAWPA Commission will review the Plan for consistency with the adopted process and the law.

There are many Sub-regional watershed planning efforts working the watershed. They are:

Upper Santa Ana River Integrated Regional Management Plan
Integrated Regional Watershed Plan for Western Municipal Water District
Integrated Regional Water Management Plan for San Jacinto Watershed
Central Orange County Integrated Regional and Coastal Management Plan
North Orange County Integrated Regional Management Plan
Chino Creek Integrated Plan

This valuable work is folded into the OWOW document. They focused on a scale and granularity smaller than the watershed view.

The Beams, about 3,000 plus people, are those who know about the initiative. This includes the many groups we are presented to such Cities, Counties, business groups, service groups, universities, large State and National associations, garden groups and environmental groups and others.

We invited the business community to this conference and discussion because we feel that market based forces are more powerful than legal, regulatory or governmental action in spurring innovation and genuine change. But we know that we do not speak business, and I am told that our water speak does not resonate.

And then there is everyone else in the watershed. We have invited and continue to invite diverse people representing diverse views so that they can speak and listen to one another in new ways.

Individually no one has sufficient resources to address the sustainability issue we face. No one person has enough understanding, credibility or authority to connect the larger networks of people and organization to do this work. We must do it together. There are those whose roles I feel are crucial who are not yet involved and our invitation continues to seek their involvement in this owow initiative. And we will continue to shape and reshape the conversation.

The Process

This watershed has historically been very successful in developing visionary large scale water planning documents and has the awards to demonstrate that. However when we first met to discuss how to approach this next Integrated Regional Watershed Management Plan we decided to take a newer approach.

We have added three new areas of concern, Climate Change, EJ, and land use and three new capabilities to this OWOW process, a systems approach, seeing the whole system from the 30,000 foot level, collaboration across boundaries and not only solving problems but creating a new desirable future.

The OWOW plan describes this large regional Santa Ana River Watershed as a whole system, detailing the various working dynamics within it, both functional and dysfunctional.

Our watershed challenges are difficult and complex. We worked hard ourselves and helped others see another's reality. We are committed to honor the work of the sub regional planning groups, the work

that has gone us before us from the corners of the watershed. SAWPA has been a special venue where it is safe to reflect and be open and honest with one another in this work and in the work of the Round Tables.

We did not want to externalize the responsibility for dealing with difficult problems to others, or experts who reside elsewhere, but rather collectively as a whole took on the problems and looked to internally address the cause of these problems. We can get very angry at those responsible for the health of Delta because our water supply is no longer reliable. But this does nothing to give us the water security we need here at home.

We asked the Pillars to move easily from problem solving to creating, to create a new shared vision and to realize breakthrough innovations. To be both pragmatic and visionary, to look at possibility, evoking inspiration and creativity throughout the watershed. It is a miracle they did not quit.

Getting the whole system in the room

We see the watershed as a dynamic system, as a large regional hydrologic based watershed. We would be undermining our potential and the promise of Prop 84 Chapter 2 if we focused on a smaller area or just a few elements of the watershed.

The watershed is defined for us by Nature. To work within and in concert with the forces of Mother Nature is more efficient than engineering a fix around it. And in these days of fiscal constraints, it is all the more important to leverage the forces of Mother Nature, rather than work at odds with Nature.

If we see each problem, drought, climate change, water quality, Environmental Justice, as separate and approach each separately the solution we come up with will fall short or be opportunistic. Quick fixes do nothing to address deeper dysfunctions. More and more people are beginning to sense that the mounting sustainability crises are interconnected. This is our chance to think big.

Thinking big means stepping back and expanding the boundaries of our whole awareness. Most of us have a certain comfort zone within which we live and work. We operate within the boundaries of our own small system and ignore the larger system upon which our lives and work depend. But once we begin to look beyond the mental fence lines that keep us thinking small we will find our place in the larger organization, in our case, the watershed.

There is a lot to discuss outside of our comfort zone. We need to have long conversations between the upper water and lower watershed about the long term effects of a wildly successful conservation and recycling program in the upper watershed on the lower watershed.

So we focused on the Watershed as a whole and developed a long term strategy instead of simply fixing isolated problems. This work is ultimately about relationships. Building the capacity to collaborate is hard work and demands the best of people, particularly when it involves people from different organizations with different goals and little history of working together perhaps with history of distrust and antagonism.

Collaborate across boundaries

We strive to build new relationships of trust and genuine mutuality among people who previously had little of either.

We asked people to resist their desire to jump to a solution or to projects, and to invest time and energy to understand the whole watershed. How the issues fit together, how there could be unintended consequences. We guarded against quick fixes, emotional nostrums, and superficial answers to our complex problems.

No one has the answer by themselves, no one can articulate a vision and get it right. No single business or government has the answers. The answer will be created among all of us together.

Building the capacity to collaborate itself is hard work. It takes time and a high level of commitment.

Creating a new vs. problem solving

We have the opportunity to create anew not just solve the problems that the old way of doing things gave us. The change we are seeking is not a call to try harder to maintain the status quo. If we always do what we've always done we will always get what we got.

Problem solving is about making what you don't want go away. Creating a new involves bringing something you care about into reality such as sustainability, water reliability and quality. The difference between a creative mind set and a problem solving mindset is like the difference between a person who after a heart attack or stroke chooses to start living differently and one who lives in constant fear of another catastrophic health event. It all comes down to choice and the capacity to focus on a vision of what we truly desire instead of what we seek to avoid.

We are shifting the conversation from the familiar, avoiding something bad to doing something positive and new. Shifting the conversation from problems to possibilities lays a foundation for genuine commitment among those involved and gets them excited about working together. Creating draws its energy from dreams and visions of what people truly want to exist, in concert with accurate and insightful understanding of what is.

Let us be driven by aspiration not desperation. Let us move from the fear of the four horsemen to creating a future that enjoys a sustainable water supply of clean water in a functional watershed home to a diversity of creatures. So what does this look like?

Creating a shared vision

We asked people who feel strongly to let go of cherished beliefs and views so that they can allow something bigger than themselves to develop. There is plenty that we can disagree on but we searched for the big pieces that we could agree on.

We discovered that many of our problems are institutional not technical or physical in nature. By working better together we can solve many of the problems.

Our Vision sees in 2025 a watershed that is sustainable, enjoys reliable high quality water that is efficiently used, reduces carbon footprint, disadvantaged communities enjoy that same level of environmental protection and quality as does the balance of the watershed.

Enough water is provided for riparian and aquatic habitat, reliable high quality drinking water supply for all, TMDLs are addressed, the watershed is salt balanced, we match water quality to use, and promote natural groundwater recharge. Landscape is appropriate for where we live and is watered appropriately. We support smart growth. We don't have the water to waste and we can't afford the necessary clean up of the pollution the runoff brings.

This all adds up to a New Water Ethic, we will value water differently. This is not about sacrifice or giving up quality of life or life style; it is about rediscovering that water is valuable and precious.

Everyone is interested in how the projects will be funded. Before we call for projects, we must first agree to a shared vision for the Watershed. While there are many details not yet developed, we are committed to the following. We need to guard against falling into the familiar trap of optimizing our own piece of the puzzle rather than building shared understanding and a larger vision. The rating of projects will be transparent. The rating will arise from a process of collaboration among a meaningful cross section of key players in the watershed. And it will stand the test of many.

Summary

We take responsibility for the health of the watershed and a new shared vision emerges that unites us, and drives our investment in the future in a new informed way. The health of the watershed is more important than any personal or agency agenda. By working together, we can address the systemic problems of water quality and reliability.

Our past Chair, Ron Sullivan, stated during the OWOW kickoff April 2007 that if we want to travel fast, go alone but if we want to go far, go with others. We have chosen to go with others and have made many great friends along the way.

The Green Valley Initiative and Ali Sahabi have created a movement and brand that is powerful and effective not only in our view of ourselves but in how those out side of this watershed view us.

We invite you to explore how you can proactively integrate sustainability factor into every dimension of your business strategy and into the core of your investment and decision making process across you organization. It will save on your bottom line, protect you against emerging forces and brand you as a leader.

If we are to accomplish the level of success necessary in 21st Century we need all of you and you institutions too! We need networks of business, governmental and non government institutions to influence the plan we are working on.

We hope that a collective awakening happens that changes how people see our watershed, and how they value water. We know that these changes need to happen, as a mounting threat of environmental and fiscal crises and the 4 horsemen have arrived.

We live in a desert and every drop counts. As a community we will to step back, expand our boundaries and see the larger limit on natural resources. Our watershed is our boat. If it leaks, we all go down together.

If we do nothing the current and future costs are enormous for rich and poor, republicans, and democrats, for profits and non profits, private and public sector.

The work ahead belongs to all of us. We invite you to embrace a 21st Century Water Ethic.