



California Regional Water Quality Control Board

Los Angeles Region



Terry Tamminen
Secretary for
Environmental
Protection

Over 50 Years Serving Coastal Los Angeles and Ventura Counties
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To: Interested Persons

From: Renee DeShazo
Staff Environmental Scientist, Regional Programs

Date: September 9, 2004

Re: Notice of Public Workshop on a Tentative Resolution to Clarify Existing Authority to Regulate Hydromodifications within the Los Angeles Region, and Articulate the Intent to Develop a Regional Policy on Hydromodification of Streams in the Los Angeles Region

Regional Board staff will hold a public workshop on September 24, 2004 to discuss and hear public comments on a tentative resolution to clarify existing authority to regulate hydromodifications within the Los Angeles Region and outline future steps to develop a regional policy on hydromodification of streams in the Los Angeles Region.

Public Workshop
September 24, 2004, 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon
Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board, Library
320 W. 4th Street, 2nd Floor
Los Angeles, California

The tentative resolution is available on the Regional Board's web site at http://www.swrcb.ca.gov/rwqcb/html/meetings/public_notices.html by scrolling to the bullet entitled "Tentative Board Resolutions". Please contact Renee DeShazo at (213) 576-6783 or Melinda Becker at (213) 576-6681 if you have any questions. Please share this notice with others who might be interested in the tentative resolution and upcoming public workshop. Note that the Regional Board may impose time limits on public comments at the workshop to allow everyone the opportunity to speak.

The tentative resolution was previously sent to interested persons and posted on the Regional Board's website on August 12, 2004. The public hearing on the tentative resolution, which was initially scheduled for the September 2, 2004 Board meeting, was continued to the regularly scheduled Board meeting on October 7, 2004 to allow interested persons additional time to submit comments. The current deadline for written comments on the tentative resolution is 5:00 p.m. on September 17, 2004.

Background

The Regional Board holds as one of its highest priorities to preserve the Region's remaining natural water courses and to restore, to the extent feasible, the highly modified urban rivers in the Los Angeles Region. Protecting the physical and biological integrity of water bodies within the Los Angeles Region consistent with the federal Clean Water Act and the Porter-Cologne Water Quality Control Act (Porter-Cologne Act) requires careful consideration of projects that alter natural stream flow or stream channels. The alteration of stream flow or the beds and banks of rivers, streams, and creeks, including ephemeral washes, is generally referred to as a hydromodification.

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The tentative resolution being considered by the Regional Board is intended to clarify the existing authority of the Board to regulate hydromodifications within the Los Angeles Region. Further, this resolution is intended to outline future steps including without limitation Basin Plan amendments to strengthen the Board's ability to protect the physical and biological integrity of the Region's water bodies.

Human civilization has attempted to alter the environment through hydromodifications for centuries. In recent history, these hydromodifications were made in order to maximize the developable land area for housing and other urban development. Urbanization, and the corresponding increase in impervious area within the watershed and decrease in the width of natural floodplains, often results in significantly altered patterns of surface runoff and infiltration and, consequently, stream flow. This, in turn, necessitates further in-stream hydromodification in order to stabilize banks and constrain the stream to the channel to prevent flooding. The sequence of events is discussed extensively in the Basin Plan and in the Regional Board's municipal storm water permit for Los Angeles County. Both of these documents are available on the Regional Board web site at www.swrcb.ca.gov/rwqcb4/.

Many hydromodifications, which are undertaken with laudable goals, have later been shown to destabilize and enlarge stream channels as well as degrade habitat and reduce species abundance and diversity. As a result, it is important that hydromodifications be carefully considered to ensure that the immediate improvements sought are designed in such a way as to avoid unintended adverse consequence on the biological community and the character of the receiving water both in the vicinity and downstream of the hydromodification.

This tentative resolution provides the Regional Board with the opportunity to emphasize the value of the Region's natural water bodies; the multiple benefits they provide including high quality habitat, recreational opportunities and groundwater recharge; and the importance of preserving our natural water courses. The resolution represents one step toward strengthening the Regional Board's ability to scrutinize and regulate hydromodifications to ensure that potential impacts are avoided whenever possible or otherwise minimized and mitigated. The Regional Board has initiated other steps by requiring local stormwater management agencies to evaluate peak flow controls and determine numeric criteria to prevent and minimize erosion of natural channels and banks caused by urbanization, and to protect stream habitat.

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