

LA COUNTY WATER PLAN

Nature-based Solutions Blue Ribbon Panel Workshop #1 Meeting Notes

Tuesday, September 24, 2024 from 1:00 – 4:00 PM

Better World Group Office (801 S. Grand Ave., Ste 200, Los Angeles, CA 90017)

- Objectives**
- *Approve the LA County Water Plan Nature-based Solutions Task Force Charter*
 - *Develop a shared understanding of Blue Ribbon Panelists' definitions, criteria, and standards for nature-based solutions*
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Attendees

Panel Co-Chair: Eileen Alduenda (Council for Watershed Health)

Panel Members:

Amanda Begley (TreePeople)
Isaac Brown (Stillwater Sciences)
Maggie Gardner (LA Waterkeeper)
Keith Hala (Los Angeles County Public Works)
Bruce Hamamoto (Los Angeles County Public Works)
Samantha Johnson (Tongva Taraxat Paxaavxa Land Conservancy)
Nurit Katz (University of California, Los Angeles)
Gary Lai (Quixotic Nature-based Solutions)
Gabiella Lassos (Sacred Places Institute)
Esther Lofton (UCCE)
Annelisa Moe (Heal the Bay)
Mark Nguyen (City of Los Angeles – Sanitation)
Natalie Ouwersloot (Foothill Municipal Water District)
Luis Perez (Los Angeles County Public Works)
Claire Robinson (Amigos de los Rios)
Jane Tsong (Watershed Conservation Authority)
Andrea Vona (Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation)
Melina Watts (Safe Clean Water Program)
Melanie Winter (The River Project)

Panel Facilitation Support Team:

Jason Casanova (Council for Watershed Health)
Debbie Enos (Council for Watershed Health)
Shona Calzada Ganguly (Better World Group)
Kimberly Guo (Better World Group)

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Agenda Item	Notes
1. Welcome & Introductions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shona kicked off the meeting with a welcome, a round of introductions around the room, and an icebreaker activity.
2. Review of Task Force Kick Off Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eileen shared an overview of the Task Force and the directives of the Blue Ribbon Panel.
3. Nature-based Solutions Task Force Draft Charter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eileen provided an overview of the draft Charter for the Nature-based Solutions Task Force, including the Task Force's decision-making process of majority vote. <p>Open Discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants clarified that the Blue Ribbon Panel will support progress towards relevant CWP targets and strategies, but will not be expected to accomplish them. Eileen reminded participants that the Task Force is open to all, and invited participants to invite others to join. <p>Draft Charter Vote:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A majority of Blue Ribbon Panelists voted to approve the Task Force Draft Charter, with one vote in abstention.
4. Develop a Shared Nature-based Solutions definition for LA County Water Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shona and Eileen led the Blue Ribbon Panel through an activity to collect Panelists' examples of grey infrastructure, green infrastructure, and nature-inspired mimicry. Following this activity, Shona and Eileen led the Blue Ribbon Panel through a discussion of key aspects of Nature-based Solutions. <p>Open Discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> People are part of nature, and are thus continuous parts of nature-based solutions. Discussion of nature-based solutions must always include involvement and consideration of people as creators, designers, and stewards of nature-based solutions. Non-nature-based solutions can supplement nature-based solutions. Drywells, for example, can infiltrate large volumes of water to support downstream groundwater-dependent ecosystems. Nature-based solutions must prioritize biodiversity and provide ecosystem benefits relevant and additive to existing natural ecological systems. Nature-based solutions must support and use the existing natural ecological system to provide solutions to humans' needs, such as flooding. Designers and implementers of nature-based solutions must consider where proposed nature-based solutions fit into the overall ecological system. Panelists resonated with the idea of working <i>with</i> the land, rather than working <i>on</i> the land, emphasizing the need to recognize existing conditions and allow natural processes to shape projects over time. Nature-based solutions must be appropriately sited based on site conditions and history. Criteria are necessary to ensure proper siting of nature-based solutions, such as bioswales.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nature-based solutions must incorporate soil health. For nature-based solutions to thrive, soil health must be remediated and restored. • Greater discussion is needed about what plant species are suitable for nature-based solutions for the SCWP. Participants discussed whether nature-based solutions should mandate installation of native plants or climate-appropriate plants, or installation of new plants through removal of existing mature trees. Participants also flagged that nature-based solutions for the SCWP may conflict with nature-based solutions for other issues, such as extreme heat. An example provided was landscaping trees, which are important for mitigating the urban heat island effect but require irrigation, countering SCWP goals. In addition, participants agreed that plants that serve bioremediation functions should be considered separately from nature-based solutions for the SCWP. • An LA County-wide definition for nature-based solutions is necessary to ensure nature-based solutions are broadly and more consistently applied throughout the County. Participants recommended that the countywide definition be followed with issue-specific sub-definitions of nature-based solutions, such as for water management. A countywide definition would enable greater consistency across the region and align various plans, such as the General Plan and Climate Plan, while the issue-specific sub-definitions would allow for the flexibility to adjust to local contexts. • Nature-based solutions for the SCWP should emphasize multiple benefits, such as environmental education and soil infiltration.
<p>5. Los Angeles County Definition of Nature-based Solutions (Safe Clean Water Plan Definition)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eileen and Shona led a discussion to identify ways to refine the SCWP definition of nature-based solutions using other definitions of nature-based solutions from California Natural Resources Agency, IUCN, and White House Council for Environmental Quality. <p>Open Discussion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The words “simultaneous,” “ecosystem,” and “societal change” are shared across multiple definitions. Some words, such as “biodiversity” and “ecosystem” should be further defined. • Greater discussion is needed to ensure nature-based solutions are prioritized in SCWP funding. Future discussions should consider how nature-based solutions, such as the acquisition of open space for water quality and land back, can be integrated into SCWP scoring. Participants noted that under the SCWP, nature mimicry receives funding. • Comparative cost could be considered as a criterion for evaluating nature-based solutions. The cost of nature-based solutions can be less than that of technological solutions, and can be more efficient at times.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nature-based solution design, development, and implementation must incorporate Indigenous traditional ecological knowledge in a way that does not burden the tribes. For instance, projects above a certain budget could be required to pay tribal consultants for their knowledge and expertise.
<p>6. Breakout Group Discussion: Develop Shared List of Nature-based Solutions Criteria & Standards for LA County Water Plan</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shona led a breakout group activity, in which groups prioritized their (1) vision for LA County; (2) criteria for nature-based solutions; (3) standards for nature-based solutions; and (4) exemplary examples of nature-based solutions. <p>Breakout Group Presentations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visions for LA County presented include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Permeable landscapes with multiple benefits ○ Naturalized landscapes with hydrology ○ Healthy and resilient watersheds and ecosystems ○ Increased natural parks and outdoor spaces ○ Human integrated restoration ○ Regional water supply integrated with local ecosystems • Criteria for nature-based solutions should include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Equity ○ Increased open space ○ Reduction of the heat island effect ○ Net gains in biodiversity and ecosystem integrity ○ Conversion of impervious surface to native habitat through natural processes ○ Improvement of natural hydrologic function and functional flows of streams, rivers, and wetlands • Standards for nature-based solutions should include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Appropriate for place/watershed, including empowered community governance and long-term stewardship ○ Improvements in community wellbeing and ecosystem function ○ Evidence-based adaptive management ○ Providing multiple benefits to environment and community ○ Human use (recreation, education) and community stewardship for operations and maintenance engagement ○ Consult a certified native landscaping specialist and natural infrastructure specialist for operations and maintenance • Exemplary examples of nature-based solutions include <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Mary Jackson Elementary School ○ Watershed Discovery Campus ○ Dominguez Gap Wetlands ○ Upper Las Virgenes Canyon Open Space Preserve ○ Rosemont Preserve

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Bimini Slough Ecology Park ○ South Los Angeles Wetlands Park ○ Concept Rendering of the Bowtie Project at the Los Angeles River ○ Vegetated infiltration, including parkway basins, especially at schools ○ Protect and restore natural habitat such as wetlands and riparian waterways ● In addition, participants noted that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Another suggested criterion for nature-based solutions is the net gain or net loss of carbon through the project, such as the scope 3 emissions of embodied carbon through the addition of cement. In addition, wetlands and riparian habitat are major carbon sinks, and can supplement carbon sequestration goals. ○ Greater discussion is needed to provide clarity on “groundwater dependent” and “groundwater connected” ecosystems. ○ Another suggested standard or criterion for nature-based solutions is the meaningful incorporation of Indigenous knowledge.
<p>6. Wrap Up & Next Steps</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Eileen reviewed the timeline of upcoming Blue Ribbon Panel meetings, and tasked attendees with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Submitting key resources to include in the Literature Review ○ Identifying key features that distinguish grey infrastructure, green infrastructure, nature inspired/mimicry, and nature-based solutions.