

NATURE BASED SOLUTIONS

Phase 2 Report
June 2026

Executive Summary

Phase 2 of the Nature-based Solutions Task Force (Feb - June 2026) focused on developing recommendations for the assessment of Nature-based Solutions within the Safe, Clean Water Program (SCW Program) and identifying next steps for broader countywide application. Phase 2 Recommendations build on Phase 1 of the Task Force, which developed a shared NbS Definition, Standard, Criteria, and recommendations to support more consistent use and prioritization of Nature-based Solutions across Los Angeles County.

The Phase 2 process was shaped by a central challenge: translating a holistic, systems-based NbS Standard into a metric that is feasible, usable, aligned with the current SCW Program structure, and which effectively communicates progress toward the goal of "prioritizing NbS". Nature-based Solutions are inherently place-based and multi-benefit. Their value depends not only on discrete project features, but also on-site context, ecological function, community benefit, long-term stewardship, and the relationships among hydrology, soils, vegetation, habitat, and climate resilience. Near-term integration needs into the SCW Program encouraged the Task Force to work within existing SCW Project Module data, current reporting structures, and the Watershed Planning adaptive management process. Accordingly, the Task Force reviewed existing SCW Program metrics, revisited the additional metric categories recommended in Phase 1, and developed an expanded set of recommended metrics organized by the NbS Criteria. Through workshop activities, surveys, and iterative review with Public Works and consultant teams, the Task Force moved from a broad list of possible measures toward a more feasible near-term metric for application within the SCW's Regional and Municipal Program:

What proportion of project benefits, including water quality, water supply, and community investment benefits, are achieved through Nature-based Solutions?

The recommended NbS Metric is intended to serve multiple related purposes: support project-level assessment of alignment with the NbS Definition, Standard, and Key Criteria; inform Watershed Planning; and lay the groundwork for future scoring updates.

The recommended metric assesses the proportion of a project's reported benefits delivered through Nature-based Solutions. This approach begins to align project assessment with the NbS framework while enabling the SCW Program to identify how Nature-based Solutions contribute to existing Program goals without substantially increasing applicant burden. It also creates a pathway for tracking progress toward the County Water Plan and SCW Program goals of prioritizing Nature-based Solutions.

The following guidance outlines how best to use the recommended metric with the understanding that this is a short-term approach rather than a final assessment framework that can support integration of NbS assessment into the SCW Program Watershed Plans and SCW Project Module. Recommended approaches for the application of the recommended metric in the medium-term should focus on additional data collection, clearer guidance, and scoring alignment and in the long-term, building towards a comprehensive framework that aligns assessment, design guidance, scoring, stewardship, and implementation across departments, agencies, and funding programs. Guidance has been broken down into SCWP and countywide applications where appropriate.

- Use the Recommended NbS Metric as a near-term integration tool:
 - SCW Program: Within the context of the SCW Program, the recommended metric serves as a starting point for NbS assessment, as it builds on data already collected through the SCW Program Project Module. Accordingly it is recommended that the metric be clearly framed as an initial assessment tool rather than a comprehensive measure of NbS value.
 - Countywide: Countywide, it is recommended that discussion explore how NbS assessment is currently understood and measured, across County departments, and how the recommended metric may serve as a starting point for broader application.

- Conduct an evaluation of existing NbS: *Refer to the "Proposed Metrics Structure" (Appendix B) for the recommended "Site Context and Assessment"¹ information that the Task Force recommends be collected by all project proponents across project types.*
 - SCW Program: The Task Force recommends project proponents document baseline ecological and social conditions, habitat type, environmental justice considerations, expected post-project ecological condition, ecotope, potential off-site impacts, and identify existing NbS on-site. This information will provide context within its respective watershed plans, ground project review in place-based conditions within the context and help determine whether the project advances ecological and community uplift.
 - Countywide: Similarly, the Task Force recommends that when undertaking project development or other interventions, documenting baseline ecological and social conditions, habitat type, environmental justice considerations, expected post-project ecological conditions, ecotope, potential off-site impacts, and existing NbS on-site be treated as a necessary precondition for intervention. It is recommended that collecting and considering this information be normalized as part of a broader project development approach countywide.

- Pair the metric with qualitative questions:
 - SCW Program: It is recommended that the SCW Program Project Module include qualitative questions aligned with Phase 1 Recommendations that allow project proponents to explain how project benefits are achieved through Nature-based Solutions. Qualitative questions could supplement, rather than replace, the recommended quantitative approach. These questions could be used to allow project proponents to explain why they did or did not select a Nature-based Solutions intervention, provide additional site- or project-specific context, and describe how project benefits are achieved. These responses can inform the roll-up metric and serve as a high-level assessment consideration.

¹ Site Context and Assessment refers to an initial review of baseline site conditions, existing ecological and hydrologic features, environmental justice considerations, opportunities, constraints, resilience factors, and existing Nature-based Solutions features on site that should be collected by all project proponents.

- Countywide: Where a program and its adaptive management process have not already been established or fully scoped, it is recommended that qualitative questions be considered as part of the assessment and design of NbS. These questions can help develop a fuller picture of the nuanced interactions among project factors, features, and impacts, particularly within multi-benefit projects where outcomes may not be adequately captured through quantitative metrics alone.
- **Develop clearer guidance for project proponents and reviewers:**
 - SCW Program: Public Works can continue to refine guidance on which BMPs, project features, capture fates, and design approaches may be counted as Nature-based Solutions. Providing project proponents with examples of qualifying and non-qualifying approaches would support more consistent reporting and application of the recommended metric.
 - Countywide: This recommendation supports a broader countywide need for clearer NbS design guidance. The near-term metric categorizes BMPs and project features using information already submitted through the SCW Program Project Module. Comprehensive design guidance would require a separate, longer-term effort with additional technical and design expertise.
- **Align the Recommended NbS Metric with future SCW Program scoring revisions:**
 - SCW Program: It is recommended that the metric inform future scoring updates so that projects with stronger NbS integration receive meaningful recognition. Without a connection to scoring, the metric may have limited influence on project design and funding outcomes.
- **Identify future data needs beyond the current SCW Project Module:**
 - SCW Program: Existing SCW Program data is a useful starting point, but it does not fully capture the systems-based value of Nature-based Solutions.
 - Countywide: It is recommended that additional data be collected over time on ecological uplift, soil health, habitat connectivity, biodiversity, stewardship, maintenance, Tribal consultation, community engagement, adaptive management, and long-term performance for use within the SCW Program and across County programs.
- **Pilot metric on a range of project types:**
 - SCW Program: The recommended metric would benefit from testing across traditional infrastructure, green infrastructure, and strong or “gold standard” Nature-based Solutions projects to identify where it may overcount, undercount, or fail to capture important NbS value.
 - Countywide: Pilot the recommended metric across a range of County project types to assess its broader applicability, limitations, and potential need for adaptation across departments and contexts.
- **Use expert or peer review to support site specific + holistic evaluation:**
 - SCW Program: It is recommended that a Peer Review Panel or similar expert review mechanism support consistent, interdisciplinary assessment. Expert review can help

determine whether the reported proportion of NbS-attributable benefits accurately reflects project design, site context and assessment, ecological function, and long-term performance. Consider the relevance of an expert or peer review support recommendation in both the Regional and Municipal Programs.

- Countywide: County departments could consider equivalent interdisciplinary peer or expert review mechanisms and approaches to support holistic, consistent, site-specific evaluation of NbS within existing project review and approval processes, where relevant.
- **Plan for short, medium, and long-term countywide application:**
 - In the short term, it is recommended that the County programs and departments apply the metric within existing programs and data systems where feasible.
 - In the medium term, agencies and departments can identify additional data needs, promote cohesive design guidance, and align project assessment approaches.
 - In the long term, the County can advance a standardized but flexible NbS assessment framework that supports systems-based design, cross-agency coordination, stewardship, and adaptive management.

Deliverable 6A.1: 5–15 page summary of Phase 2 of the NbS Task Force, with identified Next Steps. The document will outline recommendations for metric development, prioritization and application to support NbS assessment within the SCW Program and countywide.

Introduction

The Nature-based Solutions Task Force (“Task Force”) was formed in August 2024 as part of the County Water Plan’s call for clearer guidance around Nature-based Solutions (NbS) and to help achieve the County Water Plan’s goal to equitably secure safe, clean, and reliable water resources for Los Angeles County by 2045.

Phase 1 of the Task Force (September 2024-June 2025) was dedicated to standardizing and prioritizing Nature-based Solutions by developing a Definition and Standard, complete with criteria, and actionable recommendations that build on the Safe, Clean Water Program (SCW Program) 2025 Interim Guidance and the Metrics and Monitoring Study.²

Phase 2 of the Task Force (January 2026-June 2026) focused on recommending metrics for the assessment of Nature-based Solutions to be applied to the SCW Program and to complement the Initial 2026 Watershed Plans. The Task Force also explored approaches for countywide application, including how Nature-based Solutions assessment may be adopted across planning processes, departmental initiatives, and multi-agency collaborations beyond the SCW Program. Recommendations generated as part of Phase 2 will contribute to the NbS Addendum for the SCW Program Watershed Plans, will be considered in future scoring updates, and will support recommendations on how best to apply NbS assessment countywide.

Metrics, sometimes referred to as *Performance Measures (PMs)* in the SCW Program, are standardized values derived from one or more measures. Metrics quantify benefits provided by individual projects or programs and may express relationships among data points, such as gallons captured per acre or trees planted per project. While metrics are measurable and used for analysis, they do not necessarily correspond directly to a target or objective.

The Recommended NbS Metric was developed within the SCW Program’s existing Ordinance requirements, Watershed Planning process, and adaptive management framework.

Within the SCW Program adaptive management process, Indicators, or Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), are a subset of metrics used to measure progress toward defined goals or targets. Indicators aggregate or summarize Performance Measures at the Watershed Area and SCW Program-wide scales.

² NbS Definition: “Nature-based Solutions address societal challenges through sustainable actions that protect and restore living ecosystems and their functions to ensure human well-being and benefit biodiversity by meeting the established Nature-based Solutions standard and associated criteria.”

NbS Standard: “Nature-based Solutions must implement place-appropriate and evidence-backed living processes and infrastructure, such as soil and vegetation, to lead to improved long-term ecosystem function, habitat connectivity, and community health and well-being. Success of Nature-based Solutions should be qualitatively and quantitatively evaluated using the following criteria and indicators.”

The complete list of NbS Criteria and the complete Phase 1 Recommendations Report link can be found: [here](#).

They are used to quantify the cumulative benefits of SCW Program-funded projects and to communicate and track progress toward Watershed Area and Program goals.

As discussed throughout this report, the NbS metrics work also needed to consider how well individual projects align with the NbS Definition, Standard, and Key Criteria, how the Recommended NbS Metric could be applied within the SCW Program through the Initial Watershed Plans and future scoring updates, and how NbS assessment could support broader countywide implementation.

Through this work, the Task Force emphasized that “metrics” are not neutral. Metrics, as defined above, can shape what gets designed, funded, and built. In the context of the SCW Program, they can influence project design over time, reinforce what “counts” as a Nature-based Solution, and can determine which projects advance through the program. The core challenge is translating a systems-based NbS Standard into a metric that is usable and approachable without relying on a limited checklist logic.

In recommending a metric for the assessment of NbS, the Task Force had to reconcile the broader goal of holistic Nature-based Solutions evaluation with the current structure of the SCW Program and the data already being collected through the program. The work completed as part of Phase 2 should be understood as an early step toward a comprehensive approach to NbS assessment, rather than a final approach. Moving toward a metric that reflects the specificity and systems-based assessment that Nature-based Solutions warrant will require a strategic medium- and long-term vision for better aligning NbS assessment with the Key NbS Criteria and project interventions countywide.

Detailed Overview of Phase 2

The following section provides a summary of the Phase 2 NbS Task Force Meetings.

In Phase 2 of the NbS Task Force, Council for Watershed Health (CWH) coordinated three virtual meetings and four in-person Task Force meetings, with approximately 25 attendees participating in each meeting. These meetings incorporated iterative workshop activities designed to support the Task Force in developing a recommended metric aligned with the Nature-Based Solutions Task Force Final Recommendations Report, including the NbS Definition, Standard, and Criteria.

As Task Force Lead, CWH worked closely with the NbS Task Force throughout the process to ensure that a diverse and representative range of perspectives informed the recommendations. Task Force participants were initially selected in Phase 1 to reflect geographic diversity, including representatives from a range of organizations, Tribal perspectives, and agencies; and ensure representation across multiple disciplines, including engineering, landscape architecture, and ecology. In Phase 2, participation shifted to an open-invite format.

The following section details the goals and documents generated through each NbS Task Force Meeting in Phase 2.

Task Force Meeting	Feedback Collected
Task Force Phase 2 Kick-off (Virtual)	An initial Kick-off meeting shared out the scope for Phase 2 of the NbS Task Force.

Task Force Meeting 1 Date: 02/10/2026 Meeting Objectives: • Establish desired outcome for Phase 2 • Learn about existing metrics + how Task Force deliverables will be continued by County • Iterate on the Phase 2 Process	An initial "Process Memo" document was developed to lay out the challenges of setting qualitative metrics as part of Phase 2, resharing the work on metrics completed in Phase 1, and laying out the tentative process for each of the meetings so that Task Force members could provide input on the process before it commenced.
Task Force Meeting 2 Date: 03/10/2026 Meeting Objectives: • Create an expanded list of metrics for each of the NbS Criteria • Identify projects that meet each NbS Criteria well • Decide on an approach for narrowing down the expanded list of criteria	Prior to the meeting, a document was shared with the Task Force compiling all existing Watershed Planning metrics and the additional Nature-based Solutions metrics recommended during Phase 1, organized by each of the Nature-based Solutions Task Force Key Criteria. During the meeting, Task Force members reviewed the document and were assigned to breakout groups focused on one Key Nature-based Solutions Criterion. In each group, participants identified an ideal project that would meet the assigned criterion well and considered what a project would need to demonstrate to accomplish that criterion. Groups developed qualitative summaries to help ensure the recommended metrics reflected the intent of each criterion. They also reviewed the existing metric list, added any missing metrics, and flagged metrics that may belong under multiple criteria. Following this discussion, the Task Force determined that the best way to narrow down the expanded list of metrics would be through a survey.
Task Force Meeting Report Out (Virtual)	A virtual report out served to answer any questions and provide updates for folks unable to attend in-person meetings.
Task Force Meeting 3 Date: 04/07/2026 Meeting Objectives: • Discuss the NbS Metrics Survey	Feedback from the previous meeting was captured through a follow-up survey, which asked participants to narrow down metrics by criterion. A review of the survey results provided the basis for the "Proposed Metrics Structure" (Appendix B), which was reviewed by the Task Force during Task Force Meeting 3. The structure was shared

Review models for the Working Metric Design	with the Task Force for discussion, including how it could be incorporated into the SCW Program Project Module. The Task Force team and Public Works consultants then reviewed this input to determine which metrics could be included in the SCW Program Project Applicant Portal and what the structure of that form should look like.
Task Force Meeting 4 (Virtual) Date: 05/05/2026 Meeting Objectives: - Share updates on the Metrics setting process in collaboration with Paradigm - Outline final deliverables for Nature-based Solutions Task Force Phase 2 - Provide an overview of Feasibility Study Guidelines and Project Scoring Criteria refinements process to support transparency	A virtual meeting was held to share the work completed by the Task Force team and Public Works consultants to reconcile the "Proposed Metrics Structure" (Appendix B) and Task Force input with an approach that would be feasible within the SCW Program Project Module. Through this process, the team arrived at the following metric: "What proportion of project benefits, including water quality, water supply, and community investment benefits, are achieved through Nature-based Solutions?"
Task Force Meeting 5 Date: 06/09/2026 Meeting Objectives: - Provide Updates/Walk Through on the SCW Program NbS Metrics Integration Survey - Listening Session on NbS Scoring with Craftwater - Close out Phase 2 of the NbS Task Force	The final in-person meeting was focused on having the County and their consultant team (Craftwater) share an overview of the scoring revisions process moving forward over the next nine months. Craftwater discussed ordinance language to help establish the current capabilities of the program. Craftwater then took suggestions and feedback from the Task Force as options to consider within any revisions focused on connections to NbS.

In addition to the meetings detailed above additional one-on-ones with Task Force Participants, the Public Works Team, and Public Works Consultants were conducted to support the Phase 2 effort.

Key Challenges

The following section summarizes the key challenges that shaped the development of metric recommendations during Phase 2 of the Nature-based Solutions Task Force.

The Recommended NbS Metric is grounded in the SCW Program's "adaptive management" process and the immediate opportunity to identify a metric or metrics that fit within a NbS Addendum to the Watershed Plans. This created a specific near-term opportunity for the Task Force to contribute to the

SCW Program, while also requiring the Task Force to translate the broader logic of the Phase 1 recommendations into a metric that is applicable within the current SCW Program framework.

The Phase 2 process addressed three related but distinct applications of the Recommended NbS Metric: project-level assessment of alignment with the Nature-based Solutions Definition, Standard, and Criteria, use as a means of measuring achieved SCW Program Watershed Planning targets and/or goals, and potential use as an input or consideration in future project scoring.

Balancing these priorities presented a significant challenge. The Task Force had to consider the tradeoffs involved in developing a feasible near-term metric that could support SCW Program goals and targets and inform future scoring, while also preserving the project-level and systems-based assessment central to the Task Force's understanding of effective Nature-based Solutions.

These applications are at times discussed together throughout the report because they were considered together during the Task Force process. However, their implementation will differ.

The way these applications would ultimately fit together was not clear at the outset and continued to be defined throughout Phase 2; the Task Force developed the metric while the relationship between Nature-based Solutions assessment and future SCW Program scoring remained under development. As a result, the Task Force had to consider the limitations of advancing a metric without a confirmed understanding of how it would ultimately be incorporated into project evaluation or scoring.

An additional challenge was balancing the need for near-term feasibility with the Task Force's broader assessment goals. To provide recommendations relevant to the SCW Program and avoid overburdening project proponents, the Task Force attempted to use existing SCW Program data points where possible. However, the Task Force recognized that doing so would require data points that are designed to capture the nuance, site specificity, and systems-based logic that are necessary for a thorough assessment of Nature-based Solutions, as defined in Phase 1 of the NbS Task Force.

These challenges were coupled with the broader difficulty of establishing metrics for Nature-based Solutions. Nature-based Solutions are inherently holistic and systems-based. Effective assessment must therefore reflect that logic through a comprehensive quantitative and qualitative framework that balances site specificity with standardization, captures ecological and community benefits across multiple time scales, and accounts for both immediate and evolving project benefits, needs, and value.

In the context of the SCW Program, this challenge is further complicated by the existing burden on project proponents and the desire to incentivize Nature-based Solutions rather than discourage them through increased administrative and reporting requirements.

These compounding challenges shaped the Phase 2 process and the resulting recommended metric. Overall, tradeoffs were required to adapt project-level NbS assessment to the SCW Program's existing adaptive management process. Therefore, the Task Force understood this as a near-term step, with the recommendation that future SCW Program scoring and broader countywide applications would become increasingly aligned with the NbS Definition, Standard, and Key Criteria.

Recommending a Metric

The Recommended NbS Metric was positioned to serve multiple related purposes. During Phase 1, the Task Force focused primarily on identifying the data needed for project-level assessment: determining how well an individual project aligns with the NbS Definition, Standard, and Criteria. In Phase 2, this objective was reconciled with two additional goals: tracking and aggregating project contributions toward SCW Program goals and targets, and informing future scoring updates.

Accordingly, the Nature-based Solutions Task Force initially considered a broad set of data points organized by the NbS Criteria for inclusion in the recommended metric. However, the Task Force recognized that Nature-based Solutions can generate many different benefits and that selecting or combining only a limited number of metrics could misrepresent project performance, create unintended disincentives, or fail to apply consistently across project types. The Task Force also considered how the selected metric could influence project design over time. In this context, each individual metric or measurement, such as soil health, was understood as one “ingredient” rather than a sufficient measure of the multiple benefits a Nature-based Solution may provide.

The Task Force process then shifted toward identifying an approach that was feasible within the Phase 2 scope and the SCW Program’s existing adaptive management framework. Because the principal near-term implementation pathway relied largely on data already collected through the Program, the Task Force ultimately moved toward a single recommended metric for application to SCW Program projects:

“What proportion of project benefits, including water quality, water supply, and community investment benefits, are achieved through Nature-based Solutions?”

As of June 2026, the Public Works team is developing this metric further by reviewing the data currently measured in the SCW Program Project Module and determining how to assess and quantify what portion of water quality, water supply, and community investment benefits are derived from Nature-based Solutions. Part of this process involves determining which interventions, such as stormwater BMPs, capture fates, design approaches, and other currently measured project elements, should “count” as Nature-based Solutions.³

It is recommended that these changes be complemented by an initial “site context and assessment” (see Appendix B: “Proposed Metrics Structure”) step and qualitative questions in the SCW Program Project Module form, ultimately resulting in a rolled-up metric that shows what proportion of project benefits are accomplished through Nature-based Solutions.

*For the purposes of this report, **Site Context and Assessment** refers to an initial review of baseline site conditions, existing ecological and hydrologic features, environmental justice considerations, opportunities, constraints, resilience factors, and existing Nature-based Solutions features on site. Specific details on what the Task Force recommends be recorded in this step is captured in the “**Proposed Metrics Structure**” in Appendix B.*

³ This data was being collected via a survey designed by the NbS Task Force Team, Public Works, and Public Works consultants. The Survey and an overview of initial survey results can be found in Appendix C and Appendix D.

Next Steps and Future Integration

Safe, Clean, Water Program

In recommending an NbS metric, the Task Force acknowledges that the multiple uses of the metric, are related, they are not interchangeable and may require different implementation approaches.

In considering the role of the NbS metric as a form of project assessment, the Task Force shared that a project's Nature-based Solutions value cannot be reduced only to a proportion of reported benefits, and the metric should not be treated as capturing the full scope of Nature-based Solutions.

In the short term, the Recommended NbS Metric can anchor Nature-based Solutions evaluation in existing SCW Program data, and is designed to be useful for measuring progress towards SCW Program goals and targets, and supporting scoring revision.

In the medium and long term, it is recommended that the metric be paired with scoring revisions, additional portal guidance, and expert led site-specific project review⁴ to ensure that Nature-based Solutions are not only documented but meaningfully incentivized through SCW Program implementation.

The following section outlines an initial set of considerations and recommendations for the use of the recommended Nature-based Solutions metric in the SCW Program Watershed Planning process. Additional implementation guidance is provided in Deliverable 6A.2: Guidance on Nature-based Solutions Metrics for Consistent Evaluation within SCW Program.

Integration into the SCW Program Watershed Planning: The metric can be complemented by qualitative questions that allow project proponents to explain why they did or did not select a Nature-based Solutions intervention, provide additional site- or project-specific context, and describe how project benefits are achieved. These responses can inform the roll-up metric and serve as a high-level assessment consideration.

Integration of Site Context and Assessment: In the "Proposed Metrics Structure", the Task Force established the need for an initial site assessment. Requiring this of project proponents would support the systems-based logic of Nature-based Solutions; the Task Force strongly recommends that these considerations be increasingly integrated as an important part of future SCW Program projects.

Expert-led Site-Specific Project Review: Site-specific review can ensure that ecological, community, and design considerations are appropriately credited. Site-specific, expert-based review, whether through a Peer Review Panel ([see Phase 1 Recommendations](#)) or another mechanism, has been repeatedly identified by the Task Force as crucial to the assessment of Nature-based Solutions.⁵

⁴ "Expert-led, site-specific project review" was recommended in Phase 1. This could take a form similar to the Peer Review Panel recommended in Phase 1, or another form of expert review.

⁵ In Phase 1 of this effort, the NbS Blue Ribbon Panel recommended establishing a Peer Review Panel or similar interdisciplinary body of experts to assess project-specific site conditions, benefits, and trade-offs and support consistent evaluation across projects. Although this recommendation preceded development of the recommended NbS metric, the need to balance qualitative and quantitative factors has remained central to the Task Force's understanding of effective NbS assessment.

Additional Data Collection: The Task Force recommends that additional data be captured over time to more accurately assess a project’s Nature-based Solutions benefits and effectively incentivize Nature-based Solutions.

The Phase 2 Nature-based Solutions metric is intentionally anchored in data already collected through the SCW Program Project Module. It is intended to meet the Program where it is now, rather than serve as a complete measure of Nature-based Solutions. These limitations warrant clear acknowledgment in how the metric is used and interpreted and how future Nature-based Solutions assessment is planned over the medium and long term.

It is recommended that additional data be collected over time to more fully assess Nature-based Solutions, particularly where existing portal fields do not capture site context, ecological function, design quality, community priorities, long-term stewardship, or systems-based benefits.

Metric Pilot: It is recommended that the Phase 2 Nature-based Solutions metric be piloted through relevant Nature-based Solutions Task Force projects to identify where additional guidance and iterative refinement may be necessary.

The pilot can include traditional infrastructure projects, green infrastructure projects, and projects identified as strong or “gold standard” Nature-based Solutions. Projects identified by the Task Force as effective Nature-based Solutions include:

- LA River Fish Habitat Pilot Project
- The Bowtie
- Urban Orchard
- Eaton Canyon Landscape Recovery Center

Alignment Between the Nature-based Solutions Metric and SCW Program Scoring Revisions: The metric can indicate progress toward the target of prioritizing Nature-based Solutions and can provide Scoring Committees and WASCs with additional information about a project’s Nature-based Solutions contribution. However, without changes to the Nature-based Solutions scoring criteria, the metric may not meaningfully influence project design or funding outcomes.

It is strongly recommended that future scoring updates consider how the metric can be used to incentivize stronger Nature-based Solutions integration. A recommended approach is to create a scoring gradient based on the proportion of project benefits achieved through Nature-based Solutions. Projects could be required to meet a minimum threshold of Nature-based Solutions-attributable benefits, or projects with a higher proportion of benefits delivered through Nature-based Solutions could receive a higher score (or alternatively, a lower eligibility threshold). This approach would distinguish between projects with minor Nature-based Solutions components and projects where Nature-based Solutions are central to project outcomes.

Near-Term and Long-Term SCW Program Integration: The upcoming scoring revisions in advance of the 2027 Call for Projects are an important opportunity to begin integrating this work.

However, it is recommended that Public Works also plan for medium- and long-term scoring changes that support the broader paradigm shift identified by the Task Force.

In the short term, additional guidance will be needed to help project proponents understand how to complete the relevant portal fields. Project proponents will need clear instructions on how to report benefits achieved through Nature-based Solutions, especially as the metric is brought online. Without guidance, project proponents may interpret fields inconsistently or fail to capture relevant Nature-based Solutions benefits.

It is recommended that longer-term revisions focus on supporting systems-based projects and better incentivizing project design, maintenance, and implementation practices that reflect the full intent of Nature-based Solutions as detailed by the Definition, Standard, and Key Criteria developed during Phase 1.

Additional Considerations:

SCW Program Program projects must provide a Water Quality Benefit and either a Water Supply Benefit, a Community Investment Benefit, or both. Water quality therefore remains a foundational Program requirement, and key consideration in the Task Force's recommendations. However, the Nature-based Solutions Task Force identified a related concern that some strong Nature-based Solutions projects may remain disadvantaged when scoring favors benefits that are more readily quantified, like water quality or water supply. Ecological, community, and systems-based benefits may be integral to a project's value but less fully captured within the current scoring structure. Water quality, water supply benefits, and community-investment benefits should remain central to the SCW Program. At the same time, the Task Force recommends that the program ensure strong Nature-based Solutions projects are not lost because ecological, community, and systems-based benefits are less easily captured in the current scoring structure.

The recommended metric does not resolve the issue of strong Nature-based Solutions projects struggling to move through the SCW Program process. It would be beneficial for additional data to be collected to keep track of projects that are strong Nature-based Solutions interventions but are not able to apply, or do not apply, for SCW Program funding because they do not meet water quality and water supply benefit requirements. Additional support from a Peer Review Panel-like body or expanded Nature-based Solutions support through the TRP Program could help bridge this gap over time.

Countywide Application

The Recommended NbS Metric was developed with a focus on the SCW Program, as it is currently the primary policy and funding mechanism with the ability to prioritize Nature-based Solutions. However, the current SCW Program structure, portal data, and application process cannot be where this work stops.

Continued cross-sector collaboration will be important to support standardized implementation of Nature-based Solutions countywide. Future work can examine what agencies and departments across the County currently measure and how they assess projects to identify how the Nature-based Solutions

metric can align with existing processes in the near term while building toward a broader mechanism for systems-based assessment.

Countywide application will require balancing standardization with project-level flexibility. Future efforts can focus on strategic approaches that create consistency in how Nature-based Solutions are assessed across agencies and departments while accounting for program- and site-specific variation.

Guidance on Nature-based Solutions Metrics for Consistent Evaluation within SCW Program

***Deliverable 6A.2:** Guidance on Nature-based Solutions Metrics for Consistent Evaluation within SCW Program to support consistent evaluation of Nature-based Solutions within the SCW Program.*

Introduction

This implementation-oriented guidance document details the methodology, structure, and recommended integration of the recommended Nature-based Solutions metric developed during Phase 2 into SCW Program updates, scoring revisions, and broader countywide application. Its purpose is to provide context and future application guidance for the recommended metric and draft scoring structure developed by the Nature-based Solutions Task Force during Phase 2 of its work, from January 2026 through June 2026. This resource is intended to complement Deliverable 6A.1, which provides broader context on the purpose, process, challenges, and recommendations from Phase 2 of the NbS Task Force.

During Phase 1, the Task Force reviewed the SCW Program 2022 Interim Guidance and the Metrics and Monitoring Study as important starting points for understanding how Nature-based Solutions were being defined, scored, and measured within the SCW Program.

Interim Guidance: The Task Force found that the Interim Guidance offered a useful starting point by asking whether projects use natural processes or nature-mimicking strategies to address watershed needs and deliver SCW Program benefits. However, the Task Force identified limitations in the Good-Better-Best framework, including its reliance on fixed categories, its tendency to equate Nature-based Solutions with nature-mimicking features, and its inability to fully capture systems-based, context-specific project performance. Phase 1 recommendations therefore called for a clearer Nature-based Solutions Standard and a more holistic, spectrum-based approach to project evaluation.

Metrics and Monitoring Study: The Task Force viewed the Metrics and Monitoring Study as an important foundation for identifying existing metrics that could support Nature-based Solutions evaluation within the SCW Program. However, reviewers noted that many metrics needed refinement to improve clarity, usefulness, and alignment with the Nature-based Solutions Standard, and that additional data may be needed to capture ecological function, site context, and systems-based benefits. While the Task Force did not recommend fully adopting the Achievement Unit model, it recognized its value as a precedent for evaluating projects along a continuum rather than through rigid thresholds.

As part of its Phase 1 work, the Task Force also recommended additional metric categories to support assessment of Nature-based Solutions projects. These categories provided a fuller picture of the range of benefits that Nature-based Solutions can provide and served as the starting point for the Task Force's Recommended NbS Metrics in Phase 2. These recommended categories included improved soil health, functional flow measurements, tree canopy, biodiversity, and ecosystem health and function.

Phase 1 considered the use of an NbS metric primarily as a project-level assessment tool for evaluating alignment with the NbS Definition, Standard, and Criteria. During Phase 2, the Task Force was also asked to consider how the metric could track progress toward SCW Program goals and targets and inform

future scoring updates. The Recommended NbS Metric serves as a near-term bridge across these applications rather than a complete framework for any one of them.

Phase 2

The Recommended NbS Metric development process was facilitated through a series of Task Force meetings, surveys, and review materials intended to move from the broad Phase 1 Nature-based Solutions recommendations toward a more focused metric recommendations for the assessment of NbS that could be integrated into the SCW Program Watershed Planning Nature-based Solutions Addendum.

An initial "Process Memo", presented in Appendix A, was developed in advance of Task Force Meeting 1 to lay out the challenges of setting qualitative metrics as part of Phase 2, reshare the work on metrics completed in Phase 1, and outline the tentative process for each Task Force meeting. Task Force Meeting 1 (2/10/2026), focused on establishing the desired outcome for Phase 2, learning about existing metrics and how Task Force deliverables would be continued by the County, and iterating on the Phase 2 process. The Process Memo was intended to allow Task Force members to provide input on the process before it commenced.

Prior to Task Force Meeting 2 (3/10/26), a document was shared with the Task Force compiling all existing Watershed Planning metrics and the additional Nature-based Solutions metrics recommended during Phase 1. These metrics were organized by each of the Nature-based Solutions Task Force Key Criteria developed in Phase 1.

Task Force Meeting 2 focused on creating an expanded list of metrics for each of the Nature-based Solutions Criteria, identifying projects that meet each Nature-based Solutions Criterion well, and deciding on an approach for narrowing down the expanded list of metrics. During the meeting, Task Force members reviewed the document and were assigned to breakout groups focused on one Key Nature-based Solutions Criterion. In each breakout group, participants worked to: (1) identify an ideal project that would meet the assigned Nature-based Solutions Criterion well, and (2) consider what a project would need to demonstrate to accomplish the assigned criterion. Groups used qualitative summaries to help ensure that the recommended metrics reflected the intent of each criterion. Groups were also asked to review the existing metric list, add any missing metrics, and flag metrics that may belong under multiple criteria. Following this discussion, the Task Force determined that the best way to narrow down the metrics would be through a survey.

Feedback from Task Force Meeting 2 was captured in a follow-up survey, which asked participants to narrow down metrics by criterion. A review of the survey results provided the basis for the "Proposed Metrics Structure" (Appendix B).

Task Force Meeting 3 (4/7/2026), focused on discussing the Nature-based Solutions Metrics Survey and reviewing models for the working metric design. During this meeting, the "Proposed Metrics Structure" (Appendix B) was reviewed in detail by the Task Force. Members discussed how to incorporate the structure into the SCW Program Project Module, and the Task Force team and Public Works consultants Task Force input to identify metrics for inclusion in the SCW Program Project Module.

Virtual Task Force Meeting 4 (5/5/2026), focused on sharing the work completed by the Task Force team and Public Works consultants to reconcile the "Proposed Metrics Structure" (Appendix B) and Task Force input with an approach that would be feasible within the SCW Program Project Module. Rather than creating new standalone metrics, the proposed Nature-based Solutions metric is intended to measure

how existing SCW Program outcomes are delivered through Nature-based Solutions, culminating in the recommended metric: “What proportion of project benefits, including water quality, water supply, and community investment benefits, are achieved through Nature-based Solutions?”

An additional survey (Appendix C) was then sent out in advance of the final Task Force meeting to determine what within the already collected SCW Program data should qualify as Nature-based Solutions, identify what additional data should be captured in the future, and guide where qualitative questions may be necessary to support form design. The survey results will be used by Public Works consultants following the conclusion of Phase 2 of the Nature-based Solutions Task Force. An initial summary of survey results can be found in Appendix D.

Through the course of Phase 2, the Task Force emphasized the importance of explicitly linking the recommended Nature-based Solutions metric with future SCW Program scoring updates. Task Force members noted that while the Phase 2 process focused on metric development, the long-term value of the metric depends on how it is ultimately incorporated into scoring, project evaluation, and funding decisions.

By the final Task Force meeting, Task Force members had provided substantial feedback on the metric-setting process and were particularly interested in understanding how the recommended metric could inform future scoring. Therefore, Task Force Meeting 5 (6/09/2026) focused primarily on a presentation and listening session led by Craftwater, the consultant team leading the SCW Program scoring updates in advance of the 2027 Call for Projects. This meeting provided an opportunity to connect the Task Force’s Phase 2 recommendations with the forthcoming scoring update process and to identify where Nature-based Solutions considerations could be better reflected in SCW Program implementation in the short and medium term.

Recommended Metric

For the purpose of short term integration into the existing SCW Program Project Module, Nature-based Solutions metric is intended to measure how existing SCW Program outcomes are delivered through Nature-based Solutions. The Metric Recommended by the NbS Task Force is as follows:

What proportion of project benefits, including water quality, water supply, and community investment benefits, are achieved through Nature-based Solutions?

SCW Program Watershed Planning purposes, and for the purpose of inclusion in the SCW Program Watershed Planning Nature-based Solutions Addendum, this approach identifies the extent to which a project’s reported benefits are being delivered through Nature-based Solutions relative to the project itself. This approach is also aligned with the broader goal of understanding how much progress is being made toward prioritizing Nature-based Solutions within the SCW Program. Because the metric relies on existing SCW Program Project Module data, it provides a near-term pathway for assessing Nature-based Solutions contribution without overburdening project proponents.

As part of this comprehensive assessment, the Task Force emphasized that a singular metric would need to be complemented by an initial Site Context and Assessment step (see Proposed Metric Structure Section below) and qualitative questions to understand how a project uses a systems-based approach, which the Task Force identified as fundamental to Nature-based Solutions assessment. A comprehensive assessment should be supported by a consistent expert review process, potentially through a panel with the interdisciplinary expertise needed to evaluate Nature-based Solutions across hydrology, ecology, soil health, vegetation, community benefit, climate resilience, and long-term function to ensure that Nature-based Solutions assessment is applied more consistently across projects.⁶ This structure is captured in the "Proposed Metrics Structure" (Appendix B). It also provides a guide for the more thorough form of Nature-based Solutions assessment the Task Force would like to see over time.

While the work of the Task Force guided the development of the singular recommended metric, the use of existing SCW Program Project Module data without additional data fields remains a limitation. Additional planning will be needed to develop a medium- and long-term metric framework that better captures the systems-based approach central to Nature-based Solutions.

"Proposed Metrics Structure"

The "Proposed Metrics Structure" (Appendix B) was developed from feedback collected following Task Force Meeting 2 to organize the proposed metrics and identify the components needed for a more holistic assessment of Nature-based Solutions. Although the structure requires further refinement, it provides an initial roadmap for future countywide application.

The complete version of the Proposed Nature-based Solutions Assessment Structure can be found in Appendix B.

Site Context and Assessment

This section establishes baseline ecological and social conditions to ground project review in site-specific context and assess potential ecological and community uplift. It also supports the systems-based logic necessary for effective Nature-based Solutions design and implementation.

Non-exhaustive recommended fields include:

- Location
- Habitat type or ecotone
- Baseline ecological condition
- Baseline social context
- Public health and environmental justice considerations
- Expected post-project ecological condition
- Off-site implementation impacts

Design Intent

The Design Intent section is intended to guide project proponents toward healthy, systems-based interventions in the absence of formal design parameters for high-standard living infrastructure.

⁶ See Phase 1 Report Recommendations [here](#).

Some projects may be unable to implement the full range of desired Nature-based Solutions strategies because of site constraints or specific project needs. Consistent with the Nature-based Solutions Spectrum established during Phase 1, projects may still align with a Nature-based Solutions approach when they consider relevant site conditions and design toward interconnected ecological functions, even when some traditional infrastructure components are necessary. The categories identified through this process are preliminary and would benefit from further refinement.

Under this approach:

- Project proponents would select the Design Intent categories the project is designed to advance.
- Projects would address a minimum number of Design Intent categories.
- Each category would include examples of potential functional objectives.
- Proponents would provide a short narrative explaining how the selected design intents work together to create ecological uplift.

Example Design Intent categories include:

- Hydrology and water systems
- Soil health
- Biodiversity
- Habitat
- Connectivity
- Tree canopy and vegetation
- Remediation and water quality
- Climate resilience

Nature-based Solutions Assessment

This section evaluates a project's alignment with the Key NbS Criteria and its overall systems-based approach. It includes factors identified by the Task Force as important for Nature-based Solutions projects, while recognizing that some elements, such as Tribal consultation, community engagement, and long-term care, are important standards for all projects.

Recommended qualitative considerations include:

- The problem the project is intended to solve
- Whether the project addresses that problem through nature
- Consultation and engagement with Tribes and communities
- Care plan, adaptive management, monitoring, and stewardship approach
- A narrative describing the project's systems-based approach

Qualitative considerations were recommended as a way to determine a project's alignment with the Key NbS Criteria more clearly. The Nature-based Solutions Assessment includes:

- What problem is being solved
- Whether the project is solving that problem through nature

- Consultation and engagement with Tribes and communities
- Care plan, adaptive management (including monitoring), and stewardship approach
- Narrative describing the project's systems approach

Pre-and Post-Implementation Assessment

The pre-implementation and post-implementation evaluations are intended to complement the initial Site Context and Assessment step. This mechanism was initially recommended because it supports adaptive management using an established method. The Task Force considered using an established model for pre- and post-implementation evaluation, so that this information can be collected as part of a future more comprehensive Nature-based Solutions assessment approach applicable countywide.

SCW Program Integration and Scoring Alignment

The following section provides additional detail on the SCW Program recommendations summarized in the Executive Summary rather than establishing a separate set of recommendations.

The following recommendations build from the Phase 1 SCW Program recommendations made by the Nature-based Solutions Task Force for application within the SCW Program.

Align the Recommended NbS Metric with Future SCW Program Scoring Revisions: It is recommended that the Recommended NbS Metric serve as a scoring input or consideration in future SCW Program scoring updates, with greater recognition for projects achieving a higher proportion of benefits through Nature-based Solutions.

The metric can indicate progress toward the target of prioritizing Nature-based Solutions and can provide Scoring Committees and WASCs with additional information about a project's Nature-based Solutions contribution. However, without a meaningful connection to scoring, the metric may not meaningfully influence project design or funding outcomes.

Pair the Metric with Qualitative Questions: The Recommended NbS Metric is not a complete Nature-based Solutions assessment. It can indicate the portion of reported project benefits achieved through Nature-based Solutions but does not fully capture site context, ecological function, design quality, community benefit, stewardship, or long-term performance.

The metric was designed to be complemented by a required Site Context and Assessment step, as detailed in the "Proposed Metrics Structure", along with thoughtful qualitative assessment questions for each project benefit. The following tools are recommended for use alongside the metric and for consideration in the upcoming SCW Program Project Module update:

- Initial Site Context and Assessment
- Qualitative project narrative
- Design intent questions

The metric would be further strengthened by complementary review mechanisms, such as:

- Peer Review Panel or expert review mechanism
- Letter of Intent or similar qualitative review tool

These additional recommended steps are not intended as an added burden for project proponents. While all project proponents are encouraged to incorporate meaningful Nature-based Solutions where feasible, some are already seeking to develop more holistic NbS projects and would benefit from a clearer pathway to present and receive recognition for them. Additional NbS assessment steps can help create that pathway.

Use the Recommended NbS Metric as a near-term integration tool + Align the Recommended NbS Metric with future SCW Program scoring revisions: The use of existing SCW Program Project Module data is a necessary first step for the near-term feasibility of a Nature-based Solutions metric. However, the Phase 1 recommendations clearly note that existing data does not fully capture ecological function, site context, stewardship, or systems-based design. The results from the Nature-based Solutions Metric Design Survey similarly reflect this finding.

As an initial interpretation of the survey results, Appendix D includes a non-exhaustive list of additional data the Task Force recommended be collected. Additional data fields related to the following would be beneficial in aligning future assessment with the Nature-based Solutions Definition, Criteria, and Standard in the medium and long term:

- Ecological uplift
- Soil health
- Habitat connectivity
- Stewardship and maintenance
- Tribal consultation and community engagement
- Long-term adaptive management

Develop Clearer Guidance for Project Proponents and Reviewers: Additional guidance is recommended to support consistent implementation of the metric, including clarification of the following:

- Which BMPs, design features, and project elements count as Nature-based Solutions
- How to report the portion of benefits achieved through Nature-based Solutions
- How to describe design intent and systems-based function

Additional standardization and recommendations will also be needed to guide how reviewers interpret qualitative responses. This supports the Phase 1 recommendation for clearer, more consistent assessment to avoid inconsistent interpretation across projects.

Use the Metric as a Threshold or Gradient, Not Just a Yes/No Measure: Future scoring updates can use the metric to incentivize stronger Nature-based Solutions integration. A gradient-based scoring approach would allow the SCW Program to distinguish between projects that incorporate minor Nature-based Solutions elements and those where Nature-based Solutions are central to achieving project outcomes. Under this approach:

- Projects with no Nature-based Solutions-attributable benefits would receive little or no Nature-based Solutions credit.
- Projects with some benefits delivered through Nature-based Solutions would receive partial credit.
- Projects where Nature-based Solutions are central to achieving project benefits would receive higher credit.

This approach creates a clearer scoring distinction between projects with incidental Nature-based Solutions components and projects that meaningfully rely on Nature-based Solutions to deliver water quality, water supply, flood control, community, and ecological benefits.

Use Expert or Peer Review to Support Site Specific + Holistic Evaluation: Phase 1 identified the Peer Review Panel as a mechanism for holistic, site-specific evaluation. The Recommended NbS Metric provides quantitative information that can support that panel, but it does not replace qualitative, interdisciplinary expertise.

A Peer Review Panel or expert review mechanism can use the metric to understand the reported proportion of project benefits achieved through Nature-based Solutions, then evaluate whether that proportion accurately reflects the project's design, site context, ecological function, and long-term performance.

Identify a Minimum Nature-based Solutions Value for Funded Projects: Phase 1 noted that projects can currently reach the SCW Program funding eligibility threshold based on water quality and water supply points alone, without meaningfully incorporating Nature-based Solutions. The Recommended NbS Metric provides a pathway to address this gap.

Future scoring updates can establish a minimum proportion of reported project benefits achieved through Nature-based Solutions for projects to receive Nature-based Solutions credit or meet a related funding expectation. This threshold would distinguish projects where Nature-based Solutions are central to project performance from those where they are minor, incidental, or included primarily for scoring purposes.

Countywide Application of the Nature-based Solutions Metric

The following section details the short, medium and long term approaches to countywide Application of the NbS Metric as recommended by the NbS Task Force.

Short-Term Application

In the short term, countywide application of the Nature-based Solutions metric can focus on meeting existing programs where they are. For the SCW Program, this means testing how the systems-based project design logic of Nature-based Solutions can be applied within existing project assessment mechanisms and using data that is already being collected.

By identifying which project benefits are delivered through Nature-based Solutions, this short-term approach can provide initial data on how Nature-based Solutions are already being incorporated across projects and programs. This approach is necessarily limited, but it avoids requiring a fully new assessment structure or creating additional burden for project proponents. It also creates an opportunity to better understand where existing project data and assessment tools are sufficient and where they fall short in capturing the full value of Nature-based Solutions.

Medium-Term Application

In the medium term, countywide application would benefit from additional data collection and more consistent Nature-based Solutions design guidance and parameters.

Initial inquiry across several County departments found that there is currently no standardized countywide guidance, checklist, or assessment process used to evaluate Nature-based Solutions or green infrastructure projects. Instead, project assessment varies by department and is generally shaped by each agency's goals, regulatory responsibilities, funding requirements, adopted plans, and project-specific feasibility considerations. Surveyed departments may draw from a range of sources, including County plans and policies, program-specific criteria, grant requirements, EPA guidance, and internal review processes related to site feasibility, maintenance capacity, equity, climate resilience, habitat enhancement, water conservation, and public health benefits. Responses suggest that while many County departments are already considering outcomes commonly associated with Nature-based Solutions, there is not yet a consistent regional framework for determining, prioritizing, or evaluating NbS across departments.

This work can be informed by contributions from County agencies and departments to better understand what is already being measured, how projects are currently assessed, and where Nature-based Solutions criteria can be integrated into existing processes.

This phase can also strengthen connections between project assessment, design guidance, and implementation. As countywide Nature-based Solutions design guidance and parameters are developed, they can both inform and be informed by the metrics used to evaluate projects. This creates opportunities for cross-pollination across agencies, departments, and project types, helping move Nature-based Solutions assessment beyond a single program or funding mechanism.

Long-Term Application

In the long-term, countywide application of the Nature-based Solutions metric can support a broader paradigm shift toward Nature-based Solutions. This includes moving toward codified design parameters that are actively used, evaluated, and improved over time. It also includes stronger coordination across agencies and projects for design, operations, management, and stewardship.

This may appear to move beyond the realm of measurement, but metrics are not neutral. They influence what is valued, what is designed for, and ultimately what is built. If a benefit is not measured, valued, or included within standardized parameters for Nature-based Solutions, it may be overlooked in project design, funding, and implementation. Therefore, countywide application of the Nature-based Solutions metric can be understood as part of a broader effort to shift what the County values and incentivizes in infrastructure planning.

Coordination will be especially important for maximizing multiple benefits across interventions. Nature-based solutions often require collaboration across agencies, disciplines, and jurisdictions because their benefits extend across water quality, water supply, habitat, public health, climate resilience, operations, maintenance, and stewardship. A countywide approach can therefore support coordination and cross-pollination across departments and initiatives, while also informing the continued development of Nature-based Solutions design guidance.

Over time, valuing benefits differently through approaches such as triple bottom line analysis will be especially important for creating the funding and institutional support needed for the evolving operations and maintenance of Nature-based Solutions projects. Because the benefits and functions of a Nature-based Solution evolve over time, these projects often require different workforce, stewardship, and maintenance models than traditional infrastructure. In the long-term, assessment of NbS can therefore support funding and management approaches that recognize the changing nature, value, and needs of Nature-based Solutions over the life of a project.

Appendix A: Process Memo

The following document was distributed to Task Force participants during Phase 2 Meeting 1 to provide context for metrics-setting considerations and to serve as a workspace and starting point for the Recommended NbS Metrics-setting process:

Process Memo

Phase 2 of the NbS Task Force focuses on the development of quantitative metrics that can support assessment and funding decisions within the Safe, Clean Water Program (SCW Program).

Definition: Metrics (PMs)

Metrics, referred to interchangeably in the SCW Program as Performance Measures (PMs), are standardized values derived from one or more measures. Metrics quantify benefits provided by individual projects or programs and may express relationships among data points (e.g., gallons captured per acre, trees planted per project). While metrics are measurable and used for analysis, they do not necessarily correspond directly to a target or objective.

Phase 2 Objectives:

1. *Recommend metrics tied to the Task Force's proposed Definition, Standard, and Criteria, ensuring they are measurable, tangible, and rooted in ecological and social outcomes.*
 - a. *Frame metrics to encourage comprehensive, systems-based assessment of Nature-based Solutions, capturing benefits across hydrology, soil health, vegetation, climate resilience, and long-term functionality.*
2. *Discuss the integration of these metrics into the Safe, Clean Water Program, including Watershed Area reporting, tracking progress, and longer-term program evaluation.*
3. *Explore approaches for countywide application, exploring how Nature-based Solutions metrics may be adopted or adapted across planning processes, departmental initiatives, and multi-agency collaborations beyond SCW Program.*

The core challenge is translating a systems-based NbS Standard into metrics that are usable and approachable without reintroducing a checklist logic. Because NbS are inherently holistic, this work must carefully balance measurability with context, integration, and long-term function.

What Metrics Must Do

At a minimum, metrics must:

- Measure alignment with the NbS Criteria
- Support holistic implementation and assessment of NbS

Metrics can also:

- Fill gaps in current practice by
 - improving how NbS are selected and evaluated
 - Supporting evaluation of tradeoffs, not just benefits
 - Enabling long-term monitoring of outcomes
 - Reinforcing measurement of system performance, rather than isolated interventions or outputs

Why Metrics Matter

Metrics are not neutral. They can shape what gets designed, funded, and built and they can challenge fragmentation.

In the context of the SCW Program, they:

- Influence what gets designed, funded, and built
- Reinforce what “counts” as a Nature-based Solution
- Shape project design over time

Well designed metrics can encourage integrated, systems-oriented projects, while poorly designed metrics risk incentivizing narrow approaches to NbS while increasing applicant burden.

Add Notes Here:

What else do you think quantitative NbS Metrics have to accomplish?:

Step-by-Step Process

MEETING 1:

Step 1: Take Stock of Existing Work (HOMEWORK)

The Task Force begins by reviewing:

- Categories of metrics that have already been identified in the NbS Task Force Recommendations Report
- Existing metrics in the Initial Watershed Plans

MEETING 2:

Step 2: Clarify What a Project Must Show to Meet the NbS Criteria

Before selecting metrics, the Task Force will focus on clarifying what would convincingly demonstrate that a project is functioning as a Nature-based Solution, criterion by criterion.

Because NbS are rooted in systems thinking and site context, this step is intentionally designed to avoid prematurely narrowing the conversation to numbers or indicators.

For each NbS criterion, breakout groups will identify:

- What a *strong* project would demonstrate
- What would be *missing* in a weak project
- What types of documentation or outcomes matter for accountability

As part of these process groups will likely generate elements that may be suited for both qualitative and quantitative assessment.

Examples:

- Baseline ecological assessment
- Site specific biodiversity goals
- Monitoring plans

Step 3: Review Existing County Metrics

Review the existing 52 PMs + 19 Indicators

MEETING 3:

Step 4: Distinguish Quantitative Metrics from Qualitative Assessment

- Which of these elements could reasonably be tracked with a quant.metric?
- Which is better suited for qualitative assessment?

Metric-eligible elements will then be grouped into broader areas of measurement, rather than treated as isolated indicators.

At this stage, the Task Force will also:

- Identify relationships between areas of measurement
- Discuss how different metrics depend on or reinforce one another

MEETING 4:

Step 5: Consider How Quantitative and Qualitative Assessment Work Together

This step focuses on how metrics will be interpreted in practice.

The Task Force will discuss:

- How metrics should be used in combination
- Where qualitative review is necessary to contextualize results
- How this approach reflects NbS as integrated systems over time

Goal: identify a small number of metrics that, when complimented with qualitative assessment, support responsible assessment decisions of NbS, tied with Key NbS criteria.

MEETING 5:

Step 6: Identify the Infrastructure Needed to Support This Approach

The Task Force will begin identifying:

- What changes may be needed in SCW Program scoring or review processes?
- What additional guidance or tools would support implementation countywide?

Step 7: Consider Countywide Implementation

Finally, the Task Force will explore:

- What holistic implementation of these metrics could look like countywide
- Key questions, priorities, and next steps for County teams and subcontractors
- Where additional phases of work may be needed

Appendix B: "Proposed"

Proposed Structure Based on Survey Results

The following framework summarizes feedback on how to structure the metrics. Feedback was collected from the NbS Task Force Meeting 2 workshop activities and a survey/

The proposed structure includes:

- Site Context and Assessment
- Qualitative NbS Assessment (with Design Intentions)
- Pre- and Post-Evaluation

This structure is intended to be iterated on by the NbS Task Force and will be presented at the NbS Task Force Phase 2 Meeting 3, scheduled for April 7, 2026.

Site Context and Assessment

This question revisits the five initial considerations proposed under Criterion 1, which project proponents should address when establishing site-specific conditions:

Location

- Project location, relevant site context, and connectivity considerations
- Identify whether the project is located within a Disadvantaged Community (DAC) or other State and County priority frameworks, such as:
 - Disadvantaged Communities (CalEnviroScreen)
 - High and Very High Park Need Areas (Parks Needs Assessment)
 - Priority Areas for Environmental Conservation and Restoration (Parks Needs Assessment Plus)
 - High Canopy Need Areas (Community Forest Management Plan)
 - High Heat Health Burden Areas (County Heat Action Plan)

Habitat Type

- Ecotope
- Site-specific and surrounding habitat conditions
- Key species, soil type, and other relevant ecological characteristics

Baseline Ecological Condition

- Documentation of pre-project conditions
- Establish baseline to understand site conditions and measure project impact

Baseline Social Context

- Current use of the space
- Human impacts on the site
- Frequency and type of public interaction with the space

Public Health + Environmental Justice Considerations

- Existing benefits provided by the site
- Potential public health or environmental justice concerns

Post-Project Ecological Condition

- Expected ecological outcomes following implementation (Worsened, No Change, Slight Improvement, Significant Improvement)
- For conservation projects, confirmation of successful preservation

Off-Site Implementation Impacts

- Connectivity considerations
- Downstream or adjacent impacts

Qualitative NbS Evaluation

1. What problem is your Nature-based Solution solving or supporting?
 - What environmental or ecological issue is the NbS addressing?
 - How much of the identified problem is appropriate to address through a Nature-based Solution?
 - How is your project benefiting nature?
 - What tribal and community engagement has been conducted to identify and design the solution?
 - *Additional guidance will be needed to prioritize problems if multiple issues are identified.*
2. Area (acres/sq.ft.) of functional Nature-based Solution created?
 - What is the area of functional NbS being created?
 - What is the area of functional NbS being restored?
3. Design Intent (Check all that apply)

Select the primary design intent categories below and provide a brief narrative describing how the project supports each selected category. Sub-bullets are provided as examples of potential functional objectives associated with each design intent. These are intended for guidance only and are not prescriptive or required.

Provide a short narrative description detailing how the project is designed for each selected category. Projects should be designed with at least (placeholder) four of the following design intents in mind.

- Hydrology & Water Systems
 - Groundwater Recharge
 - Environmental Flows
 - Floodplain Connectivity
- Soil Health

- Soil Moisture & Infiltration
- Soil Organic Matter
- Soil Structure
- Soil Water Holding Capacity
- Biodiversity
 - Species Diversity
 - Pollinators
 - Wildlife Habitat
 - Culturally Significant Species
- Habitat + Connectivity
 - Habitat Restoration
 - Habitat Enhancement
 - Invasive Species Removal
- Connectivity
 - Habitat Corridors
 - Floodplain Connectivity
 - Landscape Connectivity
- Vegetation + Tree Canopy
 - Native Plants
 - Plant Communities
 - Understory Vegetation
- Tree Canopy
 - Tree Canopy Expansion
 - Shade / Cooling
- Remediation & Water Quality
 - Trash Reduction
 - Contaminant Reduction
 - Sediment Reduction
- Climate Resilience
 - Heat Mitigation
 - Drought Resilience
 - Flood Resilience

4. Systems Approach

Does the project function as a system?

- Using the selected design intent elements above, explain how each of these intents work together and inform one another to create ecological uplift (definition needed).
- Does the project facilitate connectivity to off-site areas?

5. Operations and Maintenance (O&M)

Reflecting survey feedback emphasizing stewardship and long-term performance

- Does the project include a care plan?

- Is the O&M plan tailored to site conditions?
- Does the project support workforce development as part of the O&M plan?
- Are workforce development opportunities leveraged in site operations and maintenance?
- Is there a plan for post-implementation monitoring?

Pre-Implementation and Post Implementation Assessment Models

The pre-implementation and post-implementation evaluations are intended to complement the site assessment and produce metrics that can be rolled up into a dashboard of benefits for watershed planning purposes. This mechanism encourages the adaptive management of a project but will, by nature, be incomplete within the context of NbS. However, at this stage and within this scope, we suggest using an existing, established method as a starting point for iteration.

Starting points/models for pre and post implementation—

[5 point assessment method \(Society for Ecological Restoration\)](#)

Applicability:

- Evaluates ecological restoration progress over time/well suited for pre- and post-implementation comparisons
- Useful for habitat restoration and ecosystem recovery projects
- Provides a simple, structured framework for adaptive management
- Can be applied across a range of ecosystem types
- Helpful for tracking ecological uplift in NbS projects

Limitations:

- Does not fully capture social, economic, or climate co-benefits
- Scoring may be subjective depending on practitioner expertise

[CRAM Assessment Method](#)

Applicability:

- Designed for wetlands and riparian habitat assessment
- Provides standardized, repeatable condition metrics
- Useful for watershed planning and regional roll-up metrics
- Supports evaluation of hydrologic and ecological function
- Widely recognized and used in California

Limitations:

- Not applicable to upland or many urban NbS projects

- Limited assessment of social or community benefits
- Requires trained practitioners for consistency

[Envision](#)

Applicability:

- Evaluates infrastructure sustainability and resilience
- Includes climate resilience and community benefit considerations
- Useful for green infrastructure and watershed projects
- Can support project-level performance tracking

Limitations:

- Focused on infrastructure rather than ecological restoration/better suited for infrastructure-focused projects
- Resource-intensive to apply
- Requires documentation and technical expertise

[Sustainable Sites SITES Rating System and Scorecard](#)

Applicability:

- Designed for sustainable landscape and site development
- Applicable to urban NbS and green infrastructure projects
- Evaluates ecosystem services and environmental performance
- Includes human health and community benefits
- Supports multi-benefit Nature-Based Solutions evaluation
- Useful for site-scale sustainability tracking

Limitations:

- Perhaps too detailed for this effort
- Certification process can be resource-intensive

[NatureServe's Ecological Integrity Assessment Method \(pg. 20\)](#)

Applicability:

- Evaluates ecosystem condition and ecological integrity
- Useful for habitat conservation and restoration projects
- Supports baseline and post-implementation monitoring
- Applicable to biodiversity and resilience-focused NbS projects
- Can support watershed-scale ecological assessments

Limitations:

- Requires technical expertise to implement
- Primarily focused on ecological outcomes

Appendix C: SCW Program NbS Metrics Integration Survey

SCW Program NbS Metrics Integration Survey

This survey is helping build toward the NbS Phase 2 Recommended Metric:

“What proportion of project outcomes are achieved through Nature-based Solutions?”

This survey is designed to help identify how existing SCW Program Project Portal data may be used to assess the extent to which SCW Program outcomes are achieved through NbS.

Questions are broken down by SCWP Goals:

- Goal A: Improve water quality and contribute to attainment of water-quality requirements.
- Goal B: Increase drought preparedness by capturing more Stormwater and/or Urban Runoff to store, clean, reuse, and/or recharge groundwater basins.
- Goal C: Improve public health by preventing and cleaning up contaminated water, increasing access to open space, providing additional recreational opportunities, and helping communities mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change through activities such as increasing shade and green space.
- Goal E: Invest in infrastructure that provides multiple benefits
- Goal F: Prioritize Nature-based Solutions

Responses may help refine proposed classification systems, dropdown categories, numerator and denominator structures, weighting approaches, and potential equations for NbS Assessment. Through this survey, we are seeking Task Force input on how existing SCW Program metrics and measures may be operationalized into a NbS assessment methodology. More specifically, we will be asking:

- What existing SCW Program data should count as NbS?
- What additional data may be needed to support NbS assessment?
- What numerator/denominator structures or equations should be used to quantify the “extent achieved through NbS”?

Each section is organized around relevant SWCP NbS Goals.

Here is a supporting [cheat sheet](#) put together by Paradigm, that includes the Indicators mentioned in the survey and their supporting definitions, units, and data points.

The survey has 6 sections and will take about 45 minutes to complete.

Please Note: Italicized questions may not be immediately relevant to metric development/NbS Addendum to the Watershed Plans, but provide crucial information for the NbS Task Force Team.

1. Name:

2. Email:

SCW Program Goal A: Improve water quality and contribute to attainment of water-quality requirements.

Progress toward this SCW Program Goal is being quantified and tracked through the following Indicators:

- Zinc load reduction
- Total phosphorus load reduction
- *Bacteria load reduction* (Not currently being tracked)*

3. The proportion of benefit achieved through NbS is calculated based on the load reduction delivered through qualifying NbS BMP types.

Please select the BMP types that should be considered a NbS:

Mark only one oval per row.

	Yes	More Information Needed	No
Bioretention	☐	☐	☐
Biofiltration	☐	☐	☐
Infiltration Well	☐	☐	☐
Cistern	☐	☐	☐
Rain Barrel	☐	☐	☐
Infiltration Facility	☐	☐	☐
Treatment Facility	☐	☐	☐
Diversion to Sanitary Sewer	☐	☐	☐

4. For any feature marked “More information needed,” what additional information is needed? What conditions should be required for that feature to qualify as a Nature-based Solutions contribution?

5. *Are there any additional BMP types that should be considered to capture NbS contribution?*

6. Does the completed equations best represent “extent achieved through NbS” for this Metric? If not, please prove an alternative equation.

Mark only one oval.

☐

= Load reduction delivered through qualifying NbS BMPs ÷ Total Project Zinc and TP Load Reduction

☐

Other:

SCW Program Goal B: Increase drought preparedness by capturing more Stormwater and/or Urban Runoff to store, clean, reuse, and/or recharge groundwater basins.

Progress toward this SCW Program Goal is being quantified and tracked through the following Indicators

- Average annual stormwater captured

7. Which capture fate types should count when calculating the portion of average annual stormwater managed through NbS?

Mark only one oval per row.

	Yes	More Information Needed	No
Treated and Discharged to Storm Drain	☐	☐	☐
Treated and Discharged to a Receiving Water Body or Aquatic Ecosystem	☐	☐	☐
Infiltrated to Managed Usable Aquifer	☐	☐	☐
Infiltrated Over Confined or Unmanaged Aquifer	☐	☐	☐
Diverted to Existing Treatment	☐	☐	☐

Treatment
Treatment
and Reuse
and Reuse
Plants
Plants

Diverted to
Diverted to
Future
Future
Planned
Planned
Treatment
Treatment
and Reuse
and Reuse
Plants
Plants



Used On
Used On
Site for
Site for
Potable
Potable
Offset
Offset



8. For any capture fate marked “More information needed,” what additional information is needed? What conditions should be required for that feature to qualify as a NbS contribution?

9. *Are there additional capture fates that should be considered to better capture NbS contribution?*

10. Does the completed equations best represent “extent achieved through NbS” for this Metric? If not, please prove an alternative equation.

Mark only one oval.

☐ = Average annual stormwater captured through qualifying capture fates ÷ Total Project average annual stormwater captured

☐ Other:

SCW Program Goal C: Improve public health by preventing and cleaning up contaminated water, increasing access to open space, providing additional recreational opportunities, and helping communities mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change through activities such as increasing shade and green space.

Progress toward this SCW Program Goal is being quantified and tracked through the following Indicators:

- Net area of park and green space created: new green space, or development of green space that did not exist
- Net area of park and green space enhanced or restored: green space that existed before the project, but which was improved because of the project or existing but non-functional green spaces that have been improved to a functional state by the Project.
- Net new area of canopy, cooling, and shading surfaces

For the purposes of identifying NbS, this question focuses on the green space-related components of the indicators above. Recreational amenities captured under park space creation, enhancement, or restoration, such as walking paths, exercise equipment, sports fields and courts, and outdoor seating, are not considered relevant NbS for supporting Goal C.

11. Which of the following auto-calculated values under the creation of green space should be considered a NbS

Check all that apply.

	Yes	More Information Needed	No
Net Area of Lawn and Natural Turf	☐	☐	☐
Net Area of Native Vegetation and Habitats	☐	☐	☐
Net Area of Climate Appropriate Non-Native Vegetation	☐	☐	☐
Net Area of Non-Native Permanently Irrigated Habitat	☐	☐	☐

12. Which of the following should be considered a NbS?

Mark only one oval per row.

	Yes	More Information Needed	No
Net area of wetland created, enhanced, or restored	☐	☐	☐
Net change in canopy at maturity	☐	☐	☐
Net New Green Space and Tree Canopy on School Grounds	☐	☐	☐
New public access to open space or waterways provided	☐	☐	☐
Enhanced or restored public	☐	☐	☐

public
public
access to
access to
open space
open space
or
or
waterways
waterways
provided
provided

Access and
Access and
recreational
recreational
opportunities
opportunities
created,
created,
enhanced, or
enhanced, or
restored
restored



13. For any feature marked “More information needed,” what additional information is needed? What conditions should be required for that feature to qualify as a Nature-based Solutions contribution?

14. *Currently, "Net new area of cooling and shading surfaces" is calculated as a sum of: Net New Area of Manmade Shade Structures, Net Change in Tree Canopy at Maturity, and Net New Green Space Created.*

Are there additional park, green space, canopy, cooling, shading, recreation, or climate adaptation features that should be considered to better capture "Net new area of cooling and shading surfaces" for NbS in the future?

15. Does the completed equations best represent “extent achieved through NbS” for this Metric? If not, please prove an alternative equation.

Mark only one oval.

☐ = Total area of qualifying Nature-based Solutions interventions ÷ Total reported area of public health, open space, and climate adaptation benefits

☐ Other:

SCW Program Goal E: Invest in infrastructure that provides multiple benefits

Because multiple benefits are central to Nature-based Solutions, this goal may be better assessed through a qualitative interpretation of available project portal information rather than a strict numerator/denominator equation.

Potential relevant portal inputs include:

- Net area of habitat created, enhanced, or restored
- Community-stated priority or concern addressed

16. “Net area of habitat created, enhanced, or restored” is currently calculated using the following values:

- Net Area of Native Vegetation and Habitats
- Net Area of Climate-Appropriate Non-Native
- Vegetation Net Area of Non-Native Permanently
- Irrigated Habitat Net Area of Non-Vegetated Habitat

What additional qualitative considerations, if any, should be used to interpret whether habitat created, enhanced, or restored contributes to Nature-based Solutions and multiple benefits?

17. The CSNA asked respondents to identify key community concerns and prioritize potential benefits of Safe, Clean Water Program projects. For the purposes of this survey, these concerns and benefits are being considered together as community priorities that NbS interventions may help address.

Which community concerns, priorities, or co-benefits should be considered when evaluating the value of NbS? Please select all that apply and use “Other” to add any additional community concerns not included on this list.

Check all that apply.

- ☐ Impacts of climate change, including flooding, drought, extreme heat, sea level rise, and wildfires
- ☐ Trash, litter, and illegal dumping
- ☐ Cost of living and housing
- ☐ Crime
- ☐ Traffic and parking
- ☐ Public transportation, pedestrian safety, and bicycle safety
- ☐ Outdoor water pollution in oceans, rivers, and lakes
- ☐ Drinking water
- ☐ Air quality
- ☐ Access to parks and outdoor recreation
- ☐ Condition of public spaces, including sidewalks, parks, and streets

18. Do you have any other suggestions for how the Nature-based Solutions contribution to SCW Program Goal E, “Invest in infrastructure that provides multiple benefits,” should be assessed using data currently collected through the project portal?

SCW Program Goal F: Prioritize Nature-based Solutions

We are exploring whether [“Design Intent”](#) categories as conceptualized by the Task Force can help assess how strongly a project is designed around Nature-based Solutions principles.

Current consideration:

Project proponents could be asked to select the primary Nature-based Solutions design intent categories that apply to their project and provide a brief narrative describing how the project supports each selected category.

The narrative could help clarify how the project is intentionally designed to support multiple Nature-based Solutions functions, such as hydrology, soil health, biodiversity, habitat connectivity, vegetation and canopy, remediation, and climate resilience. Public Works may also consider whether projects should demonstrate alignment with a minimum number of design intent categories.

19. Please review the current Nature-based Solutions "Design Intent" categories developed by the Task Force. Are there any categories that are missing, should be revised, or should be considered for inclusion in the assessment of Nature-based Solutions Design Intent %?

Mark only one oval per row.

	Yes, include	Include with Revisions	Do not include
Hydrology & Water Systems	☐	☐	☐
Soil Health	☐	☐	☐
Biodiversity	☐	☐	☐
Habitat + Connectivity	☐	☐	☐
Vegetation + Tree Canopy	☐	☐	☐
Remediation	☐	☐	☐
Climate Resilience	☐	☐	☐

20. For any categories marked “Include with revisions,” please explain what should be revised or clarified

21. Are there any additional "Design Intent" categories that should be considered?

22. Do you have any other recommendations on how Public Works should assess whether a project **intentionally** demonstrates an integrated, systems-based Nature-based Solutions design approach?

Additional Considerations

23. Do you have any additional suggestions or considerations for how the Metric (*“What proportion of project outcomes are achieved through Nature-based Solutions?”*) should be anchored in the data currently collected through the SCW Program Project Portal?

24. Any other comments on the merits or limitations of using this approach?

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Appendix D: SCW Program NbS Metrics Integration Survey Response Summary

Across survey responses, there was broad support for using existing SCW Program Project Module data to estimate the proportion of project outcomes achieved through Nature-based Solutions. However, respondents emphasized that the current approach should not rely only on auto-calculated values. Rather, the assessment should capture additional information about design intent, ecological function, treatment mechanisms, system integration, and long-term performance.

Goal A: Improve Water Quality

Use the existing load-reduction metric as a starting point, but require additional design information to determine whether the BMPs delivering load reduction are actually functioning as Nature-based Solutions.

- Do not determine NbS contribution based on BMP type alone
 - BMP labels are not sufficient to determine whether a water quality benefit should count as an NbS contribution. BMP type can be designed in ways that are more or less nature-based depending on materials, planting, soils, infiltration, biological treatment, and system configuration.
 - Bioretention and biofiltration were generally viewed as stronger NbS candidates, while infiltration wells, cisterns, rain barrels, infiltration facilities, treatment facilities, and diversions often require more information.
- Require additional information on the BMP treatment mechanism
 - Additional context is needed on BMP materials and if the BMP is designed to improve soil, vegetation, infiltration, filtration, evapotranspiration, biological treatment, habitat function, or other natural processes.
- Consider partial NbS Points
 - Several respondents noted that a project should be able to receive partial NbS credit for qualifying components without automatically classifying the entire project as an NbS, particularly where conventional infrastructure supports, conveys water to, or works in combination with a nature-based feature.
- Add or clarify BMP categories that better capture NbS practice
 - Respondents suggested adding or better recognizing BMPs such as constructed wetlands, wetland restoration, vegetated swales, bioswales, rain gardens, green streets, riparian restoration, floodplain reconnection, tree trenches, soil amendment areas, depaving, asphalt-to-garden conversion, habitat restoration, intensive green roofs, and vegetated detention or retention basins that may better reflect actual NbS practice than relying only on existing BMP categories.

Goal B: Increase Local Water Supply / Stormwater Capture:

Assess not only how much stormwater is captured, but how the water is managed, where it goes, and whether it supports natural hydrologic or ecological function.

- Capture fate alone is not sufficient information to assess NbS contribution
 - Respondents raised concerns that the final destination of water does not always show whether a project is nature-based.
 - The assessment should ask how water is captured, treated, stored, infiltrated, reused, or released. Water management should count as NbS when it supports or mimics natural

hydrologic processes, not simply because stormwater is diverted from the storm drain system.

- Clarify when storage and conveyance features qualify
 - Cisterns, rain barrels, diversion systems, and some infiltration facilities were often described as storage or conveyance infrastructure rather than NbS in themselves. These features may contribute to NbS outcomes when they support vegetation, soil function, habitat, groundwater recharge, environmental flows, or plant-available water. They should not automatically qualify if the water is simply stored, delayed, discharged, or routed to gray infrastructure without supporting ecological function.
- Require information on water use after capture
 - Several respondents emphasized that water used to sustain vegetation and living soils may be more clearly connected to NbS than water that bypasses root zones or is discharged elsewhere.
 - Respondents recommended project proponents be asked to describe what happens to captured water after it enters a cistern, rain barrel, infiltration facility, or treatment system.
 - Relevant questions include: Is the water used to irrigate vegetation? Does it infiltrate through soil horizons? Does it support trees, habitat, or wetlands? Does it recharge groundwater in a way that benefits ecosystems? Is treated water put to environmental benefit or use?
- Identify natural infiltration
 - Respondents noted that infiltration does not automatically equal NbS.
 - Infiltration may qualify when it is soil-based, vegetated, connected to plant-available water, or designed to mimic natural hydrology. Subsurface galleries, dry wells, deep injection, or infiltration above confined or unmanaged aquifers may require additional review, especially where water bypasses soil horizons, root zones, or ecosystem function.
- Consider environmental flows and watershed-scale hydrologic function
 - Assessment should consider whether projects sustain receiving waters, riparian systems, wetlands, groundwater-dependent ecosystems, habitat corridors, or environmental flows to help recognize stormwater management approaches that support watershed function rather than only maximizing capture or diversion.

Goal C: Invest in Infrastructure that Provides Community Investment Benefits

Community benefits should be considered in NbS assessment, but public access, recreation, and greening should not automatically count as NbS unless they are connected to ecological, hydrologic, climate, or public health function.

- Differentiate community benefits from NbS function
 - Respondents generally recognized the importance of public health, open space, access, recreation, and community resilience. However, several responses suggested that these benefits are not inherently nature-based.
 - Public access or recreation should count toward NbS only when connected to functioning green space, waterways, shade, habitat, soil, vegetation, or other natural systems.
- Clarify if/how public access and recreation are counted as an NbS
 - Responses were mixed on whether new public access, enhanced public access, and recreational opportunities should be counted as NbS.

- project proponents should explain whether access improvements increase meaningful interaction with natural systems, support stewardship, improve public health, or connect communities to restored open space, waterways, habitat, or shaded green space.
- Hardscape access improvements or recreational amenities should not automatically qualify.
- Assess cooling and shading based on the type and function of the surface
 - Respondents generally supported tree canopy and green space as stronger NbS indicators than manmade shade structures.
 - “Net new area of cooling and shading surfaces” should distinguish between tree canopy, vegetated cooling, green space, and built shade.
 - Additional information may be needed on whether cooling benefits come from vegetation, evapotranspiration, canopy maturity, soil moisture, or constructed shade.
- Capture community priorities that NbS can help address
 - Survey responses supported considering community priorities such as climate impacts, flooding, drought, extreme heat, sea level rise, water pollution, trash and illegal dumping, public health, outdoor access, and community resilience.
 - project proponents should explain how project design reflects community priorities identified through the [Community Strengths and Needs Assessment](#) or other engagement processes.
- Include stewardship, education, and long-term community value where relevant
 - Respondents noted that NbS should be assessed not only by installed features but also by how projects support long-term community benefit.
 - Additional information could include stewardship partnerships, interpretive or educational elements, maintenance roles, community use, and whether the project supports local ecological knowledge or Indigenous values.

Goal D: Improve Nature-Based Green Space, Habitat, and Ecological Function

Area-based calculations should be paired with qualitative review of ecological quality, habitat function, plant selection, biodiversity, and long-term viability.

- Do not treat all green space as equivalent
 - Respondents generally supported native vegetation, wetlands, habitat, canopy, and school greening as stronger NbS indicators.
 - Responses were more mixed for lawn, turf, climate-appropriate non-native vegetation, and permanently irrigated non-native habitat.
 - The assessment should distinguish between ornamental landscaping, recreational turf, climate-adapted planting, native habitat, restored wetland, and functioning ecosystem space.
- Require information on ecological quality, not just acreage
 - Respondents emphasized that habitat should not be counted only by area; quality and context matter.
 - A small, well-designed habitat feature may provide greater NbS value than a larger area of low-functioning vegetation.
 - project proponents should describe whether green space supports biodiversity, native or climate-appropriate vegetation, habitat connectivity, soil health, wildlife movement, pollinators, species of concern, or ecosystem function.
- Clarify how turf and non-native vegetation should be evaluated

- Some respondents noted that grass or turf may be better than impervious surfaces, especially for play fields, dog parks, or children’s spaces. Others questioned whether turf should qualify as NbS without biodiversity, soil health, hydrologic, or habitat function.
- Additional information should be required on irrigation demand, soil condition, plant selection, habitat value, cooling benefit, and whether the area contributes to broader ecological function.
- Recognize wetlands, riparian areas, ecotones, and habitat connectivity
 - Respondents suggested additional attention to wetland creation or restoration, riparian restoration, ecotones, habitat corridors, and connections to larger landscape or watershed plans.
 - Projects that sustain or increase habitat connectivity and restore natural hydrologic systems should receive stronger recognition.
 - project proponents should identify whether the project aligns with watershed plans, habitat plans, species needs, or restoration priorities.
- Include maintenance and adaptive management as part of ecological performance
 - Respondents noted that long-term maintenance and management are not fully captured in the current approach.
 - project proponents should provide information on vegetation establishment, invasive species management, irrigation strategy, soil protection, maintenance responsibility, and adaptive management.
 - NbS credit should be tied to whether the feature can continue functioning over time, not only whether it is installed.

Goal E: Provide Multiple Benefits / Integrated NbS Design Intent

The multiple-benefit metric should be anchored in existing SCW Project Module data, but final interpretation should include a narrative review of whether the project intentionally demonstrates an integrated, systems-based NbS design approach aligned with the NbS Definition, Standard and Criteria.

- Use the quantitative metric as a screening tool, not the full assessment
 - Respondents generally supported using existing SCW Project Module data to reduce applicant burden. However, several emphasized that a quantitative metric is a proxy and cannot fully capture design intent, ecological quality, system relationships, tradeoffs, or long-term function.
 - The metric should begin with available data but end with reviewer judgment and deliberation.
- Require a narrative explanation of NbS intent and function
 - project proponents should explain how the project intentionally uses or restores natural processes. The narrative should describe how hydrology, soils, vegetation, habitat, water quality, climate resilience, and community benefits are integrated to help distinguish projects that include isolated NbS elements from projects that are designed around a holistic NbS approach.
- Differentiate between NbS components and holistic NbS projects
 - Several responses point to the need for a tiered or stepped review process.
 - The assessment could recognize both component-level contribution and comprehensive systems-based design as a project may include one or more qualifying NbS components without being a fully integrated NbS project.

- Refine and clarify the Design Intent categories
 - Most respondents supported including the proposed Design Intent categories, though some suggested revisions or cautioned against adding too much complexity.
 - Categories such as Hydrology & Water Systems, Soil Health, Biodiversity, Habitat + Connectivity, Vegetation + Tree Canopy, Remediation, and Climate Resilience were generally supported.
 - Suggested clarifications included expanding hydrology to include water supply resilience, clarifying climate resilience, strengthening biodiversity and habitat quality, and clarifying remediation in relation to ecological recovery.
- Consider additional Design Intent categories
 - Respondents suggested possible additions such as wetland creation/restoration, ecotones, urban heat island reduction, energy efficiency, community resilience, human well-being, water security, value to Indigenous peoples, species of concern, and habitat restoration.
 - Several respondents also suggested including an “Other” or narrative category to capture project-specific benefits not easily categorized.
- Provide clearer guidance and examples
 - Respondents emphasized that clearer definitions, qualifying criteria, and project examples are needed.
 - Public Works should provide examples of qualifying and non-qualifying designs, especially for ambiguous BMPs and community benefit features.
 - Guidance should clarify the difference between gray infrastructure, green infrastructure, isolated NbS components, and integrated Nature-based Solutions.

Recommendations Across SCW Program Goals:

Anchor NbS assessment around function and benefit, not labels: The strongest recommendation across responses is that NbS contribution depends on what a feature does; assessment should consider natural processes, ecological function, water movement, design intent, and system integration.

Combine proportional metric with qualitative review: The proposed metric is useful because it asks: of the benefits a project claims to provide, what proportion is achieved through NbS? However, proportional calculations should be paired with targeted narrative questions, design documentation, and reviewer interpretation.

Avoid overclaiming NbS contributions: Several respondents cautioned that without clearer guidance, projects may overstate NbS benefits. Accordingly, project proponents should explain the basis for any claimed NbS contribution, especially for green infrastructure systems or features that are not inherently nature-based.

Pilot the approach with real project examples: Respondents suggested that the metric should be tested against actual SCW Program projects to help identify where the approach works, where it overcounts, and where additional qualitative information is needed. Pilot testing would also help refine guidance for project proponents and reviewers.