

**JOINT INFORMATIONAL AND OVERSIGHT HEARING OF
ASSEMBLY WATER, PARKS AND WILDLIFE COMMITTEE
AND
THE SELECT COMMITTEE ON URBAN RIVERS AND STREAMS
LEVINE AND GOMEZ, CHAIRS**

**A RISING TIDE OF INNOVATION: WATER RESOURCE MANAGEMENT
IN THE LOS ANGELES WATERSHED**

Background

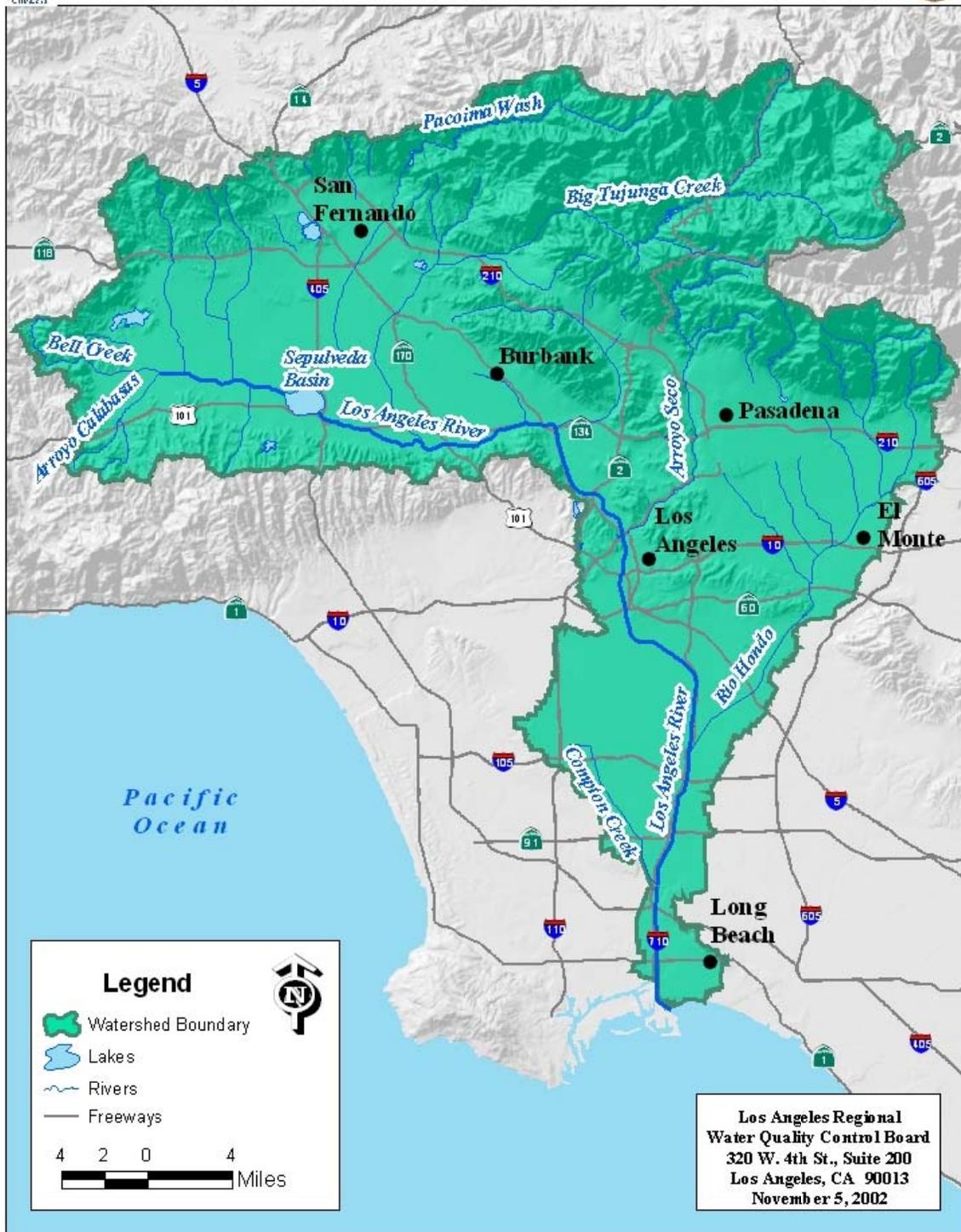
The Los Angeles watershed is a dynamic and creative place. Los Angeles County is home to over ten million people – more than a quarter of the population of California. From its official founding in 1781, water has been a critical resource for Los Angeles. The Spanish settlers who arrived in the area established “El Pueblo de Nuestra Señora de los Angeles de Porciuncula” on a hill near the Los Angeles River. Los Angeles County developed in the 19th Century by relying largely on groundwater and the limited surface water resources that originated in the mountains surrounding Los Angeles.

Imported Water. Today, Los Angeles County enjoys great diversity in its water supplies, both local and imported from distant watersheds. The region began its quest for water from outside the basin early in the 20th Century. The City of Los Angeles started with the ambitious project to acquire water rights in the Owens Valley, on the eastside of the Sierra Nevada, and convey the water across the mountains and downhill to Los Angeles. In the process, the City expanded, to the north, south and west, as a condition to those areas receiving water from the Owens Valley.

As the Los Angeles region beyond the city limits recognized the limits of their water supply, 13 cities joined together, in 1928, to create the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California (MWD) and build a canal from the Colorado River. As part of the 1922 interstate Colorado River Compact, MWD gained water rights to bring water across the mountains and desert to Southern California. Thirty years later, MWD signed a contract, in 1960, for more than half of the water from the State Water Project (SWP), which draws water from Oroville Dam on the Feather River (north of Sacramento), through the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta, down the Central Valley, and across the Tehachapi Mountains, to Southern California. MWD, however, did not take a significant portion of its SWP water, allowing Kern County to take more than its entitlement, at least until 1986.



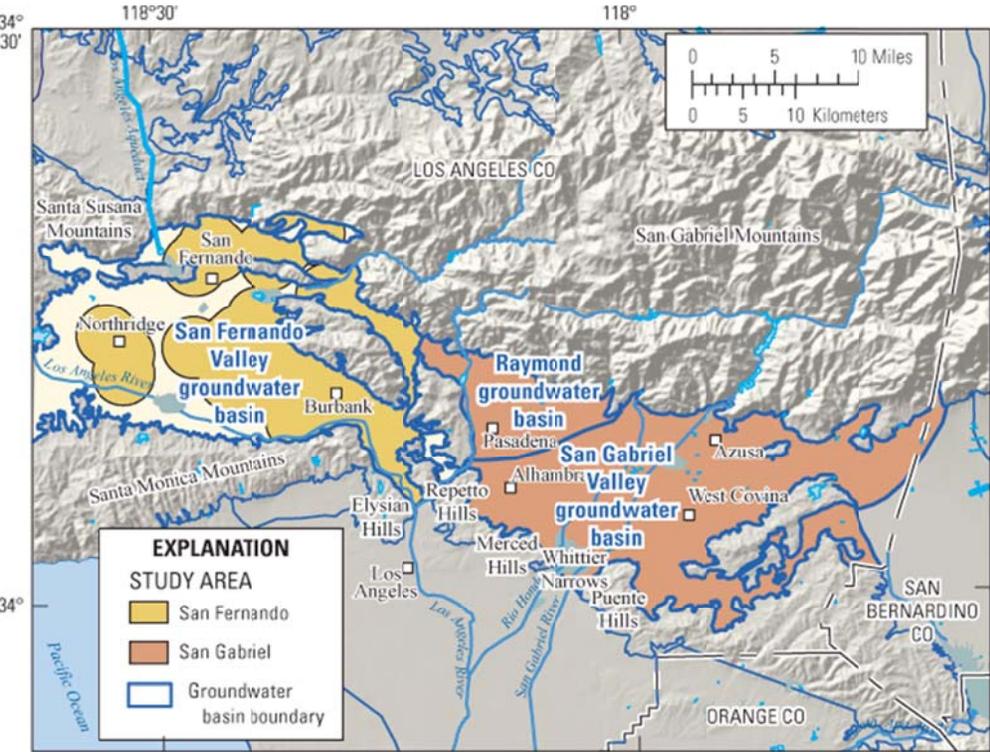
Los Angeles River Watershed



Local Groundwater. While imported water has been critical to Southern California’s growth since World War II, much of the region continues to rely on its groundwater resources in the many adjudicated basins across the coastal plain. Industrial development led to contamination of many of the region’s groundwater aquifers, so groundwater cleanup efforts extend across the Los Angeles region, including two large basins: the San Fernando Valley Groundwater Basin and the San Gabriel Valley Groundwater Basin.

The San Fernando Valley Groundwater Basin was adjudicated in 1979 and stretches across 226 square miles beneath the San Fernando Valley, Tujunga Valley, Browns Canyon, and the alluvial areas surrounding the Verdugo Mountains near La Crescenta and Eagle Rock. The basin is bounded on the north and northwest by the Santa Susanna Mountains, on the north and northeast by the San Gabriel Mountains, on the east by the San Rafael Hills, on the south by the Santa Monica Mountains and Chalk Hills, and on the west by the Simi Hills. The total storage capacity of the San Fernando Valley Groundwater Basin is calculated at 3.67 million acre-feet.

The San Gabriel Valley Groundwater Basin covers 255 square miles and is located in eastern Los Angeles County and includes most of the San Gabriel Valley and a portion of the upper Santa Ana Valley. The Main San Gabriel Basin was adjudicated by stipulated judgment in 1973, at which time the California Superior Court of Los Angeles County created a Watermaster to administer the Basin's adjudicated water rights and to provide a basin-wide governing body for management of water resources. In 1993 the State Legislature created the San Gabriel Basin Water Quality Authority (WQA) to develop, finance and implement groundwater treatment programs in the San Gabriel Basin. In other basins, groundwater cleanup programs are led by the City of Los Angeles or the Water Replenishment District of Southern California. Cleaning up these groundwater aquifers offers Southern California the opportunity to capture and store more water that comes in wet years, from either imported water or local storms.



Stormwater Management. After the 1990 Clean Water Act Amendments, cities across the basin focused attention on how to reduce pollution in the stormwater that runs off city streets into storm drains and into the rivers that flow to the ocean and beaches. After many storms, beaches close due to dangers posed by contamination from stormwater. For many years, local officials considered stormwater only as a water quality problem, with programs focused on reducing pollution by regulating what could flow off property or treating contaminated runoff.

In recent years, however, federal, state and local water officials have recognized the potential opportunity to capture the water that arrives in Southern California for water supply purposes. Efforts to capture rainwater off roofs or capture stormwater in ponds that put the water into the underground aquifers have grown. Offers of free rain barrels received overwhelming response from homeowners, in the City of Los Angeles and elsewhere. Cities have begun creating green spaces that can capture stormwater and go into the aquifer, before it gets to the river.

Water Conservation. Southern California has improved its water supply reliability by increasing its conservation of water resources. In the last 30 years, Southern California has grown by almost a third, but its total use of water has remained flat. The region's average per capita water use is less than other parts of the state. The statewide average is approximately 180 gallons per person per day, but Southern California is only 150 gallons per day, with some communities approaching only 100 gallons a day. Prior to the current conservation efforts implemented statewide in response to Governor Brown's Executive Order on drought, some areas of the State were averaging as much as 280 gallons per person per day or more. Since water conservation can be the most cost-effective investment in water supply it has become a critical part of Southern California's water supply portfolio.