

## Who Will Pay to Clean up Stormwater?

Los Angeles has been grappling with the problem of cleaning up urban runoff for decades. The Clean Water Act is over 40 years old and requires that we meet water quality standards set by the state and federal Environmental Protection Agencies. Besides that, we are a region that understands the need for clean water in a very real way: too little water, or too dirty water, and our economy and quality of life decline, and fast.

As water management evolved in Los Angeles, we set up what could be called a dis-integrated governance structure for water. We treat drinking water, stormwater, and wastewater as if they are separate, unconnected resources or liabilities. We import drinking water from far away, then clean it very well and dump it into Santa Monica Bay, at great expense. The tab is mostly picked up by the public, who pay for drinking water as well as a monthly charge from their city or county for sewage treatment. At the same time, we direct the rainwater that falls onto our streets and roof tops into storm drains and directly out to sea, laden with trash, oil, heavy metals and other contaminants. This imposes another cost, when dirty water and trash cause beach closures or discourage beach and ocean use. Now, we are under ever-greater pressure from the State Water Resources Control Board to clean up our stormwater. This is also a golden opportunity for us to do a better job of managing water overall: water is water, and LA needs to do a better job of stewarding rainwater as a valuable resource rather than a regulatory liability.

The first step is to put in place a sustainable source of funding for managing our local water. We know a lot about how to do it, and we can answer outstanding questions about which technologies

work best and where, but we will need funding to make it happen. Relying on continued bond measures to build treatment facilities is not acceptable – bond funding can be used only for capital projects, meaning there is no money available to pay for the ongoing operations and maintenance, and that just doesn't work. In addition, most people agree that the best solutions are integrated solutions, i.e. they solve more than one problem at once, so that stormwater can be captured, cleaned and stored for use by building a park or other green space in a neighborhood that needs it. A dedicated funding stream for stormwater cleanup could be crafted to require this kind of multi-benefit solution to our pressing water resource problems.

A property-based fee for stormwater is the fairest way to pay for management of the resource. Property owners have the greatest control over what happens to the water that falls on their land, and could be rewarded with discounts or rebates for making simple, on-site improvements that clean or infiltrate stormwater. Those who choose not to improve will pay, and the funds can be used for collective solutions like parks or underground treatment facilities that will benefit everyone who lives in or visits the Los Angeles region. What are we waiting for?



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