



1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 GEOGRAPHY OF INTEGRATED REGIONAL WATERSHED MANAGEMENT PLAN

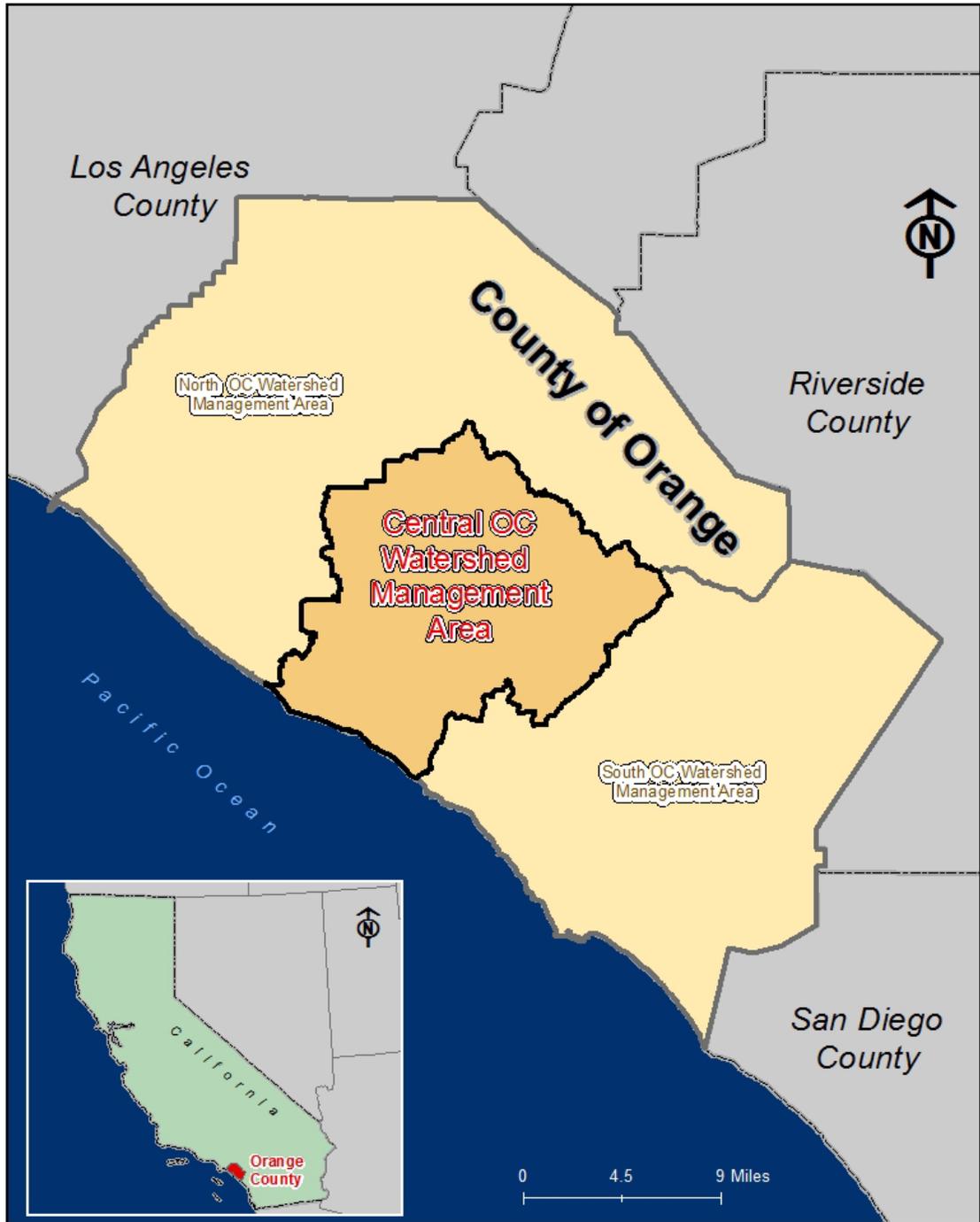


FIGURE 1.1 CENTRAL ORANGE COUNTY WATERSHED MANAGEMENT AREA LOCATION MAP

The Central Orange County WMA is defined by the boundaries of the watershed areas that drain into Upper Newport Bay (CCA No. 69), Lower Newport Bay, the Newport Beach (Robert E. Badham) Marine Life Refuge (ASBS No. 32/CCA No. 70), and the Irvine Coast Marine Life Refuge (ASBS No. 33/CCA No. 70). The WMA is located at the southern edge of the Santa Ana Regional Water Board boundaries between the North and South OC Watershed Management Areas as depicted in Figure 1-1.

1.2 INTEGRATED REGIONAL WATERSHED MANAGEMENT PLANNING APPROACH

In its 2009 California Water Plan Update, the California Department of Water Resources (DWR) notes that “water managers are learning that planning for sustainable water use must address multiple resource objectives – water use efficiency, water quality protection, and environmental stewardship – and consider broad needs – economic growth, environmental quality, and social equity” (CNRA 2005) A fundamental tenet of integrated planning is the recognition that these resource objectives are not only competitive with each other, but actually in conflict in some circumstances. Generally, these issues cannot be resolved by simply maximizing one outcome or another; their resolution must be based on a determination of an agreeable balance among competing requirements.

The Central Orange County Region has been very successful in regional planning in the past. Agencies and stakeholders have come together to address issues related to water importation, wastewater treatment, groundwater management, and flood protection. As described further in the following text, water quality issues have become a major impetus for regional collaboration. Whereas these issues have been addressed regionally, across multiple jurisdictions, this integrated regional watershed management (IRWM) plan (IRWMP) takes the next step to look at multiple programs across the region in an integrated way.

Recognizing that regional issues can often be solved better at the local level than at the state level, California has been promoting IRWM as an effective means of achieving sustainable water use. Although IRWM is not mandatory, the California State Legislature has enacted certain regulations to help improve IRWM throughout the state, along with water recycling, desalination, and groundwater management. In addition, California has provided funding for IRWM planning through bond measures, and several state funding programs now require a nexus for IRWM. To ensure that IRWM planning is effective, coordination of all stakeholders and project proponents in

a cohesive area is essential. Communities are charged with developing a process for defining watershed goals and identifying projects that cross jurisdictional boundaries and agency mandates to achieve these goals.

This innovative approach continues to be refined on the local, regional, and state level to further the ultimate goal of water resource sustainability throughout California.

1.3 INTEGRATED REGIONAL WATERSHED MANAGEMENT VISION

This integrated planning approach is appropriate for the Central Orange County Watershed Management Area (WMA) for numerous reasons:

- The WMA is integrally linked to sensitive regional and coastal habitat by dry-weather and storm drainage flows. Within the Central Orange County WMA, the entire Newport Bay Watershed drains to Newport Bay, and the Newport Coast Watershed drains directly to the Pacific Ocean. Decisions about land use throughout the WMA affect the ecosystems in these sensitive coastal areas. Water quality can be improved by a variety of means, such as land use planning, water conservation, flood control improvements, and habitat restoration and enhancement. Within the Central Orange County WMA, a number of cooperative agreements have been established. Under these agreements, the agencies share in the management, implementation, and cost of water quality projects and programs related to the total maximum daily loads (TMDLs), as well as water resource management, including wastewater collection and treatment. Each year, significant public funding is directed to stormwater and other water quality programs, including the protection of coastal ecosystems. These efforts will benefit from the Central Orange County IRWMP and the county's ability to leverage funding and project benefits to achieve regional water quality objectives.
- The communities within the region place high social and economic value on the coastal resources of the area and the protection of these resources.
- The Orange County Groundwater Basin is a regional resource. Issues related to groundwater quality, such as naturally occurring selenium, toxic plumes from former military operations, and high concentrations of nitrates and total dissolved solids (TDS) require regional solutions.

- The imported water system and water resources are shared regionally. California experienced below average precipitation and runoff for many years. However, 2011 was a year of abundant snow and rain. Agencies are continuing to work collaboratively on programs to enhance local supplies and reduce demand. Regional programs are more cost-effective and provide greater benefit locally and regionally.
- The IRWMP synchronizes local planning efforts with statewide planning efforts and priorities, encouraging the broader use of statewide management strategies. The IRWMP enables agencies to leverage financial resources through cooperation with other implementing agencies.

1.4 WATERSHED MANAGEMENT IN CENTRAL ORANGE COUNTY

As directed by the Orange County Board of Supervisors in June 2003, the Orange County Public Works Department (OCPW), formerly the Resources and Development Management Department, led a task force of city managers and special district general managers to develop a countywide water quality strategic plan. In response to recent successes and current challenges, the task force proposed a new governance model for water quality programs based on three WMAs in Orange County. The WMA concept recognizes the need for a coordinated approach to resource management and capital improvement planning, and it formalizes a partnership between Orange County, the Orange County Flood Control District (OCFCD), cities, and water and wastewater agencies. It builds upon the long-term cooperative model for managing the countywide municipal stormwater program as well as other desirable features from the partnerships that have been developed to manage TMDL programs in the Newport Bay Watershed.

This water quality strategic planning effort resulted in the designation of Orange County as a regional program administrator, with implementation in three geographic subareas of the county: the North Orange County WMA, the Central Orange County WMA, and the South Orange County WMA.

The reasons for the recommendation of the regional water quality steering committee for WMAs are the following:

- They will continue the watershed approach at a manageable scale.
- They are consistent with the likely approach of future stormwater permits.
- They will facilitate meaningful involvement of public and private stakeholders.
- They will allow subarea control of priorities.

- They are similar to the Measure M structure (renewed Measure M is a local measure that will provide funding for environmental projects and programs).
- They will follow the successful model of the Newport Bay Watershed Executive Committee and Newport Bay Watershed Management Committee.
- They will accommodate differences between regional water quality control boards (regional water boards).
- They will account for differences in existing infrastructure.
- They will promote partnership opportunities, especially between cities and districts.
- They will fit the logic of the Drainage Area Management Plan (DAMP) (Orange County 2003).
- They will allow optimum use of existing and future funding sources.
- They can be established by means of interagency agreements.

Similar to the WMA concept, IRWM planning is a more efficient and effective way to manage water resources. It allows regional prioritization of important watershed issues and consensus regarding how to address these issues. Also, IRWM planning allows the development of holistic solutions to problems, addresses problems at the source, and integrates projects and programs with overlapping jurisdiction throughout the region. Ultimately, IRWM planning promotes sustainable resource management.

The primary purpose of the IRWMP is to bridge current and developing efforts related to watershed planning, allowing more effective collaboration and more opportunities to leverage agency resources across jurisdictions. The Central Orange County IRWMP clearly describes the following:

- Central Orange County WMA
- Issues related to and priorities for the WMA
- Goals and objectives for the WMA
- Strategies for meeting the identified goals and objectives
- Current efforts within the watershed
- Ways to evaluate the IRWMP and update it as necessary