

Chapter 5.10 Environmental Justice

Introduction

The United States Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA) recognizes the disproportionate impact that disadvantaged and minority communities face throughout the United States. Disadvantaged and minority communities are disproportionately affected by environmental pollutants which are emitted by various sources. Because these disadvantaged and minority communities are concentrated in areas where the sources of pollution are situated, the communities often times endure conditions that are unknown by more affluent communities.

Environmental justice and providing support to disadvantaged communities are concerns of the One Water One Watershed (OWOW) process. The Santa Ana River Watershed Project Authority (SAWPA) has produced this report in order to present the concerns that local disadvantaged and minority communities in the Santa Ana River (SAR) Watershed region share. The findings were produced over a two month time period using a combination of personal interviews, as well as community forums with residents of disadvantaged and minority communities in the three counties that comprise the SAR Watershed: San Bernardino, Orange and Riverside.

Background

Disadvantaged Communities

The SAR Watershed contains one of the fastest growing regions in California and also some of the State's poorest residents. In 2000, the per capita income of portions of the Inland Empire was about 25% below the State average (Schreiber, 2003). **Figure 5.10-1** depicts watershed income in the SAR Watershed by census tract, based on 2007 incomes as collected by the Claritas division of Nielson Company in 2008. This disparity in income is exacerbated by the recent economic downturn which has had a detrimental effect on the region in general and specifically impacted laborers in disadvantaged communities with limited job skills.

The State of California defines a Disadvantaged Census Tract as a census tract with a household income less than 80% of the California State median household income. They also define a Severely Disadvantaged Census Tract as a census tract with a household income less than 60% of the California State median household income. In 2007 the California median household income was \$58,361 as reported by the U.S. Census Bureau (USCB, 2007). Approximately 69% of the cities/communities within the watershed are therefore considered disadvantaged or contain disadvantaged communities (**Figure 5.10-2** and **Table 5.10-1**). In terms of watershed population, 1.4 million of the 5.4 million residents are considered disadvantaged, approximately 26% of the total SAR Watershed population.

Figure 5.10-1 Watershed Income in the Santa Ana River

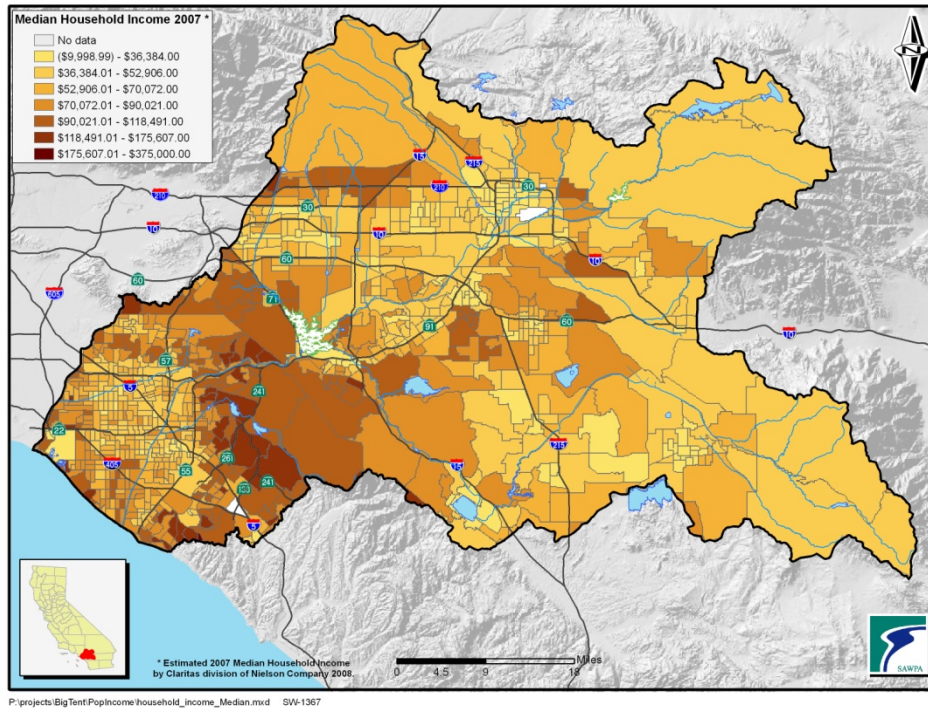


Figure 5.10-2 Disadvantaged Communities in the Santa Ana River

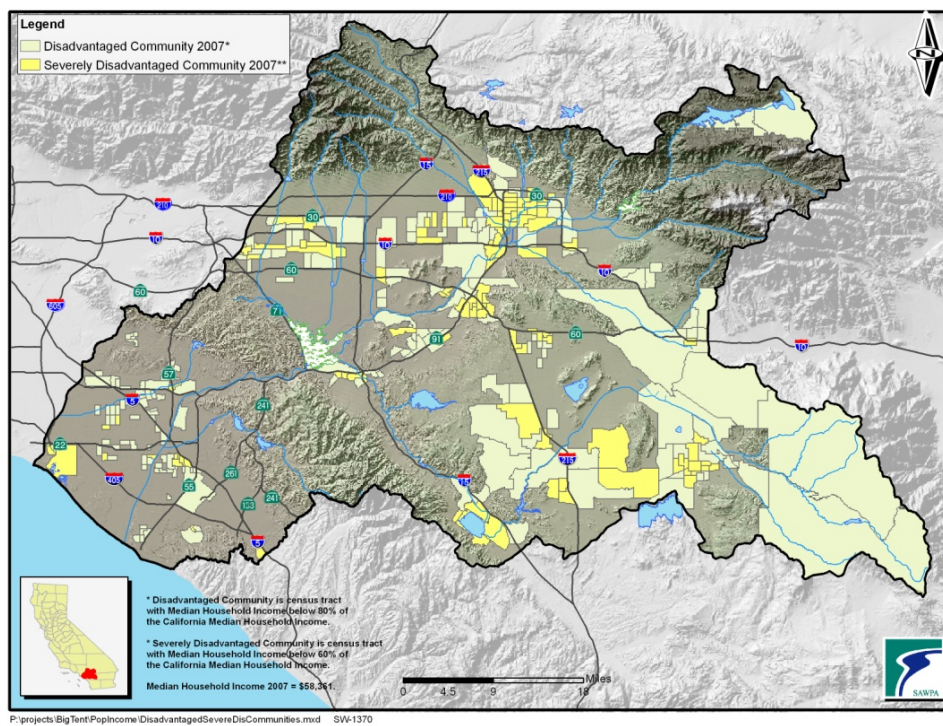


Table 5.10-1 Disadvantaged or Partially Disadvantaged Communities

Anaheim	Garden Grove	Long Beach	Riverside
Banning	Glen Avon	Los Alamitos	Romoland
Beaumont	Grand Terrace	March AFB	Rubidoux
Big Bear City	Hemet	Mira Loma	San Jacinto
Big Bear Lake	Highgrove	Montclair	Santa Ana
Bloomington	Highland	Moreno Valley	Seal Beach
Buena Park	Home Gardens	Muscoy	Sedco Hills
Calimesa	Homeland	Newport Beach	Stanton
Cherry Valley	Huntington Beach	Norco	Sun City
Chino	Idyllwild-Pine Cove	Nuevo	Sunnyslope
Claremont	Irvine	Ontario	Upland
Colton	La Habra	Orange	Valle Vista
Corona	La Mirada	Placentia	Westminster
Costa Mesa	La Palma	Pomona	Wildomar
East Hemet	Laguna Hills	Quail Valley	Winchester
El Toro	Lake Elsinore	Rancho Cucamonga	Woodcrest
Fontana	Lakeland Village	Redlands	Yucaipa
Fullerton	Loma Linda	Rialto	

Environmental Justice

The U.S. EPA defines environmental justice as the fair treatment of all races, cultures, and incomes with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws and policies, and their meaningful involvement in the decision making process of the government.

In order to achieve this objective, it is important to conduct the OWOW process in a manner that ensures all programs, policies, and activities will treat SAR Watershed residents, including minority populations and/or low income populations, fairly. This includes the need for equal enforcement of environmental laws across ethnic and income boundaries.

In order to meet the above objective, all studies conducted and data collected must adequately characterize and address the needs of the communities within the SAR Watershed. Perhaps the greatest challenge is to ensure that members of all communities are involved in the development of plans, including the OWOW Plan, and that all communities have input on water issues important to them.

Challenges

Several environmental justice issues within the SAR Watershed were identified early in the OWOW process. First, direct community impacts from groundwater contamination from industrial operations have occurred primarily in the upper watershed. This sort of contamination should be addressed as a local issue before contaminant plumes spread and the issue becomes regional in nature. Addressing such issues early not only protects water supply the community living in the area of contamination, it also provides cost savings by avoiding cost of regional cleanup efforts.

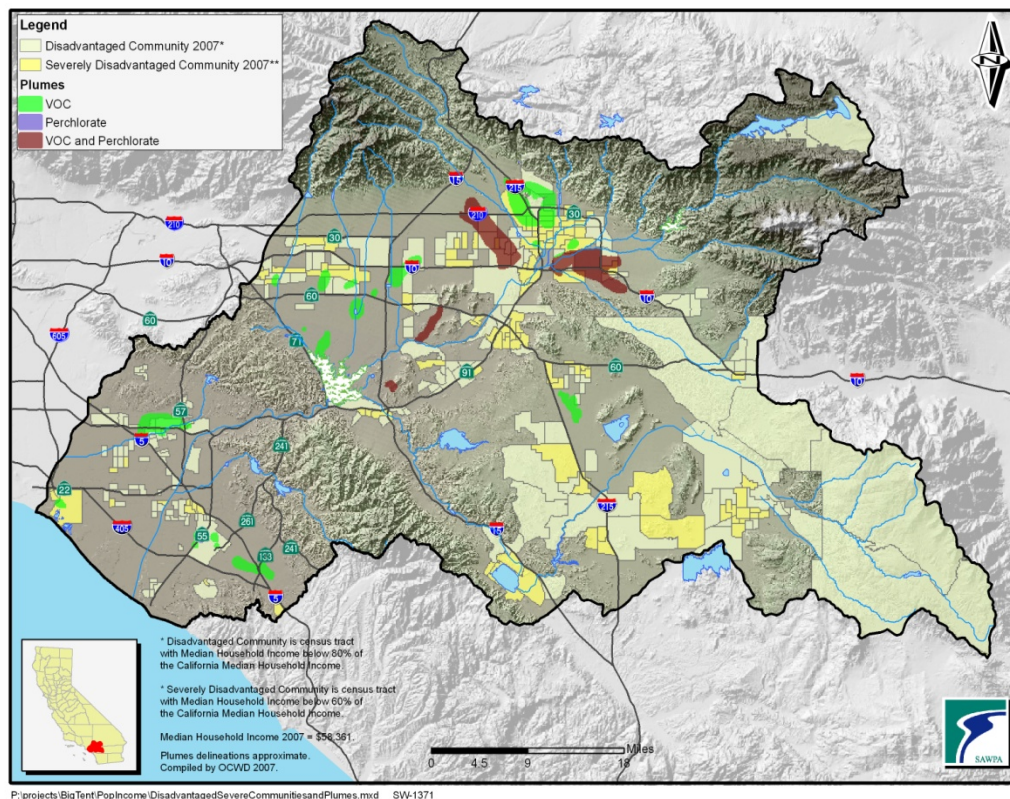
Similar issues arise in areas where groundwater and surface waters are impacted by leaking septic systems located in some high density, lower income communities where sewer services are not available. Here again, regional water quality issues can be avoided through implementation of projects to correct an environmental justice issue.

Some lower income areas of the Watershed are served by small water companies lacking resources to upgrade infrastructure and provide up-to-date treatment technologies for waste. In these areas the community lacks the resources and, in some cases, the expertise to upgrade systems. Disadvantaged areas located within larger districts with greater resources are not impacted in this way.

Finally, communication continues to be an environmental justice issue. Language barriers and a reliance on “word of mouth” communications limit communication avenues available to provide reliable, factual information to a community. In addition, the lower educational level of the community can result in difficulty interpreting the technical information needed to make informed decisions about water. Unfortunately, this issue has resulted in limited involvement from these communities in public discourse and in some cases, resulted in serious misinterpretation of information provided to the community.

Figure 5.10-3 depicts the various plumes (volatile organic compounds (VOC), perchlorate, and VOC and perchlorate) in disadvantaged communities.

Figure 5.10-3 Disadvantaged Communities and Plumes



Methodology

As part of the planning process, it became apparent that in order to fulfill the goal of direct involvement of the environmental justice community, it would be necessary to go directly to communities within disadvantaged census tracts and engage residents directly. It appeared implausible that adequate, unbiased information could be collected from meetings structured like those in the usual water resources planning process. It also became apparent that outreach would need to be conducted in a bilingual setting, as many residents were Spanish speaking and uncomfortable providing information in English.

In order to get the widest possible assessment of the concerns of the residents of minority and/or low income communities in the three counties, a series of one-on-one interviews and community group meetings were held over a period of two months in September and October of 2008. The interviews were conducted in English and Spanish in the cities of Colton and Rialto in San Bernardino County, Lake Elsinore and Pedley in Riverside County, and Santa Ana in Orange County. A standard set of questions was used to establish whether or not the residents of these communities had concerns with the water quality. The residents also were questioned about their understanding of the concept of environmental justice and their perception of the water quality in the SAR. When the survey was written, Lake Elsinore was not included in the questionnaire. Once the field work commenced in Lake Elsinore, the Lake became a topic of which the residents wanted to address without prompting.

It was apparent from the response to the questions about environmental justice and the SAR that neither concept is readily familiar to the residents of the disadvantaged and minority communities where the field work was conducted. In order to establish a base line opinion, a focus group was held at a community meeting in Santa Ana which was mostly attended by Anglo members of the community who were more affluent than the residents of the Barrio Logan area of Santa Ana who had initially been surveyed. A similar approach was used in the City of Colton because of the serious concerns about water quality in the disadvantaged and minority communities of that city. Many residents did not want to say their last names and in some instances they did not want to identify themselves, although they readily gave their opinions on their concerns with the water quality.

Findings

There is a widespread fear in minority and disadvantaged communities that the water is contaminated. During the course of the project, it became apparent early on that these communities are fearful of the water quality and are relying on water stores to obtain water for drinking and cooking. Because of the fear over water quality in disadvantaged and minority communities, there is a proliferation of water stores in these communities. Often times these water stores are chains which are located in three counties where the watershed is located. The Regional Water Quality Control Boards do not have jurisdiction over the water stores. The agency that oversees these water stores is the Food and Drug Administration because the water they sell is classified as "bottled water". It is not unusual to see residents of the communities where this project focused purchasing

a daily supply of water from the water stores. Too often the elderly residents of these communities carry their daily water supply on their own with great difficulty. Many of these elderly residents carry the five gallon water bottles in grocery carts. One senior complex in Rialto is a multi-story building. The author of this report personally accompanied one elderly resident to the water store and carried the bottles back to her apartment complex. The bottles are extremely heavy and burdensome to carry. It is troubling that the residents of these communities are so fearful of the water quality that they must shoulder such enormous burdens.

Although the Watershed has eight Superfund sites, only one resident knew about a Superfund site that exists in the area in which he lived. This resident is English speaking and the Superfund site was Stringfellow, which has a high name recognition factor. None of the Spanish speaking residents knew what the term "Superfund site" meant.

The findings below are categorized by the three counties that are within the SAR Watershed. The findings are a summary of the data that was collected in the interview process that occurred during the months of September and October of 2008. The interviews were conducted in both English and Spanish. The discussion on Quail Valley was taken from the Quail Valley Water Quality Improvement Project report prepared by SAWPA on December 2009.

County of Riverside

Community of Pedley

There is a deep concern in the area of Pedley about water quality. The community is where the Stringfellow Superfund site is located. In the conversations with residents, only one person knew about Stringfellow. The Spanish speaking residents did not know what Stringfellow is or where it is located. Bill Griffith is a long time resident of Pedley. When asked if he drinks the tap water, he replied that he never drinks the tap water. When asked why, he replied, "It's nasty stuff." Griffith said he buys bottled water. He is in a motorized wheelchair and is very knowledgeable about the area. He knows about Stringfellow as he has lived in the area for many years. Griffith spoke freely about his concerns with the water quality in his neighborhood. He currently lives in the area near the intersection of 63rd Avenue and Pedley. He also was concerned about the former U.S. Pipe Company that is located at the corner of Clay Street and Limonite, and wondered what contaminants were left behind by the company, and if perhaps the company's activities had contaminated the groundwater. Griffith did not know the term "Environmental Justice" but did echo the concerns that the environmental justice movement has in the area. Griffith did not feel that the SAR was polluted and he would allow his children to play in the river.

The concern with the drinking water was affirmed by another resident of the area. This interview was conducted in Spanish. The resident's name is Josephine. Josephine said she didn't like the flavor of the water so she bought bottled water from the grocery store. When asked about the water quality of the SAR, she immediately said she thought it was contaminated. The resident said that, in addition to her concerns about water quality, she was concerned about the illegal dumping in her neighborhood. Items dumped supposedly included motor oil so she was concerned about the effects on the water supply. When asked if the county tried to respond to her concerns, she said

they did the best that they could but the quality of the drinking supply was still a problem because of the remote location of her home. Josephine did not know the term “Environmental Justice.” She was concerned that the SAR was contaminated and would not let her children play in the river. Josephine said that her neighbors were all concerned about the water quality and purchased their water as well. It is apparent that given the isolation of the area, the residents do not feel they have any recourse but to purchase water rather than drink from a water source they do not trust to be safe.

Lake Elsinore

The Riverside County Housing Authority runs several housing projects in the Lake Elsinore area. Unlike their Los Angeles County counterparts, the housing projects are former apartment complexes which were bought by the Riverside Housing Authority for the purpose of using them as housing projects. The two apartment complexes which were part of this field work are located in single family neighborhoods and do not have any signs that they are subsidized housing. Both complexes are near Lake Elsinore. The first complex, Fairview, is located directly across from Lake Elsinore. Most of the residents were single women with young children. One resident named Lucia said that she did not drink the tap water “because it smells musty.” When asked to elaborate, she said she couldn’t but reiterated that the water smelled bad. She said she bought her water from the local water store, Agua Pura (pure water). Lucia said that she heard that the lake was contaminated and that was where they got their drinking water from. After further prompting, she said that the water smelled stagnant. Lucia had never heard the word “Environmental Justice” and had no idea what it meant. Lucia said that her neighbors were also worried about the Lake, as well as the contamination that they had heard about.

Another young mother with a small baby who did not want to give her name stated that she did not trust the tap water. She could not articulate why she didn’t trust the water when questioned. She was unable to complete the interview because of her baby.

The second housing project is located on Broadway, and produced the only two persons during the entire two-month interview period who stated that they were not concerned about the water quality. Pauline said they had water delivered to their home “out of habit.” She said that if she runs out of bottled water, she will drink the tap water. She said she didn’t have any concerns about the quality of the area’s tap water. When asked about the lake, she said that she didn’t think the lake was contaminated. Maria also is a resident of the Broadway complex, and she also had water delivered to her home because she liked the taste better. When asked about the lake, she said she didn’t think it was contaminated and admitted that she didn’t know about the SAR. When asked if she has any concerns about the tap water she replied, “No I will drink it.” Maria did not feel she had any water quality issues she wanted to address. She didn’t know what the term “Environmental Justice” meant. Another interview that went against the usual pattern produced by the field work was conducted in English with a young man in his early twenties who is a resident of the Broadway complex. The young man, Chris, said he only drinks bottled water. He buys water bottles from the grocery store and doesn’t patronize the water stores in Lake Elsinore. When asked why he doesn’t drink the water from the tap, he replied, “no way, it’s lake water.” Chris is concerned that the lake is

contaminated. He also said that the City's water pipes are rusty because the area is old. He pointed out that the newer areas such as Murrieta do not have rusty pipes, so he would drink the water in that area. Chris also said that he thinks the water is dirty because the lake is dirty. When asked if his concerns were being addressed by the officials, he replied, "I don't know, probably not." Chris was not aware of the SAR (although he knew of the Colorado River) or the term "Environmental Justice".

Steve also is a resident of the Broadway complex. He was surrounded by his children when he was interviewed. Steve said he purchases bottled water from the water store because he doesn't think the tap water is good, "it's contaminated." Many of his responses were prompted by his children. In spite of the fact that Lake Elsinore is widely used for recreation, when asked about the Lake, he immediately replied that it was contaminated and he doesn't allow his children to play in the Lake. When asked about his concerns with the tap water, he reiterated that he feels the water is contaminated. Steve doesn't think that the issue is being addressed and didn't know how it could be better addressed. The term "Environmental Justice" was not recognizable to Steve or his children.

Rudy was interviewed at the DeJong Dairy in Lake Elsinore. He said he didn't buy bottled water but had a filtration system at his house. He said he bought the filtration system because he is "somewhat" concerned about the runoff into the lake. He thinks there is contamination in the Lake from the water run-off. Rudy said he thinks the officials are addressing the issue and does not believe he has anything to contribute "because they know more about it than I do." When asked what should be done to address the concerns he has heard about, he replied "the City should talk to us." Rudy did not know the term "Environmental Justice". Rudy's girlfriend Irene echoed his comments.

Another couple, who were interviewed together and wanted the husband to be the spokesperson, were Francisco and Connie. The couple had just bought water from a water store in Lake Elsinore. They were carrying the five gallon bottle in a baby carriage. When asked why they bought water from the water store, Francisco replied in Spanish, "Because the water is contaminated." When asked why he thought the water was contaminated, Francisco replied "because it comes from the Lake and the Lake is contaminated." Both Francisco and Connie said the water "smells bad." When asked if they would let their children play in the Lake, both immediately replied, "No." When asked what could be done to address their concerns, Francisco said he would like someone to talk to him about the water. Neither one had heard the term "Environmental Justice".

Quail Valley

Information for the preparation of this section is taken from *Quail Valley Water Quality Improvement Project* (SAWPA, December 2009). Quail Valley is located within the City of Menifee in western Riverside County. According to the 2000 Census, Quail Valley had a population of 1,639, but more recent estimates put it at 4,400 residents in approximately 1,400 homes. Many of these homes are mobile homes located in small lots that rely on septic tanks for wastewater disposal. Although Quail Valley is not officially considered a disadvantaged community based on California State Median Household Income, as this classification is granted at the census tract level, it is

evident that this community is indeed disadvantaged. In particular, the area known as “The Grid” shows characteristics of a disadvantaged community.

Many of the septic tanks in the community have a history of malfunctioning, as evidenced during the 2004-05 rainy season, when many of the septic tanks of people surveyed overflowed. It is believed that the problems arise partly due to the percolation characteristics of the sites, the irregular topography of the area with high groundwater levels, and the high density of housing units. Many of the septic tank failures occur in the Grid.

According to the Santa Ana Regional Water Quality Control Board, there are approximately 1,100 septic tanks in Quail Valley, and as many as 3,900 additional lots available for development. A survey conducted in March 2005 by the Riverside County Environmental Health Department concluded that 27% of residents interviewed have grey water discharges, 28% said they have experienced problems with their septic systems, and 10% were observed having sewage discharge.

Although there is no quantifiable evidence, it is generally believed that septic tanks in the area are partly responsible for water quality impairments in Canyon Lake, which is in the Regional Board’s list of impaired waters for nutrients, and has a TMDL plan in place.

A moratorium was in place in 2006, banning the construction of new housing units or remodeling of existing units until a formal sewer system is in place. This moratorium limits what is perceived as a high potential for development in the area and adversely impacts economic development.

In March 2009, the City of Menifee formed the Quail Valley Task Force to address the problems associated with failing septic tanks. The Task Force was formed with members from Eastern Municipal Water District, Elsinore Valley Municipal Water District, the City of Menifee, the City of Canyon Lake, and the City of Riverside. In addition, the Quail Valley Sewer Improvements Alternatives Study was conducted in 2005, as commissioned by Eastern Municipal Water District to analyze the problem and identify potential solutions.

The Task Force decided to concentrate on Subarea 9 for the first phase of a Quail Valley Sewer Project. Subarea 9 is the southern portion of Quail Valley and is believed to be a contributor to some of the impairment in water quality in Canyon Lake. It is also believed that installing a sewer system along Vista Way in subarea 9 is most feasible due to topography and to the fact that there are many lots that could be developed if the sewer system were built, thus stimulating the local economy.

The study and work performed by SAWPA identified the following challenges in addressing the septic tanks problem.

- The topography of the area is hilly, which makes the construction of a sewer system more expensive.
- The small size of the lots and narrow streets make the construction of the sewer system difficult and expensive.
- Construction costs and funding challenges due to the recent downturn in the economy and the low income of residents of the area affect the financial feasibility of the project.

Preliminary estimations are that the sewer system would have a capital cost of approximately \$70 million.

- Although 80% of residents surveyed indicated that they would be willing to connect to the sewer system, hook-up fees may limit the feasibility to do so.
- The belief by some people that the authorities only have an interest in sewer Area 9, which is the area closest to Canyon Lake.

An implementation strategy for Quail Valley is laid out in the SAWPA report, consisting of the following seven strategies:

- Strategy 1 – Develop a plan to lift the moratorium on sewer the area.
- Strategy 2 – Develop a phased approach to sewer the area considering technical complexity and funding availability, including an emphasis on securing funding from several sources.
- Strategy 3 – Address additional sewer needs within Quail Valley, including provisions for “over-sizing” of sewers to accommodate future needs.
- Strategy 4 – Communicate with the residents of Quail Valley addressing the concerns and viewpoints of both the English-speaking and the Spanish-speaking members of the community.
- Strategy 5 – Concentrate on moving forward with providing sewer to Area 9 within the context of a larger Quail Valley Project.
- Strategy 6 – Develop and implement an interim plan to assist residents during rain events.
- Strategy 7 – Sign an MOU among the members of the Task Force to continue to work toward the resolution of issues and help assure residents that the Quail Valley Project will not end with the sewerage of Area 9.

Beaumont Cherry Valley

The community of Cherry Valley is an unincorporated area of Riverside County, next to the City of Beaumont, with an area of approximately 8.24 square miles. The population of the community was estimated at 5,945 in 1990 and 5,891 in 2000. The ultimate built-out population is estimated at approximately 24,700. The Beaumont-Cherry Valley Water District (BCVWD), which provides potable water service to the City of Beaumont and Cherry Valley, in its 2005 Urban Water Management Plan, estimates the following population growth:

Year	2000	2005	2010	2015	2020	2025	2030
Population	5,891	6,981	7,936	9,610	11,159	12,559	13,870

The median household income of the community in 2000 was \$39,199, or 83% of the State average household income of \$47,493. This puts the community slightly above the threshold to be considered a disadvantaged community by the State: 80% of the median state household income. However, similar to Quail Valley, some areas of the community are believed to fall under the 80% threshold.

The potable water supply from BCVWD is from local groundwater wells. While formal potable water service is provided by BCVWD, residents of Cherry Valley rely on septic tanks, or on-site waste disposal systems, for wastewater disposal and treatment prior to effluent discharge to groundwater.

According to the Water Quality Impacts from On-site Waste Disposal Systems in the Cherry Valley Community of Interest (Wildermuth Environmental Inc 2007), groundwater quality has been impacted by septic tank discharges. According to this report:

- Several production wells have been negatively impacted and nitrate concentrations are increasing at BCVWD and other retailer's wells.
- Several wells within and down-gradient of Cherry Valley have nitrate concentrations that are near or exceed the MCL of 10 mg/L.
- Water produced from these wells have a nitrogen isotopic signature that is consistent with discharges from septic tanks.

Based on the conclusions of the WEI study report, on July 17, 2007 the County of Riverside Board of Supervisors issued a prohibition on the use of on-site waste disposal systems in the Cherry Valley Community of Interest. Based on resident concerns with the prohibition, on April 29, 2008, County of Riverside Supervisor Ashley established the Groundwater Quality Evaluation Committee for the Beaumont/Cherry Valley Area (Committee). The Committee members included interested local residents and technical experts in the field of water quality. The technical experts were non-voting members and provided only technical assistance to the local residents. The Committee was tasked with reviewing technical data presented by Federal, State, and regional experts and making recommendations to the Riverside County Board of Supervisors, the cities of Beaumont, and Banning, and the Board of the BCVWD regarding the on-going concerns about groundwater quality in the Beaumont Groundwater Management Zone (GMZ). Regional Board staff and SAWPA served as technical experts on the Committee. The Committee completed its Final Report and Recommendations on June 15, 2009, but unfortunately removed the input of the several technical experts on the panel.

On July 10, 2009, the Riverside County Board of Supervisors accepted the Committee report and recommendations, but chose not to change its position on the septic system ban. On August 28, 2009, a report of the County actions and report findings were shared with the Regional Board. The Regional Board staff recommended further analysis be conducted, possibly under a SAWPA Task Force format, to ensure the protection of water quality and beneficial uses in the Beaumont GMZ. Furthermore, the Regional Board suggested additional regulatory actions if the County prohibition were to be repealed in the future, such as a prohibition on future waste discharges from septic systems to the Beaumont GMZ, and a cease and desist order with a compliance schedule to residents in Cherry Valley who dispose of wastewater to septic systems.

County of San Bernardino

City of Colton

The residents of the northern portion of the City of Colton are deeply concerned about their water quality. One resident, a young mother of a two year old child, said that she buys water from the store because the water that comes from the tap is yellow. When asked if she has ever complained to the City about the water quality, she says that she doesn't feel it will do any good so she stays silent. Every day, she and her husband go to the water store for their daily supply of water for drinking and cooking. This resident says that in addition to the water discoloration, the taste of the water is an issue.

A group of parents whose children attend an elementary school in northern Colton were queried about their water quality concerns and the following are their responses. One resident of the north side of Colton also expressed reservations about the quality of the tap water. When asked about water quality concerns with regard to the SAR, this resident, who is an undocumented worker and did not want her name to be revealed, replied that she never goes near the river so it is not a concern. This resident says that the tap water in her home is brown. She blames the brown discoloration on the rusty city pipes that deliver water to her home. She said that her entire neighborhood has rusty water. Although she lives in a disadvantaged community, she is not aware of the term "Environmental Justice." When asked if she would allow her children to play in the SAR, she replied, "No, it's polluted."

Camela, a resident who lives in northern Colton also stated that the water tastes bad. Because of the taste, she buys water from the store. Camela said she has not seen brown water coming from her tap, but at the same time said she buys bottled water because the tap water "is dirty." She feels that the pipes that bring water to her home need to be replaced. Like her neighbors, Camela feels it is useless to complain so she stays silent. Again, the term "Environmental Justice" is an unknown term in this community.

Sonny is a long time resident of Colton. He lives in south Colton. He is a Latino who lives in a primarily Anglo area of Colton. He says he doesn't see any brown water and has never had a concern about his drinking water. He admits that he never worries about the water quality but realizes that there are water problems in other parts of the city. As for the City's response to the citizen's concerns, he feels the city is responsive. "The City is going about flushing the pipes." When asked whether or not he knew what "Environmental Justice" is, he replied, "No." In spite of everything, Sonny buys bottled water because "it tastes better."

One of Sonny's neighbors is an older couple who reaffirmed that they do not have any concerns with their water quality. They routinely use the tap water for cooking and drinking. When asked whether or not they knew what the term "Environmental Justice" means, neither one could define the term.

Dave is another long time resident of south Colton. He and his wife Barbara stated that they drink the tap water readily and do not feel the water is contaminated. They pointed out that the southern part of Colton obtains their water from a different water source than the northern part of the city. Barbara believes that this may be a reason why they have never had an issue with the water quality in Colton.

City of Rialto

An informal focus group was conducted at the Senior Center in the City of Rialto. The interviews were conducted in Spanish with a group of Latino senior citizens. Each of the persons interviewed stated that they buy their water from water stores in Rialto because they are fearful of the pollution in the water. The group stated that the City of Rialto advised them not to drink the water.

Teresa is an elderly Latino woman who lives in a senior complex in Rialto. In spite of having arthritis in her hands which impedes her ability to grasp, she buys her water daily from a local water store called *Agua Pura* (pure water). The water store is in a minority neighborhood and has a brisk stream of customers buying water. It is not uncommon to see pedestrians walking from the water stores with large containers of water for their daily consumption. When asked how the City conveyed the message of not using the water, Teresa replied, "Through television commercials and in the newspaper." When asked when this was done, she replied, "It's been a while; it's been the last year or so."

An Internet search revealed a great deal of press on the perchlorate issue in the City of Rialto. The large number of press stories could have added to the perception that there is a serious problem with water quality in the City. Nevertheless, the City of Rialto stated that the tap water is safe to drink. Rialto Councilmember Joe Baca, Jr. noted that the City has sent mailers to residents explaining that the water is safe to drink. Nevertheless, the residents interpreted this mailer as stating that the water was unsafe to drink. Councilmember Baca said the City is aware of the problem and is working on ensuring the residents understand the water is safe to drink.

County of Orange

City of Santa Ana

The Barrio Logan area of Santa Ana sits in the shadow of the Ward Disposal and has been a source of concern for the residents for many years. The City of Santa Ana's Code Enforcement Department has tried repeatedly to respond to concerns by the neighbors, but is limited in what the department can do. The residents in this minority and mix-zoning disadvantaged community also are leery of the water quality. "I don't drink the water from the tap because it tastes bad," said a resident of a home next to the Ward facility who identified himself as "Salinas." When asked if he used tap water, he said he didn't because of fear of the water being contaminated. When asked why he thought the water was contaminated, he replied that it had "been on the news." This resident is a patron of the local water store.

Another resident of Barrio Logan echoed a similar concern. Juanita was interviewed at a park in the Barrio Logan area where she was watching her children play. When asked if she drank tap water she replied, "No, it doesn't taste good." When asked from where she obtained her water, she stated that she went to the water store to buy water. Juanita said she had heard that the water was contaminated so she was not going to take chances. Juanita said that it was "cheaper to buy water at the water store than to pay a doctor bill." It is evident from this conversation that this resident is extremely fearful of the water quality in the area.

During the same interview period, another woman was approached about her thoughts on water quality. Although she was in Santa Ana at the time of the interview, she said she was a resident of Corona. When asked if she used tap water, Veronica replied, "No, it tastes bad." When asked to elaborate, she said, "There are too many chemicals in the water; it leaves a bad taste." When asked about the SAR, Veronica stated that she was familiar with the SAR but she would not let her kids play in the water because of fear of contamination. When asked where she bought her water from, she replied, *Agua Pura*. *Agua Pura* is the same water store where the residents of Rialto and Lake Elsinore buy their water.

The Communications Linkage Forum (Comm Link) was created in 1989 in the City of Santa Ana in order to foster communications between the community and city leaders. The membership consists mostly of older long time residents of Santa Ana. The majority of the members of this group are not members of minority and disadvantaged communities. At the group's October meeting, the question was posed as to where they obtain their drinking water. The majority stated that they drink the tap water. The group included an official from the City's Water Resources division. None of the residents polled at the meeting had any concerns about water quality. None of these residents patronized the water stores.

The City of Santa Ana was chosen for targeted outreach to the disadvantaged community because it is located in two of the three WMAs. This outreach specifically targeted the 92701 zip code of Santa Ana because in this area there is only one half of an acre of open space for every thousand residents. In addition, it has the second highest child obesity rate in California with cities of population over 100,000. The City of Santa Ana has neighborhood associations that are officially recognized by the City as citizen participation groups. These neighborhood associations groups hold monthly or quarterly meetings to address the particular needs of their neighborhood.

Targeted outreach efforts began in the Lyon Street Neighborhood Association located in the City of Santa Ana. Residents in this neighborhood identified their main concern to be the lack of parks in their community. There was genuine interest from the Lyon Street neighborhood group to participate in the IRWMP process but there were other priorities that took precedence such as employment, housing, traffic safety and education. Though the stakeholders identified were unable to participate engaging in this neighborhood forum was a success because a community need was identified. The County of Orange realized that this type of targeted outreach efforts would help to involve other disadvantaged communities.

Armed with this new insight an outreach plan was developed and implemented to ensure that these targeted stakeholders would get involved and stay involved. The County researched other IRWM groups who were successfully outreaching to disadvantaged communities by in the State. County staff then identified and contacted organizations that were already engaged in this type of targeted outreach in other parts of the State of California. They included Environmental Justice Coalition, Urban Semillas, San Gabriel and Lower Los Angeles Rivers and Mountains Conservancy, and Los Angeles County Department of Public Works. Staff gathered information from these organizations to determine the methods that were being using to conduct this targeted outreach. This research proved that successful outreach was tied to partnering with existing community outreach groups. Community groups are an important connection because the members are a part of the community and understand the needs.

Latino Health Access

The first community group that the County began targeted outreach with is Latino Health Access. Latino Health Access (LHA) is a nonprofit organization founded in 1993 to help meet the multiple health needs of the Latino community. LHA assists in improving the quality of health and life of uninsured, under-served people by providing them with quality preventive care services and educational programs. LHA emphasizes full patient participation in health-related decisions. LHA lacks a direct connection to water resource issues but their in-depth community involvement, specifically through a program known as “Pasa La Voz”, translated in to English means “Pass on the Voice”. This program focuses on civic engagement and increased political participation by actively involving community members to help them become a valuable networking resource.

On February 7, 2009, County of Orange staff provided an informational presentation at an all day workshop with members of the community park board. This presentation was conducted in Spanish and included information on Measure M2 and Proposition 84 IRWM grant opportunities, examples of regional water projects completed in other DAC areas of California and fund raising ideas. A brain storming session ensued where community outreach opportunities were discussed.

As a result of the County’s targeted outreach, LHA submitted a project for inclusion in the Phase III Central Orange County IRWMP. The project involves the development of a pocket park in the 92701 zip code of Santa Ana, the most park-poor area of the city. The park will include a basketball court, a playground, community center with a multi-purpose room, full industrial kitchen, small office space and a walking path. Located two blocks from downtown Santa Ana and next to Spectrum condominiums, the LHA Park and Community Center will be walking distance for most residents. In addition, LHA plans to offer nutrition and physical activity, English as a Second Language, and mental health support programs at the Center. The Community Center will be seeking Silver Certification under the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Green Building Rating System, which means that the construction will have to include water-use efficiency among other environmentally-responsible measures.

On April 11, 2009 County of Orange staff participated in a site cleanup event and brought in kind assistance in the forms of tools such as shovels, rakes, hoes and trash bags. About 20 volunteers showed up to help with the cleanup. Previous efforts were made to clean up but were not successful due to the lack of tools. Support for this project has continued by offering in-kind services, such as assistance from County of Orange LEED certified staff and support for local fundraising events. The development of this pocket park will help fulfill the need of a park that was originally identified by the Lyon Street neighborhood.

La Habra High School Watershed Event

OC Watersheds staff worked with the National Hispanic Environmental Council and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the City of La Habra to conduct targeted outreach with two AP Environmental Science classes at La Habra High School. The outreach was a two day watershed event that was held on May 21 and 22, 2009. This two day event started with speakers coming to the AP Environmental Science classrooms at La Habra high school to provide information to the students about their watershed, water supply and water quality. Lunch was sponsored by the City of La Habra and Waste Management to give the students’ additional time to participate in the event. The second day

included a field trip where students walked to Coyote Creek and conducted water quality and habitat monitoring. Information was provided to the students about the types of pollutants that were being tested as well as what affects these pollutants can have on water quality. Habitat monitoring studied what types of birds and other animals were using the area for habitat. After the monitoring the students wanted to make a difference so they made the extra effort to remove trash and debris that was in Coyote Creek channel. The students removed a large amount of trash and debris that had collected in the creek. The watershed event was very successful because the students gained valuable information and experience in the environment and helped to clean up their watershed. Over fifty students participated in this two day event.

A grant was submitted and approved by the US Fish & Wildlife Service for water quality monitoring supplies. This targeted outreach has developed into yearly Water Quality monitoring efforts by La Habra high school AP Environmental science students. In October 2009 program implementation began with County of Orange staff providing water quality monitoring training to the students. Training involved the use of the mobile lab where students performed water quality tests for nitrates, phosphorous, dissolved oxygen and pH. This grant has helped to expand these efforts by incorporating a second high school to begin water quality monitoring.

Conclusion

The SAR Watershed includes one of the fastest growing populations in California. The Inland Empire is growing at a phenomenal rate and will only continue to expand. Because there are so many disadvantaged and minority communities in the SAR Watershed, it is important that Environmental Justice be of prime importance in any discussion of water supply and reliability in the Watershed. There is a wide perception among residents of disadvantaged and minority communities that the water is contaminated. In the two month time period spent in the disadvantaged communities of Riverside, San Bernardino and Orange Counties, it is apparent that that these communities are going to great lengths, both physically and economically, to avoid using tap water. Whether it is an elderly woman in Rialto carting heavy bottles of water home, or a young mother with small children who also lugs heavy bottles of water home, the reality is the same: people are afraid that the water is contaminated. There must be a serious effort to communicate with the residents of these communities about the water supply and reliability. The disadvantaged and minority communities have a feeling of disconnect from the agencies that have jurisdiction over their water supply. The residents need to be assured that the water supply is not contaminated. There is a grave distrust of the water quality in these areas by the residents, and this has to be countered. Although public officials state that that there is nothing wrong with the water quality, the residents are not aware of this message. Too often, these residents are situated in communities that are isolated. For example, the area surveyed in Pedley was in an isolated rural neighborhood where persistent dumping onto the ground is the norm. The residents believe, and rightly so, that this will contaminate the ground water and feel powerless to stop the dumping of oil and other hazardous materials in their neighborhoods. There is also a fear of what contaminants are left behind by industrial plants that are no longer functioning. Although millions of dollars have been spent cleaning up Superfund sites in the Watershed, there is still the persistent idea that there is contamination in the water supply. The residents of the disadvantaged and minority communities often times only speak Spanish, so an effort should be made to speak Spanish to these communities.

In 2007, SAWPA initiated the OWOW project in order to pool all of the resources in the SAR Watershed to ensure that the water supply is protected. A network of nearly 100 Federal, State, and local agencies along with the private sector is in the process of producing a long range planning document that will give the region a unique and comprehensive approach to Watershed management. With so many agencies and stakeholders involved, it is only right that the disadvantaged and minority communities which are so isolated and distrustful of their water quality, be brought into the process. OWOW is comprised of various pillars such as Flood Risk Management and Water Quality Improvement. The Environmental Justice pillar is an equally important pillar that must be nurtured in order to allow these disadvantaged and minority communities to begin to participate in the process of creating the long range planning document, which will give us the blueprint for watershed management for many years to come.

The results of this interview study reinforce the need for a careful, coordinated public information program in service to the Environmental Justice community. Many of the resident's concerns are based on misinformation, but nonetheless, they are concerns. Carefully planned, well-executed public information programs have not reached the entire community, and it would be beneficial to convene a number of roundtable discussions among public education professionals from throughout the Santa Ana River Watershed to develop a strategy that reaches all communities.

There are legitimate water quality issues that impact low income communities throughout the Watershed. These issues need resolution. However, some of the issues involving perception of unsafe water where water supplies are clearly safe for public consumption identify another problem. Spending scarce family resources to protect families from a perceived risk appears to be a major Environmental Justice issue. The solution to this issue is to ensure that all communities have the information they need to make informed decisions.

Acknowledgements

Many people took the time to help throughout the course of this project. Space does not permit the listing of all of the people encountered over the two month period; however, the following persons who stand out in this project are gratefully acknowledged:

Congressman Joe Baca

Rialto City Councilmember Joe Baca, Jr.

Jeremy Baca

Mike Trujillo, Congressman Joe Baca's office

Heidi Marshall, Executive Director Riverside
County Housing Authority

Mary Gutierrez, Comm Link Santa Ana

Ana Carricchi, Director of Policy Latino
Health Access

Dave Woelfel, Santa Ana RWQCB

Bob Holub, Santa Ana RWQCB

A special note of gratitude goes to SAWPA's Executive Director Celeste Cantú for supporting this project, and also to Jeff Beehler, PhD, Senior Environmental Project Manager at SAWPA, for his encouragement and support.