

HEAL THE BAY'S STORMWATER REPORT SHOWS LITTLE PROGRESS IN REDUCING POLLUTION FROM LA COUNTY'S STORM DRAIN SYSTEM

As winter rains begin, Heal the Bay releases its first-ever Stormwater Report—a groundbreaking assessment of how well stormwater pollution is being managed in Los Angeles County. Upcoming deadlines, as early as 2021, to meet strict stormwater pollution reduction limits are fast approaching. Many local municipalities are not close to reaching their goals, which is resulting in poor water quality across the region.

SANTA MONICA, Calif., December 10, 2019 — Heal the Bay, an environmental nonprofit, releases its [Stormwater Report](#) to examine progress in stormwater pollution reduction efforts in Los Angeles County, California. The report assesses the current state of affairs, identifies progress in reducing stormwater pollution, offers a streamlined framework for improved collaboration between stakeholders, and outlines clear and measurable guidelines that strengthen the ability of watershed management groups to reduce stormwater pollution within their jurisdictions as quickly as possible.

Stormwater is the single greatest source of pollution in LA County's rivers, lakes, and ocean. Cities and counties have had nearly 30 years to create and implement plans for reducing stormwater pollution. Heal the Bay's new Stormwater Report examines data from 12 watershed management groups over six years (from December 2012 to December 2018) to assess progress made toward stormwater pollution reduction goals. Heal the Bay finds that LA County groups are only about 9% complete toward final goals and some groups have fast-approaching deadlines in 2021. The report also reveals that monitoring and enforcing stormwater pollution is made more difficult by a lack of transparent requirements and processes. As a result, many local municipalities are not making meaningful progress to reduce stormwater pollution, and information is not readily available to the public, who are directly impacted by polluted waters.

“Heal the Bay's Stormwater Report shows six years of shockingly minimal progress in cleaning up LA's stormwater. We urge officials to take immediate action by strengthening regulations that hold polluters accountable for implementing multi-benefit stormwater projects. The power of local water in LA can only be realized if we protect and clean this precious resource,” says Dr. Shelley Luce, Heal the Bay's CEO.

There are 208 waterbodies in the LA region that are identified as impaired by the California State Water Resources Control Board. Many of these waterbodies are impaired by multiple pollutants such as bacteria, heavy metals, nutrients, pesticides, and trash. Impaired waterbodies do not support their intended beneficial uses, including fishing, swimming and wildlife habitat.

Water quality is much worse 72 hours after a significant rain event in LA County. This is because of how LA County manages its stormwater. In our region, the storm drain system is separate from the sewer system. While sewage is sent to treatment facilities to be cleaned before it is discharged, stormwater flows over streets, through storm drains, and out into receiving waters. Along the way it picks up pollutants that pose serious risks to public and environmental health. Even during dry weather, runoff from driveways, parking lots, sidewalks, and illegal dumping ends up in our storm drain system and then flows into local waterbodies untreated.

The LA County MS4 Permit, the primary mechanism for regulating city and county stormwater pollutant discharge, is coming up for renewal in early 2020. The existing permit has failed to spur water quality improvements, and environmental groups fear the new permit will be further weakened and compliance deadlines extended. Cities and counties must be held accountable if they are not on track to reach their stormwater pollution reduction goals. Heal the Bay's Stormwater Report indicates that many groups are now drastically behind schedule.

Fortunately, there is new funding available to improve stormwater project implementation. Funding from the Safe, Clean Water Program will be allocated throughout LA County starting in spring 2020, increasing available funding for stormwater projects by approximately \$280 million per year. This will more than double the amount spent by municipalities on stormwater projects in LA County. These funds can be further leveraged with other sources, including Measure A (LA County Safe, Clean Neighborhood Parks and Beaches Protection), Measure M (LA County Traffic Improvement Plan), Measure H (LA County Homelessness Initiative), Prop 1 (CA State Stormwater Grant Program), and Prop 68 (CA State Parks, Environment, and Water Bond).

“Stormwater has the potential to be a wonderful resource for water supply, recreation, and so much more. But right now, it is more of a hazard polluting our waterways. We need to step up cleanup efforts if we are to see water quality improvements in our lifetimes. We should not have to wait 60 years for clean water,” says Annelisa Moe, Water Quality Scientist at Heal the Bay and lead author of the Stormwater Report.

With long-term plans in place and new funding opportunities at hand, the approval of a strong 2020 LA County MS4 Permit will lead to more stormwater projects moving forward. These projects would significantly improve water quality throughout LA County, protecting both public and environmental health, while also providing multiple additional benefits to LA communities such as a new water supply, improved air quality, and climate resiliency.

The Stormwater Report can be found online at: <https://healthebay.org/stormwater-report/>

ABOUT HEAL THE BAY:

Heal the Bay is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization making Southern California coastal waters and watersheds safe, healthy and clean. We use science, education, community action, and advocacy to pursue our mission. Learn more at www.healthebay.org

CONTACT:

Talia Walsh, Heal the Bay, (310) 451-1500, x137; twalsh@healthebay.org
Annelisa Moe, Heal the Bay, (310) 451-1500, x115; amoe@healthebay.org

####