

**VOLUNTEER STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE  
FOR RECREATION USE SURVEYS OF ENGINEERED CHANNELS  
IN THE LOS ANGELES REGION**

**LOS ANGELES REGIONAL WATER QUALITY CONTROL BOARD**

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## **PURPOSE AND APPLICABILITY**

This standard operating procedure (SOP) details the methodology to be used to conduct recreational use monitoring of engineered channels in the Los Angeles Region, in order to determine the extent of recreational activity in, on, and adjacent to these water bodies. This is part of the Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Boards re-evaluation of the recreational use designations for the engineered channels in the region. The procedures outlined in this SOP are applicable to all Regional Board staff, stakeholders, and volunteers who participate in any coordinated recreational use survey for this purpose. Where recreational use surveys are conducted as discrete events by Regional Board staff, or incorporated into other projects or monitoring programs by other agencies, the *Field Assessment* element of the *Procedures* section will be applicable.

## **SUMMARY OF THE METHOD**

Recreational use monitoring will involve concurrent monitoring of the engineered channels of a given watershed by different sets of volunteers (field teams). Teams with the same agency/organization affiliation will be assigned a volunteer coordinator from that agency/organization. Each team will be assigned to specific reaches identified by Reach Names, Cross Streets, and Thomas Guide Locators.

The monitoring will consist of two components

1. Field survey to document physical conditions and recreational activities at the site being monitored, and
2. Completion of questionnaires (Recreational Use Surveys) by those engaged in recreation at the site being monitored

## **ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

**Field Team:** Each team will consist of at least two members: (1) the primary field surveyor and photographer, and (2) the use surveyor. The field surveyor will conduct the field survey as detailed in the procedure section and conduct photo-documentation of the recreational activities observed. The use surveyor(s) will solicit respondents for the user survey and provide assistance in completing questionnaires. Any additional field team members will be use surveyors and will also provide assistance to the field surveyor as necessary.

**Volunteer Coordinator:** There will be one field coordinator for each agency participating in the recreational use monitoring. Each volunteer coordinator will be in charge of the field teams affiliated with their organization/agency. The coordinators will provide training for their volunteers on the standard operating procedure for the recreational use monitoring as outlined in this document. They will be present at the start of the monitoring effort to ensure each team is properly

equipped; and at the conclusion of the field work to receive the data collected and debrief the team members. They will also be available by phone throughout the monitoring period to provide guidance and answer questions.

Data Manager: The data manager will compile all the information obtained from the field monitoring efforts and transcribe them into a user-friendly format.

**VOLUNTEER TRAINING:**

Volunteer coordinators will conduct training of their volunteers one week prior to a scheduled monitoring effort. At this training, field teams will be formed, monitoring sites assigned, and a meeting point identified. Team members should become familiar with the directions and maps prior to the monitoring/surveying day.

**EQUIPMENT AND SUPPLIES**

The following items will be provided for each volunteer team

1. Clipboards, Pens
2. Field Observation Sheets
3. Copies of User Survey
4. Photo-log forms
5. Instructions for Field Assessment
6. Instructions to access monitoring points
7. Notebook or Blank sheets for additional notes/comments
8. Flyer to put in window of car
9. Health and Safety Information
10. First aid kit

Each volunteer should bring

- Timepiece (one per team)
- Cellular phone (to be reachable)
- Digital Camera
- Sturdy shoes
- Drinking water
- Sunscreen
- Hat
- Weatherproof jacket

## **PROCEDURES**

The goal of the recreational use monitoring is to capture routine recreational activity within and adjacent to the engineered channels surveyed. The procedures contained in this section must be carefully followed in order to maintain the integrity of the data collected for this purpose. Volunteers should be mindful to not introduce bias into the process.

### *Preliminary Procedures*

Volunteers will meet at a pre-determined time on monitoring day to check in with the volunteer coordinator, and pick up equipment and supplies. The offices of each Volunteer Coordinator could be used as a meeting area for field teams. After field monitoring and conducting surveys, volunteers should return to their pre-determined meeting area to be debriefed and to turn-in field sheets, completed questionnaires (surveys), and photos.

### *Monitoring Locations*

Each team will be assigned two or more monitoring locations (the actual number will be dependent on the total number of teams). Directions to the survey locations and access points will be provided along with maps and Thomas Guide page and grid numbers. The volunteer coordinator will be available for questions and clarifications.

Teams will spend 1 – 2 hours per location and should walk or bike as much of the stream length as they are able. The actual extent of the water body segment surveyed should be noted on the field sheet using cross streets or other appropriate markers for the starting and ending points. The amount of time spent at each location will depend on the degree of recreational activity occurring at the location – a minimum of 1 hour for locations with little or no activity, and no more than 2 hours where there is significant activity. Upon completion of a monitoring exercise, teams will immediately proceed to the next location.

### *Access*

Each team of volunteers will be given a map and information that identifies access points. Only legal access via parks, bike paths, multi use trails or overpasses will be used. Park your car in a safe nearby location and leave project identification information (flyer) on the dashboard.

### *Field Assessment*

#### *Field Monitoring*

1. A field sheet will be completely filled out for each site. The names of all team members should be included
2. Note the date, location, start time, and weather and flow conditions as

- indicated on the field sheet
3. Using the field sheet, keep a running tally of the number of people observed and the nature of activity they are engaged in.
  4. Take one photo upstream and one downstream of the channel.
  5. Take at least one additional photo for each type of activity observed as listed on the field sheet.
  6. The intent of the photos is to document the activity and not the people engaged in the activity. Therefore, long view photos should be taken in such a manner as to protect the privacy/identity of the people recreating.
  7. These long view photos should capture the channel walls and flow conditions where possible. Long view photos are best shot with the sun at the photographer's back.
  8. Document each picture taken on a separate photo-log form provided for this purpose. Note the date location, photographer name, photo number, time (for each photograph), and narrative description of the activity captured.
  9. Note the end time of the field survey and the extent surveyed

#### *Conducting User Surveys/Questionnaire*

1. Potential survey respondents will be approached in pairs with a courteous manner. Minors should not be approached.
2. Team members will introduce themselves.
3. The following script will be used to explain the projects purpose and solicit participation in the survey:  
*"We are involved with a watershed-wide effort to determine the types of recreational activities that occur in and around the river/stream. The information we collect will be used to ensure that the proper level of water quality protection is provided to protect those recreating in these water bodies. We have a questionnaire which will take less than five minutes to complete. You could fill it out yourself or we could ask you the questions and fill in your responses. Would you like to participate in this survey?"*
4. Team members should not attempt to persuade potential respondents that appear reluctant to participate.
5. The number of potential respondents refusing to participate should be noted on the field sheet.
6. Respondents do not have to respond to all questions. The use surveyor should make the notation "dta" beside the questions the respondent declines to answer.
7. The survey will be reviewed before the interviewee departs to make certain that the survey is clearly and completely filled out and to seek clarification on the responses, where necessary.
8. Team members should complete as many surveys as possible during the two-hour monitoring period.
9. Team members should contact their volunteer coordinators with any questions.

Turning in Field Data

All field sheets, forms, photos and completed surveys must be returned to each Volunteer Coordinator directly upon completion of monitoring at the final location. Team members may briefly update their volunteer coordinators on the monitoring exercise.

The volunteer coordinator will compile all data and information received from the volunteers, check them for completeness, and submit them to the data manager within one week of the coordinated monitoring effort.

**SAFETY CONCERNS**

Team members should ALWAYS put safety first. For safety reasons, team members should stay in close proximity of each other during the entire monitoring exercise.

1. Most importantly, common sense must be used at all times
2. No form of illegal access should be attempted
3. Confrontations with homeless people should be avoided at all times.
4. The volunteer coordinator should be contacted immediately if any logistical problems arise.
5. Call 911 in case of medical emergencies or immediate threat to personal safety.
6. The monitoring effort should be abandoned where it is perceived that the personal safety of team members may be compromised.