



## Cost-benefit analysis key

By Holly Schroeder and Bill Buratto  
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Earlier this year, Bill Watkins, executive director of the UCSB Economic Forecast Project, shared his outlook on Ventura County with a capacity crowd of business and government leaders. In his view, the region was expected to have low population growth and a strong economy, bolstered by the continued success of Countrywide Financial and Amgen.

What a difference six months can make.

Ventura County workers now face extensive layoffs from some of our region's largest employers — more than 12,000 employees to date — and local businesses are burdened by increasing costs that may serve as a catalyst for choosing to move their businesses out of the county.

Which makes it all the more confusing as to why one of our regulatory boards tasked with serving the public interest would consider a proposal that would not only add backbreaking costs to local businesses each year, but also restrict their ability to expand and force potential layoffs in an industry sector that has been a major contributor to our region's economic success.

At issue is cleaner water, something all Ventura County residents value. But the question is how best to achieve it.

A proposed permit revision before the Regional Water Quality Control Board would impose Draconian storm-water regulations on businesses and local governments throughout the region and essentially force any new construction to create minifiltration mechanisms to clean runoff water on each construction site.

Unfortunately, this small percentage of superclean water will then pour into our existing storm drains and mix with the millions of gallons of polluted runoff water from all the streets, farms and existing development that don't have these special systems.

The result will be an enormous financial burden on business with no clean water benefit.

Additionally, the proposed revisions would discourage the very type of development residents and local governments have been trying to encourage in the county — compact, infill projects that take advantage of existing infrastructure and don't impact our beautiful open spaces.

The proposed revisions as they stand would require that enormous amounts of land — land that is rarely available in infill projects — be dedicated to storm-water control. As a result, businesses needing to expand or wanting to build new facilities in urban areas will not likely meet the requirements. In any other jurisdiction, this would force businesses and cities to seek out underdeveloped land where these requirements can more easily be met, but given Ventura County's desire to limit growth in the unincorporated areas, it is likely that no building will occur at all, forcing businesses and jobs to relocate to neighboring areas, furthering the jobs-housing imbalance and negatively affecting the economic vitality of Ventura County.

To make matters worse, the proposed revisions rely on incomplete science and studies that aren't even applicable in Ventura County. They use old national data and studies completed in the Pacific Northwest that aren't relevant for Ventura County, where we also need to provide flood control during significant rain events. This one-size-fits-all approach doesn't consider Ventura County's climate, geology, hydrogeology or terrain.

For example, many areas of Ventura County have high groundwater that makes some requirements for retaining water in the ground completely unachievable.

Ventura County cannot afford the price tag associated with the revised storm-water permit, not the actual dollars and not the cost to our business community or our quality of life. Not when there are other solutions to the problem.

Instead of pursuing an ineffective, "feel-good" approach that will diminish business opportunities and employment in Ventura County, the board should first conduct a cost-benefit analysis to see how exactly these proposed revisions will impact our economy and taxpayer pocketbooks. Once we have better data to make informed decisions, we are confident the board will need to impose regional solutions that treat large quantities of water throughout Ventura County instead of the current site-by-site "solution."

That is the only way to achieve cleaner water for our families while maintaining the county's economic vitality and employment growth.

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