

Urban Coast

The Journal of the Center for Santa Monica Bay Studies

November 18, 2009

Urban Coast Launch Event

Remarks by Dr. Shelley Luce, Executive Director of the Santa Monica Bay Restoration Foundation

Thank you Dean Plumb, and thanks to you and the school of science and engineering for your support and your partnership in the Center for SMB studies and the Urban Coast journal. Disseminating useful data and policy analysis relevant to the coastal waters and watersheds in our region can only advance our common goal of creating a better Los Angeles and a better world.

The Urban Coast is important to us because it expands and deepens one of the core functions of the Santa Monica Bay Restoration Commission. One of our jobs is to build consensus. That's a term we hear a lot but we all know that it's actually very hard to achieve with all the competing goals and funds and opinions out there. But it's important and we put a lot of work into achieving it and I have learned that in order to really build consensus we have to get past people's positions and understand the rationale or the analysis that forms their position on a given issue. Doing this takes time but is extremely rewarding and is one of the purposes of this Journal: it is a forum for experienced, knowledgeable professionals to state their opinions, popular or unpopular, and give voice to the rationale behind those opinions, so that we can all understand better. In this way we can find the commonalities and the specific areas of discord in the positions we all take, and then I believe we can we can craft better solutions for the problems we are struggling with.

One consensus that seems to have been reached is that we need to undo some of the damage that we have done in developing our cities. We can look back and marvel at what we have built: the dams, the aqueducts, the freeways, the bridges, the buildings, were created by our amazing engineers and skillful builders, with politicians backing them and enormous public support, and in a pretty short time period too. What they didn't realize was that the health and prosperity of the city they were building depended on the natural processes of the land and water it was built upon.

Now, we know better and we all talk about green infrastructure and more parks and cleaner water and a healthy city. We know there's less water for our lawns, our kids don't have safe parks, the climate is changing and we must adapt. These are the new challenges, not just for us scientists and policy makers, but for those amazing engineers and skilled builders and visionary politicians and financiers. They are still here, in southern California we have everything we need to rebuild, to unpaved the urban coastal region so that we bring nature back home and let it do its work, cleaning our air and water, integrating natural processes into everything we do. This means green streets and alleys, rain gardens and native plants, natural stream channels and wetlands, a healthy urban forest, even in our most developed areas. These are things we are learning to do, and we are getting better at it.

How to do these things right – technically, politically, and socially – and how to pay for them – these are issues we still grapple with, and these are the issues that our journal, Urban Coast, will advance. The premiere issue features leading policy-makers on climate change and water supply and the bold steps that they believe are required of us; it analyses a radical new policy innovation that makes low-impact development a requirement in municipal stormwater permits; and it details the environmental impacts of highly collaborative stream restoration projects that are models for our region and beyond.

The line-up is already forming for the second issue which will feature stormwater BMPs from around the region, where streets and buildings have been retrofitted to transform this toxic problem back into a useful resource; designing a marsh restoration that adapts to climate change; and follow up analysis and next steps for the MLPA process in southern California.

We are very excited about the Urban Coast journal and so glad you are all here to help us launch it.

The Center for Santa Monica Bay Studies is a joint program of Loyola Marymount University's Seaver College of Science and Engineering and the Santa Monica Bay Restoration Foundation.

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