

TECHNICAL WORKING GROUP MEETING #2

SEPTEMBER 26, 2024

10:00 AM – 2:00 PM

CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL FLOWS FRAMEWORK

LOS ANGELES RIVER

MEETING LOCATION: LOS ANGELES RIVER CENTER AND GARDENS
570 W AVE 26, LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

Attendees

Name		Affiliation	In person/virtual
Manuel	Aguilar	City of Los Angeles Department of Water and Power	Virtual
Steve	Appleton	LA River Kayak Safari	In person
Jon	Avery	US Fish and Wildlife Service	Virtual
Brian	Baldauf	Mountains Recreation & Conservation Authority	In person
Jon	Ball	City of Los Angeles Sanitation and Environment	Virtual
Eric	Batman	Los Angeles County Department of Public Works	Virtual
Edward	Belden	LA Bureau of Engineering	Virtual
Tim	Brick	Stewards of the Arroyo Seco	In person
Isaac	Brown	Stillwater Sciences	In person
Nate	Butler	Stillwater Sciences	In person
Jason	Casanova	Council for Watershed Health	Virtual
Johanna	Chang	City of Los Angeles Department of Water and Power	Virtual
Rebecca	Correa	Mountains Recreation & Conservation Authority	In person
Edith	de Guzman	UCLA/UC Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources	In person
Meghrie	Demirdjian	City of Los Angeles Department of Water and Power	Virtual
Candice	Dickens-Russell	Friends of the Los Angeles River	In person
Mas	Dojiri	City of Los Angeles Sanitation and Environment	In person
Brionna	Drescher	California Department of Fish and Wildlife	Virtual
Joe	Edmiston	Mountains Recreation & Conservation Authority	Virtual
Monica	Eichler	US Army Corps of Engineers	In person
Kyle	Evans	California Department of Fish and Wildlife	Virtual
Hannah	Flynn	Stillwater Sciences	In person
Mary	Ferguson	LA County Parks and Recreation	In person
Jesus	Gonzalez	City of Los Angeles Department of Water and Power	In person



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Name		Affiliation	In person/virtual
Karina	Gonzalez	City of Los Angeles Sanitation and Environment	In person
Ben	Harris	Los Angeles Waterkeeper	In person
Chad	Hecht	Center for Western Weather and Water Extremes	Virtual
Nathan	Holste	Bureau of Reclamation	Virtual
John	Huynh	City of Los Angeles Department of Water and Power	In person
Rita	Kampalath	LA County Sustainability	Virtual
Nurit	Katz	UCLA/ City of Los Angeles Department of Water and Power	In person
Stacee	Karnya	City of Los Angeles Sanitation and Environment	In person
Wendy	Katagi	Stillwater Sciences	In person
AJ	Keith	Stillwater Sciences	Virtual
Melissa	Lane	Stillwater Sciences	In person
Esther	Lofton	University of California Agriculture & Natural Resources	Virtual
Michael	Lutz	City of Los Angeles Department of Water and Power	Virtual
Paola	Machan	Carollo Engineers	In person
Ron	Mayuyu	City of Los Angeles Sanitation and Environment	In person
Chris	Medak	US Fish and Wildlife Service	Virtual
Jessica	Medrano	Stillwater Sciences	In person
Mayra	Molina	California Department of Fish and Wildlife	Virtual
Carling	Monder	USC Public Exchange	In person
Thuan	Nguyen	Los Angeles County Department of Public Works	In person
Nathan	Nunez	Nunez and Nunez Consulting	In person
Sophia	Olmeda	City of Los Angeles Department of Water and Power	In person
Bruce	Orr	Stillwater Sciences	Virtual
Katherine	Pease	Heal the Bay	In person
Tania	Pineda- Enriquez	Heal the Bay	In person
Mahesh	Pujari	City of Los Angeles Sanitation and Environment	In person



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Erik	Porse	University of California Agriculture & Natural Resources	Virtual
Drew	Ready	Council for Watershed Health	Virtual
Ernesto	Rivera	Los Angeles County Department of Public Works	In person
Alex	Robinson	University of Southern California	In person
Rowan	Rodrick-Jones	Stillwater Sciences	In person
Christian	Romberger	California Department of Fish and Wildlife	In person
Susie	Santilena	City of Los Angeles Sanitation and Environment	In person
Bill	Saunders	Los Angeles County Department of Public Works	In person
Bronwen	Stanford	The Nature Conservancy	Virtual
Clark	Stevens	Resource Conservation District of the Santa Monica Mountains	Virtual
Kris	Taniguchi-Quan	Southern California Coastal Water Research Project	In person
Ryan	Thiha	City of Los Angeles Sanitation and Environment	In person
Bryan	Truong	City of Los Angeles Sanitation and Environment	In person
Jane	Tsong	Watershed Conservation Authority	Virtual
Melissa	Turcotte	Los Angeles County Department of Public Works	Virtual
Maddy	Utrecht	Stillwater Sciences	In person
Amanda	Wagner	US Army Corps of Engineers	Virtual
Samuel	Ward	Stillwater Sciences	In person
Pat	Wood	Los Angeles County Department of Public Works	In person
Belle	Zheng	Council for Watershed Health	In person



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Agencies, Organizations, and LA River CEFF Terminology

Acronym	Meaning
CDFW	California Department of Fish and Wildlife
CWH	Council for Watershed Health
CEFF	California Environmental Flows Framework
FoLAR	Friends of the Los Angeles River
HtB	Heal the Bay
LABOE	City of Los Angeles Bureau of Engineering
LACPW	Los Angeles County Department of Public Works
LADWP	City of Los Angeles Department of Water and Power
LARWQCB	Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board
LASAN	City of Los Angeles Sanitation and Environment
LLAR	Lower Los Angeles River
MRCA	Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority
NRDC	Natural Resources Defense Council
RCDSMM	Resource Conservation District of the Santa Monica Mountains
S.AS	Stewards of the Arroyo Seco
SCCWRP	Southern California Coastal Water Research Project
SDMP	Structured Decision-Making Process
SWRCB	State Water Resources Control Board
TNC	The Nature Conservancy
TTWG	Thematic Technical Working Group
TWG	Technical Working Group
UCANR	University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources
UCLA	University of California, Los Angeles
ULAR	Upper Los Angeles River
USACE	US Army Corps of Engineers
USC	University of Southern California
USFS	US Forest Service
USFWS	US Fish and Wildlife Service
WCA	Watershed Conservation Authority



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Overview

The purpose of this meeting was to kick off the Thematic Technical Working Group (TTWG) involvement in the Los Angeles River California Environmental Flows Framework (CEFF) C process, provide necessary background information, share organizational management goals, begin to identify performance measures, and to hold space to brainstorm, ask questions, and make comments related to the topics above.

Meeting Notes

Introductions

Welcome by Wendy Katagi, Stillwater Sciences

Wendy Katagi, Stillwater Sciences: Welcomed all to the LA River California Environmental Flows Framework Technical Working Group (TWG).

“Today we will be focusing on the work of the Thematic TWGS (TTWGS). The LA River is a precious resource to all of us. TWG members here today represent decades of involvement with the watershed and river, including in flooding, hydrology, ecology, recreation, climate change, water quality, water supply. We’re grateful for your expertise and legacy. Your legacy of work will be a critical part of the process. We thank you for that. The purpose of LA River CEFF, which was developed by a group of experts, including some with us today, is to solve tough questions about flows and needs for the community. We also understand there are regulatory requirements for the river, as well as projects that touch the river or flow into the river. This time is to acknowledge competing needs and work together to find balance. This is our river. A year from now, we will be looking at recommendations from this group to inform regulatory decisions about the use of the river and how much flow will need to stay in the river. We are not alone in addressing our own challenges.”

Opening Words

Joe Edmiston, MRCA: Endorsed Ian McHarg’s Design with Nature approach. Noted that the products of the LA River CEFF process will not only be published, but implemented, and that timing with the likely Proposition 4 would mean a significant amount of funding from the state for implementation.

Jesus Gonzalez, LADWP: Commented that overall, we all want the river to thrive. Noted the planned major investments and projects in the City of LA alone that will impact the river. Shared LA River CEFF’s importance to LADWP, the river’s historic significance for the city and significance in the long term. LADWP is planning major investments with the river as part of envisioning the river’s future over the next 100 years. Emphasized that the purpose of the TWG is not for priorities to compete, but for members to have an open dialog.

Shared the example of the LA River Ecosystem restoration project as a large, cross-cutting project with opportunities to achieve all goals. Noted that it will require careful planning and coordinating



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with other projects to account for impacts of dry-season base flows. Emphasized the City of LA's support, engagement, funding, and desire for transparency.

Review of LA River CEFF, Project Process and Timeline by Isaac Brown, Stillwater Sciences

See attached slides 3-16.

Discussion

Edith de Guzman, UCLA: Edith clarified whether LA River CEFF looks only at the “ribbon” of the river, or the watershed. Noted that for some themes, such as water quality and urban cooling, a watershed-scale analysis may be more suitable.

Stillwater.Sciences.response: Actions in the watershed impact flow to the river and possibly from the river and are key to understanding hydrograph.

Steve Appleton, LAR Kayak Safari: Steve noted that considering historic loss of tributaries and aquifer capacity, we may under-calculate summer historic flows. Asked how the hydrograph is calculated.

Stillwater.Sciences.response: LA River CEFF Section A aimed to develop an understanding of historic natural flows and developed a model, which included flows from before and after modifications. The LA River naturally has gains and losses. Stillwater acknowledges that the model cannot catch all variability.

Ben Harris, LA Waterkeeper: Noted the importance of addressing peak flows-related flooding issues that threaten river-adjacent communities.

Stillwater.Sciences.response: The study question, addressing flood for river-adjacent communities, is central to how the process moves forward. **(ACTION ITEM)**

Mas Dojiri, LASAN: Noted that City of LA is working on a LA River temperature study and that temperature is part of water quality. Donald C. Tillman, Los Angeles-Glendale, and Burbank Water Reclamation Plants have new NPDES permits to lower the temperature the temperature of effluent from 86 to 80 degrees Fahrenheit. It will be critical to understand whether this will influence beneficial uses, and to what extent. Data to answer this can be used for water quality questions.

TTWG Kickoff by Nate Butler, Stillwater Sciences

See attached slides 17-42.

Discussion

Ben Harris, LA Waterkeeper: Asked whether the LA River CEFF products will be considered incomplete to due the availability (and lack thereof) of data.



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Stillwater.Sciences.response: The LA River CEFF process involves incorporating as much information as possible and documenting the lack of/need for information to develop performance measures and/or suitability criteria. These documentations would be made in terms of what success looks like.

Steve Appleton, LAR Kayak Safari: Asked whether TTWGs should consider interrelationships between groups. As an example, water temperature would impact water quality, habitat, and urban cooling. Should the TTWGs consider what information is needed to answer these questions?

Pat Wood, LACPW: In response to Steve Appleton, agreed that some actions and recommendations will have implications for other thematic management goals and responsibilities. As an example, a goal that increases flood hazards will require the involvement of the flood risk mitigation TTWG. Noted that housing near the river is important, considering housing shortage.

Stillwater.Sciences.response: Yes, flood hazard needs to be considered. Human health and safety are critical throughout the process.

Mahesh Pujari, LASAN: Asked a question about how to move forward when existing flows are not sufficient for management goals.

Stillwater.Sciences.response: LA River Step 10 will address multi-benefit opportunities. The purpose of the current Discovery phase is to understand what success would look like.

Mas Dojiri, LASAN: Asked a question about the purpose of the products of the LA River CEFF process. Will the final draft report be submitted to the State Water Board for review? Will the State Water Board use these recommendations in their decision-making?

Stillwater.Sciences.response: Our recommendations will inform their process. The LA River CEFF process was recommended directly by Erik Ekdahl, Deputy Director of the Division of Water Rights. We are directly communicating with him.

Breakout Session Instructions: Management Goals Evaluation by Nate Butler, Stillwater Sciences

See attached slides 43-66.

Discussion

Alex Robinson, USC: Asked a clarifying question regarding the concept of flow nexus: should the TTWGs consider how some actions may not have a nexus for one theme, but do for another? Example of increasing flood protection resulting in decreased habitat.

Stillwater.Sciences.response: Yes, document these moments. The Stillwater team will help to find synergies.



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Breakout Sessions

Biodiversity-Habitat.TTWG.Breakout.Group

The Biodiversity/Habitat TTWG Breakout Group discussed the following management goals:

- **Jon Avery, USFWS:** Noted that 30 pairs of least Bell's vireo have been documented in floodplains on mainstem channel.
- **Christian Romberger, CDFW:** Habitat function, species usage, and population dynamics in the watershed.

Additionally, there was a group discussion in response to a question raised by **Nurit Katz (UCLA)** about setting a goal for riverbed nesting, in addition to adjacent bank-area nests like that of the least Bell's vireo.

Cultural-Tribal.TTWG.Breakout.Group

The Cultural/Tribal TTWG Breakout Group discussed the following management goals and priorities:

- **Nathan Nunez, Nunez and Nunez Consulting**
 - Demonstrate interconnectedness of the San Gabriel Mountains and Los Angeles River through a cultural/tribal perspective.
 - Reintroduction of steelhead trout into the Los Angeles River
- **Brian Baldauf, MRCA**
 - Highlight the importance of river, providing cooling and exposure to aquatic biodiversity
 - Continue the push to recycle water while prioritizing preservation and enhancement of in-channel habitats.
- **Paola Machan, Carollo Engineers**
 - Educate communities on the historical components and values of the river.

Additionally, the group discussed temporal and spatial considerations for these goals, including the particular importance of the soft-bottomed portions of the river, as well as considerations for goals explicitly focused on tribal culture, such as use of tule boats, seasonal ceremonies, and decolonialization of place names.

Flood.Risk.Management.TTWG.Breakout.Group

The Flood Risk Management TTWG Breakout Group discussed the need to clarify some of the broad management goals regarding reduced flood risk and determine how reduced flood risk would be evaluated or assessed by different organizations. There are many management goals that relate to reducing flood risk that could potentially be consolidated.



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The group noted that the biodiversity-focused management goal to naturalize the Los Angeles River should also be discussed as a flood risk management goal. The group also discussed how high-magnitude and infrequent flood events (i.e. the 100-year storm event) are not CEFF flow metrics where a recommendation would be made, but that flood risk and management or operational decisions for flood flows could affect some of the CEFF flow metrics.

The group discussed efforts to quantify the storage volume necessary to reduce the existing flood risk enough to allow for vegetation or other restoration features in the channelized reaches. The California State Polytechnic University of Pomona study, River, Revitalized, looked into this question and should be added to the CEFF resources.

The group discussed new FEMA recommendations being considered for risk associated with climate change, such as increased flood discharges and how those are calculated for flood risk mapping.

TTWG Members' suggested goals included:

- Maximize naturalization of the river channel wherever feasible while maintaining flood protection
- Replace concrete infrastructure with nature-based solutions wherever feasible
- Reclaim natural floodplain open space along river channel
- Prevent further development within the river's natural floodplain
- Maximize stormwater capture infiltration throughout the watershed
- Achieve 51 miles of habitat along the river channel
- No reduction in flood capacity and potentially increase in flood flow carrying capacity

Recreation.TTWG.Breakout.Group

The Recreation TTWG Breakout Group discussed the broad management goal of improving the interface between the river corridor and adjacent communities, noting that desires and needs for recreation will vary based on location, cultural background, and other factors.

TTWG Members' suggested goals included:

- Increase accessibility of water recreation
- Enable community drive opportunities to directly participate in ecosystem restoration projects through planting native plants
- Establish robust methods to gather useful flow and water stage data in recreation zones
- Develop and make publicly accessible visualization tools and show water levels, flow, and flood risk in real time
- A healthy, biodiverse, accessible river that supports vulnerable communities and mitigates climate change
- Complete the LA River trail so that there is a continuous ride along the entire river and encourage future routes on both sides where feasible



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- Improve the interface between the river corridor and adjacent community

Urban.Cooling.TTWG.Breakout.Group

The Urban Cooling TTWG Breakout Group discussed the following management goals and priorities:

Edith de Guzman, UCLA

- Identify vulnerable communities with less adaptive capacity along the river through an equity analysis
- Focus on summer months to allow potential recreational areas to improve local climate
- Consider the effects of utilizing the river water for cooling on existing river flora and fauna
- Call attention to river water body serving as cooling agent even during dry seasons
- To make access to climate adaptation reachable for all Angelenos
- Make the river an urban cooling corridor
- **Carling Monder, USC Public Exchange**
 - Maximize soft-bottom sections potential as cooling areas
 - Understand relationship between vegetation and water levels
 - Highlight cold groundwater upwelling in soft-bottom areas as cooling influence, in addition to vegetation
 - Identify and address research gaps and knowledge gaps
 - Increased resilience and habitat for river
- **Karina Gonzalez, LASAN**
 - Emphasize effectiveness of potential concrete removal in certain areas for cooling
 - Assess potentially competing water needs for groundwater recharge and using the river water for cooling
 - Examine relationship between river temperature to urban cooling, and whether temperature issues are a result of water effluent or the channelization/concrete lining of river, or both
- **Chad Hecht, Center for Western Weather and Water Extremes**
 - Density observation network to improve current understanding of urban heat island effects to optimize improvements to most vulnerable communities.
 - In addition to sharing the priority above, discussed potential of releasing reservoir water to river during dry season to sufficient water for cooling during hottest weather

Water.Quality.TTWG.Breakout.Group

The Water Quality TTWG Breakout Group discussed the relationship between flows and concentration of pollutants, the need for additional data comparing pollutant concentration between low- and high-flow periods, and importance of baseline concentration limits to protect



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aquatic organisms. Warm effluent and trash were discussed as primary pollutants, especially during the winter wet seasons. Effective management at catch water basins was highlighted to prevent clogging and forcing protective screens to send trash along with water to the ocean.

Esther Lofton (UC Agriculture and Natural Resources) proposed multifunctional green infrastructure utilizing trees to both capture bacteria and reduce water temperatures, leading to additional question regarding flow requirements at different points in hydrograph to support vegetation growth.

The group discussion also touched upon bacterial growth influenced by shaded/non-shaded areas, and concerns over conflicting water temperature needs by different biodiversity at various reaches of the river.

TTWG Members' suggested goals included:

- Decreased trash in our waterways
- Safer swim conditions
- Arundo and invasive plant removal
- Funding the projects that will lead to compliance with wet- and dry-weather TMDLs for the upper LA River
- Increased water recycling at DCT and LAG
- Protection/enhancement of biodiversity
- LA River to achieve water quality regulations/beneficial uses
- Compile and analyze the data from different agencies and publish an annual report with a transparent analysis
- More recreational opportunities for inland communities and easier access to the river

Water.Supply.TTWG.Breakout.Group

The Water Supply TTWG Breakout Group discussed the need for LA River CEFF process to identify “How much water, when we need it and where we need it” to achieve goals in the river to determine the implications for the water supply programs. **Jesus Gonzalez (LADWP)** noted dry weather base flow as a major challenge, but that he believes potential conflicts are solvable.

The group also discussed the fact that implementation of the goals/alternatives will take a long time, and there is a need for both near and long-term perspective/plan recommendations.

TTWG Members' suggested goals included:

- Ensure the LA region is water secure
- Maximize stormwater capture in the LA River watershed
- Increase water recycling and provide sustainable water supply in LA region
- Improve water supply resiliency and reliability by developing local water sources while protecting the beneficial uses in the river
- Naturalize the river as much as possible improving habitat for fish and wildlife



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- Restoring steelhead passage from the San Gabriel Mountains (Arroyo Seco) to the Pacific Ocean
- Using a watershed approach, enhancing biodiversity and meeting the climate change challenge

LA River CEFF Workplan Guidance: Steps 9-12

See attached slides 67-87.

Discussion

Edith de Guzman, UCLA: Asked a question about how the tradeoffs analysis will be conducted: focusing most on what's possible, or most desirable. Acknowledged that TTWGs are being empowered in light of many current unknowns and possible pathways. Noted that incorporating scenarios, in addition to including as many factors as possible in analysis, may give more robust end results.

Stillwater.Sciences.response: Whether the recommendations are general, specific, qualitative, or quantitative will be determined further in the process depending on what is best.

Ben Harris, LA Waterkeeper: Asked about how the TTWGs should address assumptions and unpalatable alternatives.

Stillwater.Sciences.response: At this point, in the Discovery phase, the aim of TWG's work is to understand all opportunities. The in-development flows assessments will support further analysis in the spring. Stillwater has added anthropogenic parameters to the assumptions.

Clark Stevens, RCDSMM: Asked how and when to incorporate "wish list" projects that are not represented in any planning documents.

Stillwater.Sciences.response: This will be addressed before TWG meeting #3, in the TTWG meetings. Visionary projects/ideas are not off the table. We emphasize that this is a unique time that we want to leverage with all experts. If we do not have the data to support and model an idea, now is the time to discuss and document it.

Discovery Discussion and Looking Ahead, by Isaac Brown and Wendy Katagi, Stillwater Sciences

See attached slides 88-94.

Discussion.prompt;What are your concerns or challenges with the LA River CEFF process?

Candice Dickens-Russell, FoLAR: Made a comment acknowledging that it will be difficult for TWG members to meaningfully contribute to multiple TTWGs due to the quantity of groups.

Stillwater.Sciences.response: Heard that how the multitude of voices will be heard and validated is a concern. Agreed with that point, especially given FoLAR's perspective and experience of working across disciplines.



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Edith de Guzman, UCLA: Shared concern that product will be inappropriately prescriptive, given the time and scope, and noted importance of framing the LA River CEFF products as one set of possible outcomes.

Stillwater.Sciences.response: Heard and agreed. To that point, we will build on ongoing efforts with similar study questions, some outside of the LAR watershed. Will leverage what has already been done, to address broad goals.

Monica Eichler, USACE: Shared concern over whether the TWG has all the right representatives at the table. Within large organizations, such as USACE, there are many groups covering many efforts, and due to funding we may not be able to represent them all. Asked whether other experts will have opportunities to contribute, even if they cannot attend any meetings.

Stillwater.Sciences.response: Any contributions will be well received. Stillwater is on a mission to include those voices. MRCA is hosting a public webpage that will be updated with news and deliverables. **(ACTION ITEM)**

Rebecca Correa, MRCA: Asked a question regarding how newer TWG members can catch up on previous work, see a schedule of when meetings are happening, and see details for the upcoming meetings.

Stillwater.Sciences.response: This is a good point, just like any project milestone schedule with deadlines/internal deadlines. We are open to feedback on this.

Ben Harris, LA Waterkeeper: Made a comment about the amount of uncertainty that the TWG will face during the CEFF process. Asked whether recommending large studies would be within the scope of CEFF, given that the 20-month timeline would be too short for a long-term study.

Candice Dickens-Russell, FoLAR: In response to Ben Harris, asked how projects without published studies will be incorporated. Noted that FoLAR conducted a design study involving repurposing infrastructural gravel pits and has done prior work comparing master plans.

Stillwater.Sciences.response: We have been working directly with authors/teams behind different plans. Will respond in a targeted way to this. **(ACTION ITEM)**

Katherine Pease, HTB: Noted that many of the plans incorporated do not fully include anthropological or political considerations.

Stillwater.Sciences.response: Agreed, there is much important information that is not documented within plans. Example of Nathan Nunez's storytelling within the Cultural/Tribal TTWG. **(ACTION ITEM)**

Pat Wood, LACPW: Noted that some plans that include repurposing certain facilities or assets have not consulted with the owners of those facilities/assets, and that this must be addressed.

Meeting Closure Wendy Katagi, Stillwater Sciences

