

The Future of LA Water is Female: Celebrating the Achievements of Dorothy Green

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[Wendy Ramallo, Executive Director and Jessie Johnson, Communications and Partnerships](#)

In 1987, Congress designated the month of March as Women's History Month. Since that time, U.S. Presidents have issued annual proclamations designating the month of March to continue as Women's History Month. Women who came before us, and those who work among us, now have made some of the most impactful contributions to our basic life conditions: safeguarding the water we drink, the air we breathe, and the places we play.

To celebrate the achievements of women, CWH is launching an educational effort to highlight the influential work of women in the environmental community to inspire future generations of leaders.

One of the most important and complex challenges facing Angelenos today is the safety and resilience of our local water supplies. From boardrooms to courtrooms, community spaces and natural places across Los Angeles, women are leading the effort to ensure our water future is safe and secure for decades to come. As a result of their efforts to diligently advance the health and sustainability of our regions watershed across various fields, we know the future of LA water is female.

The first female water leader we would like recognize is none other than our very own fearless leader, Dorothy Green.



Dorothy Green was neither a scientist nor an engineer but an environmental visionary who spent her life advocating for responsible management of California's water resources. Born in Detroit, Michigan, she moved to Los Angeles and enrolled at UCLA as a music major; the same year of her graduation would also become her wedding anniversary as she and Jacob (Jack) Green married in 1951.

Undoubtedly one of the most influential environmental thought leaders and activists in Los Angeles history, Dorothy began her environmental legacy by focusing on solving a problem right in her own backyard. Her path to clean water activism was spurred in 1985 when she discovered her brother had been splashed with untreated wastewater from an open drain at Ballona Creek in Marina del Rey. Shortly after the incident, Dorothy convened a group of like-minded individuals in her Westwood living room and formed Heal the Bay.

Dorothy became a full 'citizen-warrior' when she campaigned for Proposition 20, which soon led to the formation of the California Coastal Commission, and later campaigning against a project that would bring Northern California water south through the California Aqueduct by looping around the polluted Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta. Her activism was so powerful that she was appointed by Mayor Bradley to the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power Board of Commissioners. As a member of the Board she helped guide the policies of the largest municipal water and power utility in the Country.



By 1996, Dorothy had founded Heal the Bay, Council for Watershed Health and the California Water Impact Network. It has been said that her genius was in bringing together different players in the water world to talk about solving our (California's) problems. She was ahead of her time in her approach to water governance - she promoted efficient water management practices that respect natural water distribution at a time when no one else was thinking about water so holistically. She was known for her relentless efforts to improve statewide water management, travelling throughout California educating people on best water management practices and even as she fought a decades long battle with cancer as she worked to publish her book, *Managing Water*. Her intelligence and passion inspired many – through the years and still today – to become involved in water science and politics.

CWH was clearly formed under the leadership of a true change agent. When Dorothy asked us all to think “upstream” it was more than a scientific issue of reducing the source of the pollution that flows to the ocean. It was a challenge to all of us to look up and look around at what we had done to the environment and the people in it. She was known to remind everyone who would listen that, “We have enough water, if only we manage it wisely.” True to her vision, CWH continues to play an important role in reshaping how water agencies have improved water resource management.

CWH Executive Director Wendy Ramallo and Director of Finance Rumi Yanakiev reflect on Dorothy Green's leadership and mentorship. Rumi was the first officially employee of CWH and worked with Dorothy for many years.

Over 20 years ago Dorothy challenged us to work with nature to restore wetlands and habitats and build places that can hold water during flood events – saving rain through natural systems. Her vision of safely restoring segments of the LA River, roundly assailed at the time, is now being championed by agencies, political leaders and community members from Pacoima to Long Beach and everywhere in between. In sum, “she was warned, she was given an explanation, but nevertheless, she persisted.” Likewise, her vision for reducing water flow upstream and increasing water capture in the San Fernando Valley is the basic principle guiding hundreds of millions of dollars in groundwater recharge and water reuse projects.

My children will know an LA River I never before imagined, because of Dorothy's persistence. They will understand the impact of their actions at school and at home on water quality and supply in the San Fernando Valley because of her activism promoting the use of natural systems to slow, spread and sink water back into the ground.

For these reasons and many more we celebrate her legacy in her own words, “I don't look back, only forward.”

- Wendy Ramallo

"I think of Dorothy each and every day. Every time I read about our ocean and rivers, conservation and recycling, desalination and augmentation of our aquifers by capturing rainwater, native vegetation and drought, or any aspect of the water issues we face in Southern California, I think of Dorothy. Every day I come to work, I think of Dorothy. Every day there is something to remind me of Dorothy. She was a remarkable woman, my mentor, my surrogate mother, and my friend. She made this world a better place to live. She was a brilliant and passionate woman, she was driven by her goals, tireless, devoted, inspiring – a visionary and a leader. She gave time to everyone who wanted to talk to her about the complexity of our water issues, and always advocated for common-sense solutions. Dorothy gave me a very special opportunity to be part of her life, part of her vision."

- Rumi Yanakiev