

2. USR Planning Framework, Stakeholder Involvement, and Integration

The purpose of this section is to provide 1) an overview of the IRWM framework for the Upper Sacramento, McCloud, and Lower Pit Region (USR), 2) an assessment of stakeholder involvement in the USR, and 3) a review of the levels of integration that are being achieved through the region's watershed planning and project implementation process.

2.1 Regional Framework for Integrated Planning in USR Watersheds

The California Department of Water Resources (DWR) Guidelines and California Water Code state that an Integrated Regional Water Management (IRWM) plan is to be a comprehensive planning document to encourage regional strategies for management of water resources. By investigating a broad spectrum of issues, developing objectives, and identifying management strategies, participants in the IRWM process work to improve relationships and communication and coordination that achieve synergies of staff and financial resources, making planning more comprehensive and less duplicative throughout the region. This process should result in a water management plan developed via grassroots effort that addresses a meaningful diversity of needs in the USR.

2.2 Stakeholder Involvement

USR stakeholders have been the driving force for the region's IRWM planning effort, from initially identifying the opportunity for IRWM in the USR to pushing for a representative governance structure and inclusive IRWM plan. The region's history with IRWM and similar collaborative efforts is discussed below, along with a description of how stakeholder input and effort has been integrated into the planning process.

2.2.1 USR Planning Process – Overview

In March 2009, the River Exchange (REX) and California Trout (CalTrout) sent out a joint letter as part of the project's stakeholder solicitation process and in support of the Regional Acceptance Process (RAP). The letter announced that these two organizations were working together to promote regional water management planning for the Upper Sacramento and McCloud watersheds, and that they were inviting organizations to 1) participate in what was proposed as a long-term effort to better understand the water resources in those watersheds, and 2) collaboratively design an approach to managing water resources that recognizes the many competing needs for water use and stewardship in the region.

In developing the RAP documents, the two organizations were in contact with representatives of the Upper Pit Region, the Northern Sacramento Valley Region, and the North Coast Region to ensure that the USR covered substantial portions of excluded areas and possessed congruent regional boundaries. REX and CalTrout submitted the RAP on behalf of the Upper Sacramento, McCloud and Lower Pit Region in April 2009, and held the first meeting of the Regional Water Management Group (RWMG) in February 2010 to announce acceptance as an IRWM region. In August 2010, the second meeting of the RWMG was held to select an applicant for the planning grant. Due to the River Exchange's extensive organizational experience implementing and administering state grant awards, the RWMG selected REX to apply on behalf of the region.

In developing the planning grant proposal, coordination occurred with RWMG members, DWR and Regional Water Quality Control Board staff, adjacent regions (North Coast, North Sac Valley, and Upper Pit), as well as with the Cosumnes, American, Bear, and Yuba and Inyo-Mono regions.

In early 2012, the River Exchange signed a two-year grant agreement with DWR to manage the process of developing an IRWM plan for the USR. The planning process was designed to develop a water

management plan that is meaningful for the region and developed by the stakeholders, rather than a top down, one-size-fits-all approach, to accommodate the diverse needs of different interests.

Much of the groundwork for the IRWM planning effort had already been initiated through the work of other collaborative processes in the region. Examples from the McCloud watershed include the McCloud River Coordinated Resource Management Plan (CRMP), the Redband Trout Conservation Agreement, and the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) relicensing process for the McCloud-Pit Hydroelectric Project. In the Upper Sacramento watershed, REX had previously partnered with a diverse group of stakeholders to complete a Watershed Assessment and Management Strategy (North State Resources 2010) that was funded through DWR's CALFED Bay-Delta Program.

As the planning process got underway in 2012, the project team initially began meeting every other month. This schedule encouraged continuity of discussion while allowing time for the project team to respond to requests and develop meeting materials. In mid-2013, after most of the chapter work had been discussed within the broader stakeholder group, many of the details were worked out by smaller working groups dedicated to particular subjects. For example, the project development work group developed an approach to prioritization that was approved by the RWMG. These work groups provided continued and open participation, but allowed focused refinement of the details necessary to complete a comprehensive IRWM plan.

In 2013, the IRWM Plan was completed and a Memorandum of Understanding between a group of stakeholders (further described below) established the USR IRWM Group. In late 2013, the entities represented on that group formally approved the Plan and submitted it to DWR for final approval. During the spring of 2014, DWR approved the Plan and provided final payments on the planning grant.

2.2.2 Stakeholder Composition

Chapter 16, Governance, gives an in-depth look at the composition of the stakeholder body. It is important to note that stakeholder identification and outreach has been occurring since initiation of the RAP process in 2009. Interested stakeholders who are new to the IRWM effort are integrated into the planning process in whatever capacity they're interested and willing to participate.

Of the stakeholder types listed in the California Water Code, the USR has representatives from:

1. Retail water purveyors, including local agencies;
2. Wastewater agencies;
3. Flood control agencies;
4. Municipal and county governments and special districts;
5. Energy producers;
6. Native American Tribes that have lands within the region;
7. Environmental stewardship organizations (including watershed groups, land conservancies, and environmental groups);
8. Industry organizations (including agriculture);
9. State, federal, and regional agencies with specific responsibilities and knowledge within the region; and
10. Disadvantaged community representatives.

A full list of participants in the 2011-2013 planning process is included in Chapter 16, Governance.

2.2.3 Process to Identify Stakeholders

The River Exchange, as the initial grant recipient from DWR, publicly noticed the IRWM development process in March 2011 as a news release to a number of regional news outlets. It announced the grant award and contract along with a description of the planning process and intent to prepare an IRWM plan. The news release included contact information for the River Exchange. This announcement was preceded by at least two years of outreach to and research by a variety of organizations within the region, including those types listed above and in Chapter 16, Governance.

As described above, stakeholder identification was complemented by the numerous collaborative activities that had occurred in the region. Through these efforts, many stakeholders already knew one another, or were at least aware of organizational interests. This aided REX in their initial outreach. The 2009 group was asked to further identify potential interested organizations for participation, and this was requested again in 2012 with the beginning of the planning grant. The process was structured to ensure that all stakeholders were able to submit their comments and viewpoints, and at no point in the development of the RAP or the IRWM Plan was participation closed to any individual or organization.

2.2.4 Disadvantaged Community Outreach

Most of the region qualifies as “disadvantaged” using DWR’s criteria of 80% of statewide median household income per the most recent census. The three largest communities in the USR, Dunsuir, Mt. Shasta, and McCloud, qualify as disadvantaged communities (DAC) and are active participants in the region’s IRWM planning and project implementation process.

As described in Section 2.2.1, outreach to these communities and others began with the RAP process. They were identified as disadvantaged using the DAC mapping tool available through DWR’s IRWM website. Coordination between representatives from these entities and the River Exchange, as well as through collaborative outreach with other groups, ensured that these communities were well integrated into the IRWM process early on, and consistently incorporated and included throughout. This outreach included individual phone calls, informative e-mails, process updates through other organizations, and one-to-one discussions in the project development phase to ensure that these communities had every opportunity to identify and describe their projects, thereby preparing them for future implementation opportunities.

Stakeholders recognize the critical water supply, delivery, and wastewater treatment issues faced by DACs. As a result, all stakeholders involved in the IRWM development process made it clear that a major priority for the region is support for the infrastructure challenges faced by these communities. This collective support has been key to the ongoing participation of these communities, and it has helped to establish a foundation on which future USR RWAG activities can be based.

2.2.5 Aboriginal Community Outreach

As described in the Region Description (Chapter 3), four tribes have lands or interests in the USR area: the Modoc Nation, the Shasta Tribe (represented by the Shasta Nation and the Shasta Indian Nation), the Pit River Tribe, and the Winnemem Wintu Tribe. These tribes began to be identified during the RAP process (though the Shasta Nation band of the Shasta Tribe was invited at the beginning of the planning process, in early 2012).

Prior to completion of the 2013 IRWM Plan, these nations were all involved in the IRWM planning process to some extent; however, the level of participation varied. For instance, participation by the Shasta Indian Nation was limited, whereas the Winnemem Wintu Tribe was actively involved – partnering on several projects and submitting comments on nearly all chapter drafts. The Pit River Tribe

submitted comments but did not submit projects and stated that their participation was limited in part because of the Tribe's inclusion in several IRWM regions.

Outreach completed during the original planning process included a special effort to encourage input and comments from these aboriginal nations. This has ranged from one-to-one discussions regarding process and timeline to accepting late chapter comments for consideration. Each group was asked on at least one occasion about project development, including the offer of technical assistance. In addition, the budget identified in the planning grant application for completing an assessment of regional tribes' ethnographies and attitudes towards water and natural resources was doubled partway through the planning process to accommodate the number of tribes and the importance of their contribution to the planning process. For at least one nation, this ethnography work was their primary contribution to the document; for others, it represented a complement to the effort they put into contributing to – and, in some cases, developing – plan content.

In 2013, representative of the four tribes joined with other groups in signing the Memorandum of Understanding that established the IRWM group, and each tribe voted to approve the 2013 Plan. Since that time, Tribal involvement in IRWM has been instrumental in RWAG's governance, and the RWAG process has provided sustained opportunities for RWAG members to increase their understanding of Tribal status and issues. Projects specifically proposed by tribes in the 2013 Plan were not selected for major funding during 2014-2017, along with numerous other proposals, because the emphasis was placed on infrastructure needs in municipalities. The tribes represented in the RWAG supported those funded infrastructure proposals, as well as funding for the Pacific Forest Trust conservation easement near McCloud. Also, the Winnimem Wintu Tribe was a partner in the funded proposal for groundwater monitoring in the McCloud area.

In the future, the RWAG hopes to steadily improve its understanding of Tribal natural resource issues in the USR and incorporate such issues in the overall approach to improved watershed management. This approach is encouraged by DWR's 2016 IRWM Guidelines for implementation of Proposition 1.

With DWR's emphasis on greater Tribal participation under Proposition 1, RWAG anticipates that there will be new opportunities for USR tribes to access valuable training and technical assistance for project development, as well as new opportunities for Tribal input and leadership in the management of the region's water resources. Tribes have a rich cultural legacy and ancestral memory that can especially enhance local restoration and climate mitigation efforts.

The 2018 IRWM Plan update process included a concerted effort to engage tribes in completion of the document and to establish a priority for continued involvement in IRWM planning and project implementation. Formal letters were distributed to each of the tribes inviting feedback on the plan update and offering compensation for staff time in document review. By addressing organizational obstacles such as lack of financial and administrative capacity, RWAG aims to empower Tribal leadership in RWAG and advance implementation of Tribal projects in the USR.

The Government-to-Government Relationship

As stated in the 2016 DWR guidelines, the entities implementing IRWM must recognize that tribes are sovereign nations, and as such, coordination with tribes is on a "government-to-government" basis. The following discussion offers observations and recommendations regarding that relationship, based on experience in the USR RWAG and in this update process.

According to the direction from DWR, RWAG is responsible for carrying out the government-to-government relationship. However, most of the people who represent entities in the RWAG lack the training and experience necessary to implement that concept. Typically, the resource management

interests within RWAG have been mutual, or at least amenable to discussion and compromise on a relatively informal basis. Several issues have arisen regarding Tribal participation and the government-to-government relationship. These occasions are summarized below in the interest of better future relationships within the RWAG, and as examples for consideration elsewhere in the statewide IRWM process.

To summarize, these cases involved: 1) failure to involve tribes (and other RWAG members) early in preparation of grant proposals for support of RWAG operations; 2) failure to involve tribes (and other RWAG members) early in development of approaches to drafting the 2018 IRWM Plan update; and 3) especially, failure to use a formal process to invite tribal governments to participate in review of specific chapters of the 2018 IRWM Plan update that address tribal relationships and RWAG governance.

The River Exchange acknowledges that the issues likely could have been avoided with better communication early in the respective processes and during the work itself. With the benefit of hindsight, it is apparent that management and coordination of tasks on behalf of RWAG sometimes erred on the side of perceived efficiency, through informal communications and a focus on short-term work goals. Relationships with tribes and others may have suffered as a result.

Therefore, even when good informal relationships exist among tribal representatives and other RWAG representatives, it is recommended that all RWAG members, including tribes, observe the government-to-government relationship as it exists, and with each step, be considerate of those relationships that have been fostered through years of collective hard work in the region. Good will and shared interests are obviously important, but they may not always be sufficient to account for the broader responsibilities of the various entities involved in the IRWM process.

Through this update, the RWAG and its tribal members also wish to encourage DWR to play a more active role in supporting the government-to-government relationship being implemented at the IRWM region level. It is strongly recommended that DWR provide clear direction and regular training regarding the role of the government-to-government relationship in the IRWM process and the responsibilities of all parties in implementation of that relationship.

2.2.6 Technology and Information Access

A website (www.uppersacirwm.org) was developed early in the planning process to make information available to all stakeholders and interested parties. The website not only brings greater transparency to the IRWM process, it ensures that all participants have easy access to the same information. While the website includes a restricted area, it does so only to allow internal information – primarily related to project development – to be kept confidential until it is ready to be made public. This allows a certain amount of “gestation time” by providing participating stakeholders an opportunity to become familiar with a suite of proposed projects prior to introducing them to the public.

In addition to the website, RWAG administrative duties include stakeholder coordination and outreach. RWAG’s interim administrator maintains a contact list and email list that are regularly updated as additional stakeholders, representatives, and contacts become known.

The IRWM development and update project teams encouraged an open process with information flowing both ways. Much of the role of the stakeholders in the original plan development process was to provide current and accurate information regarding State guidelines, as well as regional conditions, policies, values, and priorities. In return, the project teams provided source information, bibliographic references, and arranged forums for discussion where further discussion was warranted. The most relevant and used references were added to the website data management system for universal reference (see Chapter 13, Data Management, for more information).

2.2.7 Decision-Making Process

The decision-making process is covered more extensively in Chapter 16, Governance. To summarize, the USR stakeholders went through two formats of decision-making in developing the 2013 IRWM Plan. The first approach to decision-making was identified in 2012 before the formal regional water management group was established. This was done through an interim governance structure to facilitate decision-making without having the immediate requirement for a formal agreement. Through a majority decision made via a noticed vote of interest groups present, stakeholders agreed to have a direct democracy through the “general assembly” of all interested and participating stakeholders. To participate in any decision, an organization must have had a representative participating in at least two out of the previous three meetings. The first attempt at a decision was for 100% consensus. If this could not be reached, the parties not in agreement met to work out their differences. At the next meeting that same issue was brought back, first for consensus and then, if consensus could not be reached, a vote requiring 75% approval. If the issue did not pass the second round of consensus and did not achieve a 75% approval, it was identified as a “dead” issue.

In addition to this, and in order to facilitate the process of document development, stakeholders agreed that any chapter that received no comments during review could be considered approved by the stakeholders for use as foundational material in further chapter development. This agreement was reached with the caveat that all stakeholders would be able to review the document again before plan adoption.

The second decision-making development came with the writing and signing of an MOU in mid-2013 to formalize the governance structure. This document altered the decision-making process, but retained the representative democracy of the stakeholder group (later renamed the Regional Watershed Action Group, or RWAG) made up of signatories to the MOU. Again, more about this topic can be found in Chapter 16, Governance.

2.2.8 Involving Stakeholders

As shown in Table 16.1 (see Chapter 16, Governance), the suite of entities participating in the development of the USR IRWM Plan was diverse and included varied interests throughout the region. During the initial outreach phase of the development of the IRWM Plan, all organizations and agencies in the region were alerted of the opportunity to participate and, subsequently, to become a signatory to the MOU. This outreach was achieved through personal contact and public announcements by the grantee (i.e., REX), as well as through encouraging those contacted to invite other parties they thought might be interested. The outreach phase extended from the RAP through much of the planning process, allowing extensive time for contact, communication, and ongoing opportunities for participation in the planning process.

The renewed outreach effort during development of the 2018 IRWM Plan update included letters and emails inviting participation, press releases, updates to RWAG’s website, and many of the targeted outreach methods mentioned above.

The diverse nature of the USR stakeholder group is an essential component to implementing the objectives through the use of the resource management strategies (RMS) (see Chapters 7 and 8). As described in Chapter 16, Governance, the work group identified to draft the initial objectives included aboriginal groups, environmental advocacy organizations, timber companies, water purveyors, and federal and local public agencies. The individuals representing these groups and their perspectives made use of the RMS to identify concrete, measurable outcomes for the objectives, which were then turned into performance measures. The decision made by this group, and affirmed by the stakeholder group, was that the measures used to identify successful implementation of the objectives (and, therefore, the Plan), would be cumulative among the diverse entities active in the region and in the development of the IRWM

Plan. For example, the USR has established an objective (see Chapter 7) that includes reducing fuels on 5,000 acres each year. This target could be met were the U.S. Forest Service to prescribe burns on 3,000 acres with other entities making up the difference with shaded fuel breaks, creation of defensible space, removal of invasive species along riparian corridors, etc. In addition, participation by a diverse group of stakeholders during the development and ongoing governance of RWAG has resulted in a governance structure that encourages balanced implementation of objectives and the use of resource management strategies (see Chapter 16, Governance, for more information).

In the Coastal Smart Growth reference¹ provided as part of the DWR Guidelines (November 2012), the website lists the following as the goal of involvement: “to fairly identify and respond to all legitimate interests by providing clear and convenient opportunities for substantive involvement at critical stages in the development process.”

On regular occasions during the drafting of the initial IRWM Plan, all stakeholders received a list of chapters for review, along with the due date for edits and comments, and whether the chapter was out for the first or second review round. In most cases, submitting comments on review documents represented the best and most important way for stakeholders to take part in the plan development process, and this was completed through a very fair, open, and representative process.

The County of Shasta, whose jurisdiction includes a substantial portion of the USR area, declined to participate in the original planning process, perhaps because the County has a physical presence in three IRWM regions. In any case, they were kept informed through the e-mail list regarding periodic meetings and documents for review. Information relevant to county service areas and other topics of interest represents accurate and current information because of these contacts. It is possible that the County may be interested in future participation.

Also not present in the planning process were Pacific Gas & Electric and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation. Both of these entities have substantial fiscal and policy interest in the USR, but they did not express interest in participation. As with Shasta County, it’s possible that these entities may be interested in future participation. They have been and will continue to be kept informed via the e-mail list.

In 2018, the USR IRWM Plan was updated to achieve compliance with the State’s 2016 Program Guidelines. The Plan update team led an effort to increase stakeholder participation in the IRWM process. The existing signatory and significant stakeholder contact lists were updated, and outreach was conducted in an attempt to engage new stakeholders, as well as re-engage former IRWM participants.

Plan update team members participated in relevant meetings, made presentations on the IRWM process, and invited significant land managers and watershed stakeholders to reconsider participation in RWAG. In addition to Tribal engagement, letters were sent to County of Siskiyou and County of Shasta. The project team attended McCloud River Coordinated Resource Management Plan (CRMP) meetings to provide project progress reports to key stakeholders in the USR watersheds, solicit relevant scientific studies, and invite participation in the plan revision.

One of the objectives for the 2018 IRWM Plan update included consideration of obstacles to involvement. Primary obstacles identified include lack of organizational capacity among individual members, lag-time between project implementation and DWR reimbursement, and administrative inefficiencies within the RWAG collaboration. To improve meaningful participation among diverse stakeholders, operational effectiveness is necessary. RWAG is currently leveraging the Proposition 1 IRWM Disadvantaged Community Involvement (DACI) phase to transition from decentralized and rotating administrative

¹ <http://coastalsmartgrowth.noaa.gov/elements/encourage.html>

functions by volunteer to a “stable” administration capable of coordinating stakeholders and managing grants, while developing and implementing projects in a way that is efficient and maximizes benefit to local communities.

2.2.9 Technical Assistance to Project Proponents

The USR is one of six IRWM’s in the Sacramento Hydrologic Region. As an entirely DAC region, the USR is eligible for significant funding dedicated to technical assistance for DAC’s during the DACI phase (2018-2020). The process for receiving technical assistance is relatively straightforward. When responding to calls for project proposals, it is suggested that project proponents indicate whether assistance is required to bring projects to a “shovel ready” status. If assistance is required, the RWAG project team then either sources the assistance in-house, or refers the technical assistance request to the Sacramento River Funding Area (SRFA). Contact is then made and all questions are worked out between the project sponsor and the technical assistant. For clarity and consistency, the same technical assistant follows each project through the development process. In addition, if it is determined that ongoing assistance will be needed, this can be set up through RWAG.

2.3 Integration

There are four types of integration discussed here: integration of local, state, and federal perspectives and priorities; stakeholder integration; organizational resource integration; and project integration. While many of the processes and structures facilitating this integration are in other sections of the document, and the outcomes of this integration are evident throughout the document, it is important to note that the USR RWAG continues to coordinate and integrate specific efforts with the goal of better functioning as a unified whole.

2.3.1 Integration of Local, State, and Federal Priorities

As noted in Chapter 3, Region Description, there are significant planning efforts by a variety of institutions underway throughout the USR. Some of these institutions are active participants in the USR planning process, but many are not. In all cases, the jurisdictional responsibility of these groups is respected in that the IRWM Plan does not challenge, negate, or oppose any of these authorities, nor does the governance structure or authority of the USR MOU document affect these authorities. The relation of the IRWM Plan function to these documents and processes is meant to be a positive and complementary one. USR stakeholders would like to see the IRWM Plan integrate these other efforts and encourage the further integration of mutual planning efforts. The goal of the planning document is to be a hub for information as well as an inspiration for further collaboration, developing synergies that result in implementation approaches that would not be possible without the IRWM structure. Further integration efforts on a local, state, and federal governmental level will pursue this ideal, and are memorialized in section 3.04 of the MOU:

“Although the IRWMP refers to many legally binding statutory and regulatory provisions—such as general plans, zoning ordinances, water quality plans, and various permits, licenses, and approvals— its purpose in doing so is to ensure that the IRWMP is consistent and compatible with those existing legal obligations. Rather than adding to or modifying the present legal and regulatory environment, the IRWMP is intended to streamline and improve the stakeholders’ ability to operate and succeed within that environment.”

2.3.2 Stakeholder/Institutional Integration

One of the most tangible, yet unquantifiable, benefits of IRWM planning is the practice of regular meetings of water-related interest groups to discuss activities, opportunities, issues, and most of all, build

trust. Many of the organizations at the table have historically been (or may currently be) at odds over water issues. While it is not expected, nor intended, that the RWAG will solve all water-related conflicts in the region, there are definite advantages to increased communication and cooperation. The process has helped to educate stakeholders about each other's activities, priorities, and challenges. During the RWAG's discussions regarding their collective future and the future of the group, many participants expressed the desire that the IRWM planning process should continue with the objective of increased education and coordination regarding common issues. Stakeholders see this continued communication as a way to overcome conflict and, possibly, achieve common objectives on issues that affect all participants.

In addition to the goals and outcomes of USR stakeholder integration, the governance structure was identified and further refined so that all stakeholders are on equal footing with regard to input and expectations. Financial support is not expected from any participant and, though in-kind effort is expected with regard to participation, it is hoped that organizations will be able to equitably share the coordination and meeting facilitation efforts.

2.3.3 Organizational Resource Integration

Integrating organizational resources can include financial and/or staff resources, how data is shared, coordinating technical expertise and capacity, or looking at such resources in a more integrated way. USR stakeholders have encouraged organizational integration through placing a priority on projects with multiple partners (see Objective 2 – Cooperation and Trust). RWAG also encourages integration by building administrative capacity for organizations and members requiring assistance in order to serve as sponsors for implementing priority restoration and data gathering projects; more information is available on this topic in Chapter 10, Project Review Process and Implementation.

2.3.4 Project Implementation and Integration

Chapter 10, Project Review Process and Implementation, gives more detail on this topic. In general project sponsors have responded positively to requests and opportunities for integration. As project development began after the identification of regional issues and challenges, objectives, and resource management strategies, participants were able to respond to these topics and collaborate with other stakeholders to identify true regional gaps in management and/or knowledge in designing their project responses. Project sponsors had many facilitated opportunities to discuss integration and coordination through project development workshops. In addition, proximity made further collaboration – outside the facilitated process – easy. One of the key tasks for future RWAG activities includes further coordination in issue identification and project development; stakeholders see this as an important service provided by the IRWM process, and one that is not duplicated in other arenas.

As a result of refining operations, RWAG anticipates expanding the number of signatory stakeholders in the coming years. Working across sectors and watershed boundaries to implement green and grey infrastructure projects, RWAG aims to coordinate with the Upper Pit RWMG and North Coast Resource Partnership (NCRP) to reinforce water supply reliability, fire safety, and climate resilience.