



Regional Advisory Committee (RAC) Meeting #93

October 6, 2021
9:00 am – 11:30 am

Zoom Meeting

NOTES

Attendance

RAC Members

Ann Van Leer, The Escondido Creek Conservancy
Anne Middleton, ECOLIFE Conservation
Beth Gentry, City of Chula Vista
Brook Sarson, San Diego Sustainable Living Institute
Charlie de la Rosa, San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance
Chris Trees for Mike Thornton, San Elijo Joint Powers Authority
David Walker, San Diego Audubon Society
Elizabeth Lovsted for Kelley Gage, San Diego County Water Authority
Jack Simes and Leslie Cleveland, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
Jenna Voss for Grant Sharp, County of Orange
Jennifer Hazard, Rural Community Assistance Corporation
Joey Randall for Kim Thorner, Olivenhain Municipal Water District
John Flores, San Pasqual Band of Indians
Julia Chunn-Heer, Surfrider
Julia Escamilia, Rincon de Diablo MWD
Justin Gamble, City of Oceanside
Keli Balo, City of San Diego
Kimberly O'Connell, UC San Diego
Marisa Soriano, City of Chula Vista
Mark Seits, Floodplain Management Association
Michelle Berens, Helix Water District
Oscar Romo, Alter Terra
Patrick McDonough, San Diego Coastkeeper
Phil Pryde and Rob Hustel, San Diego River Park Foundation
Sandra Jacobson, California Trout
Rania Amen for Al Lau, Santa Fe Irrigation District

RWMG Staff and Consultants

Arthella Vallarta, Woodard & Curran
Chelsea McGimpsey, County of San Diego
Karina Danek, City of San Diego
Loisa Burton, San Diego County Water Authority
Mark Stephens, City of San Diego
Nicole Poletto, Woodard & Curran

Rosalyn Prickett, Woodard & Curran
Sally Johnson, Woodard & Curran

Interested Parties to the RAC

Alicia Appel, City of Escondido
Arash Afghahi, Viejas Natural Resources Department
Bob Leiter, American Planning Association
Carmel Brown, Department of Water Resources
Cristina Torres, Viejas Tribal Government
Elisa Marrone, City of Escondido
Gail Patton, San Diego County Water Authority
Hannah Gbeh, San Diego County Farm Bureau
Inken Mello, Woodard & Curran
Jodie Monaghan, Roundtable of Regions
Joni German, San Diego County Water Authority
Juan Magdaraog, City of Escondido
Maks Khashchuk, Department of Water Resources
Mark Stadler, Member of the Public
Michelle Hallack, NV5
Michelle Pombrol, Department of Water Resources
Puja Batra, Batra Ecological Strategies
Soleil Develle, Fallbrook Public Utility District
Zaffar Eusuff, Department of Water Resources
Zoe Smith, City of Escondido

Welcome, Introductions, & Land Acknowledgement

Ms. Elizabeth Lovsted, San Diego County Water Authority, welcomed everyone to the virtual RAC meeting. Ms. Sally Johnson, Woodard & Curran, reviewed the virtual meeting process including how to use the virtual controls and chat feature. Meeting participants were encouraged to enter their name and organization into the chat for roll call.

Ms. Lovsted read the Tribal Land Acknowledgment to the group, which was written to delivered in a virtual setting:

- We acknowledge that this virtual meeting of the San Diego IRWM Program Regional Advisory Committee is taking place in the traditional lands of the Kumeyaay (*Coo-me-eye*) and Luiseño (*Loo-sin-yo*) people. As we begin this meeting, we acknowledge and honor the original inhabitants of our region. A land acknowledgement is a critical step toward working with native communities to secure meaningful partnership and inclusion in the stewardship and protection of their cultural resources and homelands. We respect these ancestral grounds where we are collectively gathered and support the resilience and strength that Indigenous people have shown worldwide.

Mr. Mark Stadler, former San Diego IRWM Program Manager, is retiring from the San Diego County Water Authority. Mr. Stadler has worked at the San Diego County Water Authority since 1989 and has served as the San Diego IRWM Program Manager since 2007. To celebrate Mr. Stadler's achievements in IRWM, Ms. Carmel Brown, Department of Water Resources, Ms. Lynn Rodriguez, Watersheds Coalition of Ventura County, Ms. Jodie Monaghan, Roundtable of Regions, and Ms. Jenna Voss, County of Orange, have shared their admiration for Mr. Stadler. Ms. Lovsted presented Mr. Stadler a Proclamation of Appreciation from the RAC to thank him for all the work he has done for the San Diego IRWM Region.

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Mr. Stadler thanked the RWMG for giving him the opportunity to address the RAC for the last time. He would also like to thank his colleagues for all the years they have worked together. His two biggest accomplishments are the RWMG and the RAC, which did not exist 16 years ago. He is looking forward to watching the San Diego IRWM program continue to thrive and grow in the future.

Questions/Comments

- Congratulations, Mark!
- Best of luck, Mark!
- Congrats, Mark!
- Congrats, Mark! Enjoy!
- Thank you, Mark! We will miss you!
- Congrats, Mark! For so many years, we have worked together, and I appreciate how you have listened and supported NGOs in this process.
- Congratulations, Mark!
- Congrats, Mark!
- All the best to you, Mark!
- Congratulations Mark! Thank you for your service to the San Diego County Water Authority.
- Have a fantastic retirement!
- Enjoy your well-earned time to explore other things in your life, while serving as an emeritus Roundtable member!
- We will really miss you!
- Thank you, Mark!

San Diego County Farm Bureau – Agriculture Presentation

Ms. Hannah Gbeh, San Diego County Farm Bureau, presented on agriculture in San Diego County (The County) to give the group an overview of agricultural issues and challenges. Agriculture is the fifth largest economic activity with approximately \$1.8 billion dollars in direct economic contributions, and it is the twelfth largest farm economy in the state. There are approximately 224,000 acres of agriculture in the County. The agricultural industry in the County is one of the most sustainable and environmentally friendly growing communities in the world. However, the agricultural industry is at a tipping point. According to the San Diego Department of Agriculture Weights and Measures' annual crop report, the County has lost over 70,000 acres of agricultural production. This loss of acreage can be attributed to high cost of land and water, labor shortage, anti-agricultural rhetoric, and complex regulatory environment.

There is an anti-agricultural rhetoric because agricultural activities have been attributed to the rise of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions via livestock production. Ms. Gbeh stated that this is an incomplete picture. In the County, the agricultural sector is down 5%, which has not been correctly modeled. The San Diego County Farm Bureau is working with the County to develop a more accurate model of GHG emissions. Ms. Gbeh stated that agricultural land uses is being inaccurately bundled with open space land uses. They cannot be categorized under the same category because they have distinctly different land uses. Agricultural land uses are working landscapes, providing food and horticultural products that feed humanity and sequester carbon dioxide, while open space land uses are to preserve the natural environment. Additionally, farmers in the County are already implementing water efficiency technologies.

To assist the farming communities, Ms. Gbeh recommended streamlining the local, state, and federal regulatory processes since many farmers struggle with navigating through the required paperwork. Regulatory acts have also significantly impacted farmers. For instance, the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) has

impacted four groundwater basins in Borrego Springs, decreasing water usage by 80%. In the future, Ms. Gbeh stated that there will not be any agricultural activities in Borrego Springs.

Another challenge is stakeholder input. Ms. Gbeh appreciated on how water agencies, the County, and cities solicit agricultural communities for their input on plans, policies, and water infrastructure projects. However, Ms. Gbeh informed the group that agricultural communities are a relatively silent group, and they do not like electronic communication methods. They prefer more traditional communication methods, such as hard copy mailers, phone calls, alignment with industry associations, and in-person meetings. Electronic communication methods, such as emails, are not effective in agricultural communities because they do not have access high quality broadband or fast internet.

The construction of water infrastructure projects that benefit agricultural communities and the offering of financial incentives has been extremely important to farmers. For example, the City of Escondido constructed a treatment plant that pumped recycled water to avocado farmers in the County. Ms. Gbeh stated that this has been the lifeline of farmers in the Escondido rural areas. The special rate from the San Diego County Water Authority has also been vital to agricultural communities. Farmers can opt in for a reduced cost of water, and in exchange, they will receive cutoffs in an event of a drought.

Questions/Comments

- How much carbon dioxide does agriculture sequester and are there efforts to increase it?
 - It depends on the type of commodity. For example, the sequestration potential is different for a tomato than an avocado tree. Yes, there are efforts to increase agriculture's sequestration. One of the efforts is the County's Climate Action Plan.
- How will current low water on the Colorado River affect agriculture?
 - Although there is a high cost of water in the County, we are fortunate that many water agencies, such as the San Diego County Water Authority, have become more resilient to droughts. If there is a state mandate for reduction, it will be a problem for farmers because they need water for their crops. We need more storage infrastructure projects and more creative solutions such as groundwater recharge.
- Thank you for explaining the communication and outreach needs for these communities, very helpful!
- Do you know how much total water is used by the agricultural industry each year? Do you know the breakdown of that water (potable/reclaimed/ground)?
 - I do not know because there are too many water agencies in the state. The water agencies have these data, so it would be interesting to see how much water the agricultural industry is using.
- How much of the industry is "near" or close to access reclaimed water?
 - I do not know. A part of the issue is infrastructure access. It is challenging to convey the reclaimed water to the agricultural areas in the County.
- Thanks for the extremely informative presentation! What about concerns and regulations regarding pesticides and nutrients in runoff?
 - We are allowed to buy products that are marketed and labeled safe to consume. Everybody uses pesticides, so it is unfair that farmers are a target. If pesticides do get phased out by the state, the state needs to replace it with another "tool" that farmers can use.

- Do you believe farmers would have issues with people knowing their water usage data? Districts would know their potable and reclaimed issues but would have no idea on their ground water pumping and I believe farmers would be reluctant to share that data.
 - Yes, they would. Farmers are very protective about property rights, and they are concerned about the government. They want to know what the data is being used for.
- Are there any cool season fescue growers in San Diego County?
 - I never meant one personally, but I assume there are some in the County.
- Feel free to reach out to me. Hannah Gbeh, San Diego County Farm Bureau Executive Director, Hannah@sdfarmbureau or 760-504-4109.

Project Completion Report: Storm Water Quality for Grape Day Park DACs

Ms. Ann Van Leer, The Escondido Creek Conservancy (TECC), presented the project completion report for the Storm Water Quality for Grape Day Park DACs Project, funded through the Proposition 1 Disadvantaged Community Involvement (DACI) Program. The 7-mile-long concrete Escondido Flood Control Channel currently bifurcates neighborhoods and affects property values and the quality of life for nearby DAC residents in the City of Escondido (the City). The goal was to develop a pilot restoration project that would showcase a restored Escondido Creek at Grape Day Park.

A significant portion of the grant went towards hydraulic modeling. The original intent was to take down the walls of the concrete channel. However, the model showed that was not possible in Grape Day Park. As a result, the concept had to be revised. The engineers developed an idea not to only control the water in the Escondido Creek, but to grab the storm drains and control the stormwater before it hits the creek, creating a new public amenity. The revised concept includes an opportunity to divert and treat dry-weather flow from storm drain pipes through a created creek system, provide year-round water to a Creek channel through the park, provide additional passive parkland and trail system, and integrate trails, overlooks, and gathering areas.

During community outreach events, TECC showed how other water quality improvement projects have been integrated with public use spaces around the country in order to show community members that similar design approaches can be implemented in the City. This sparked excitement towards the project and fostered many ideas from community members about the design of new amenities at Grape Day Park. The design of the features and elements of the new amenities at Grape Day Park were inspired from similar projects, which include visual access to water, gather spaces, seating in the sun and shade, native gardens, and educational and interpretive panels.

The project area is the existing parking lot in Grape Day Park. The intent is to transform the parking lot into new public use spaces. Due to an amendment, the TECC was able to shift some funds into developing visualizations. These visualizations were vital since it showed the potential of the new public use spaces in Grape Day Park. There are also adjacent redevelopment opportunities for parking replacements. These redevelopment opportunities include formalizing shared parking at Civic Center Plaza and Escondido Signature Pavilion, converting a surface lot at Maple Street into structured parking, and integrating shared parking into structured parking as part of the Civic Center Plaza and Escondido Signature Pavilion redevelopment.

Questions/Comments

- Thank you, Ann. Our grant administration people – Loisa, Bill, and Gail do great work!
- Wow, fascinating!

- Great presentation, Ann. Thank you for your patience and participation in the IRWM Program. We look forward to seeing the Grape Day Park project come into fruition.
- What are your next steps?
 - Good question. We started this with the idea to see if we can make change in the entire 7 miles of concrete channel. It takes time. Right now, our organization is going through strategic planning. One of the key questions is where do we go with this? The City of Escondido, from when we started and from where we at, has gone through two City Managers and many council members. We are retrenching to figure out what our next steps are, but we hope to continue our work and move this along.
- Where does Escondido Creek discharge?
 - Escondido Creek drains through Harmony Grove to the San Elijo Lagoon.

Statewide Updates

Ms. Chelsea McGimpsey, County of San Diego, provided an overview of the drought funding updates. \$500 million dollars was authorized for the Department of Water Resources (DWR) by the California Legislature to provide drought relief financial assistance. \$200 million dollars are available for the Small Community Drought Relief Program. \$100 million dollars are available for Urban Community Drought Relief and \$200 million dollars are available for Multibenefit Projects.

The Small Community Drought Relief Program is currently open, and the guidelines are available online. The goal of the Program is to provide immediate and near-term financial and technical support to help small communities survive the current and future droughts. Small communities are not supplied by an urban water supplier (urban water supplies serve more than 3,000 connections or greater than 3,000 AFY). The applications will be processed until funds are exhausted or until December 29, 2023, whichever comes first.

The Urban Community Drought Relief and Multibenefit Projects funds were combined for a total of \$190 million dollars available this solicitation (\$95 million dollars available Summer 2022). There is no match requirement and a 25% advanced payment may be available based on cash flow. Applications are submitted on a rolling basis. The goals of the Program are to address immediate impacts on human health and safety, address immediate impacts on fish and wildlife resources, and to provide water to persons or communities that lose or are threatened with the loss of contamination of water supplies. The application to the Program has been simplified. Projects must have multiple benefits and must be complete by March 2026. The projects that meet the following criteria will be prioritized for funding:

- Respond to critical human and/or wildlife emergencies, especially for emergency projects that address a Human Right to Water Challenge
- Readiness to process (CEQA, approvals, etc.)
- Benefitting areas served by urban water suppliers that are meeting 15% voluntary water conservation goal included in Executive Order N-10-21.

The Urban and Multibenefit Drought Relief Funding has set aside \$50 million for underrepresented communities (URCs) and Tribes (up to \$5 million dollars per project). To be eligible for this set aside, an applicant must apply through the San Diego IRWM Program. The RWMG is requesting additional information from DWR regarding applicant eligibility. The draft guidelines and proposal solicitation package for the Urban and Multibenefit Drought Relief Funding is now available. Public comments are due to DWR by 5:00 PM (PST) on October 8. The RWMG is planning to send a comment letter, focusing on the following:

- Clarify which projects are eligible for the URC and Tribes set aside

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- Request that all applicants be eligible for the 25% advanced payment
- Clarify the definition of immediate relief
- Request URCs not be subject to CEQA and other environmental approval timelines
- Request resiliency be added as a prioritization criteria
- Clarify the process of awarding funds equitably

Questions/Comments:

- Demand management measures are not included as eligible projects under the Urban and Multibenefit funds. These programs are the bread and butter of water agency conservation programs. We would like to see these projects included.
 - This is a good point. We will need to include this comment in the comment letter.

Implementation of Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Workgroup

Ms. Karina Danek, City of San Diego, provided updates to the group regarding the implementation of the Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) Workgroup recommendations. The RAC approved the JEDI recommendations in the August RAC meeting. The RWMG is evaluating the implementation of the recommendations for feasibility. The JEDI recommendations are the following:

- Create a URC outreach workgroup
- Include unconscious bias training for the Project Selection Workgroup (PSW)
- Include all qualifying URC projects in Tier 1 for scoring
- Follow up with project sponsors regarding any “fatal flaws” in submitted project applications
- Explore opportunities for stipends to URCs participating in the PSW and other IRWM activities

The proposed composition of the URC Outreach Workgroup is 12 members and will form on ad-hoc basis. Depending on timing of solicitation, the URC outreach may be skipped to expedite the Project Selection Process. The Workgroup will meet twice (1.5 hours/each) and engage in community outreach directly as needed. The caucuses will be asked to nominate Workgroup participants via email in October. Members of the public are eligible to participate, but they must be nominated by the appropriate Caucus.

A brief unconscious bias training for the PSW will take place at the beginning of the first PSW meeting. The RWMG plans to show a video that explains unconscious bias followed by a group discussion. Additionally, unconscious bias handouts will be provided in the Workgroup materials. The training may be skipped to expedite the Project Selection Process depending on timing of solicitation.

The Project Scoring Recommendation was to include all qualifying URC projects in Tier 1, resulting in the RWMG to clarify the URC definition, determine URC status, and develop criteria to elevate URC projects. The current URC definition is from the 2019 San Diego IRWM Plan Update. The RWMG developed a flow chart to determine URC status:

- Does Project benefit area meet the URC definition?
- Is >75% of benefit area URC?
- Does project directly benefit URC?

If the project meets these criteria, then the project is a URC project and is elevated to Tier 1. Projects will have the opportunity to justify how they meet the URC definition. The RWMG is currently evaluating “fatal flaws” in submitted project applications and exploring opportunities for stipends to URCs participating in the PSW and other IRWM activities.

Questions/Comments:

- Did you eliminate the option of using an outside consultant to help the RAC with their outreach?
 - That has not been eliminated. It is still being discussed.
 - Thank you. I know a great consultant for this type of work.
- Is there a component to target social media, press releases, etc. to get the word out directly to URCs or is the expectation that the RAC would do that?
 - Great suggestion. We have not talked about that in detail. Part of the workgroup is to discuss the preferred outreach approach.
- How is “benefit area” defined?
 - The benefit area of a project is discussed in the grant application. There are two ways to discuss the benefit area. If it is a project with a discrete location, such as a recycled water pipeline, the benefit area is considered along the pipeline. Another example is a restoration project, and the benefit area is where the restoration is occurring. In projects that are more widespread, such as a rebate program, the service area would be considered.

Grant Administration

Ms. Loisa Burton, San Diego County Water Authority, presented updates on grant administration. In total, the San Diego IRWM Region has billed DWR over \$77.4 million dollars in grant funding out of the \$111.7M in grant awards for 9 grant programs, equating to 69% billed. 50 projects are now complete out of the 74 projects funded. Proposition 84, Round 3 is almost complete (5 out of 7 projects completed). The two remaining projects under this Round are Project 4: Regional Demand Management Project and Project 6: Rincon Customer Driven Demand Management Program. There are no updates for Proposition 84, Round 4 as progress reports are due from Local Project Sponsors (LPS) on October 15. Most projects under this Round are still in the implementation phase with ten active projects over 50% complete.

The Proposition 1, DACI program has 7 projects complete. The Proposition 1 DACI Program will be completed by February 2022. The two remaining projects are Project: 4 Groundwater Planning for Pauma Valley DACs (74% complete) and Project 7: Sediment Management for Tijuana River (80% complete). There are minor updates on the Proposition 1, Round 1 Program. The first progress reports and invoices were received on July 15 and most projects are now in construction. The first progress report has been fully approved by DWR, and only 1 LPS agreement is still pending execution.

Questions/Comments:

None.

Public Comments

- The Bureau of Reclamation has two open funding opportunities. The FY 2022 Water Energy and Efficiency Grants funding opportunity closes on November 3, 2021. The FY 2022 Environmental Water Resources Projects funding opportunity closes on December 9, 2021. More details can be found at <https://www.usbr.gov/watersmart/>. If you have any questions, please either email me at JSimes@usbr.gov or call me at (951) 205-4600.

Summary and Next Steps

Ms. Johnson presented a list of upcoming funding opportunities. They have been included in the table below.

Project Types	Deadline	Website
DWR: Drought Response Funding	Small Communities Funding opens 8/6, rolling deadline Urban and Multibenefit Drought Funding expected October	Small Community Drought Relief (ca.gov) 2021 Urban and Multibenefit Drought Relief Funding (ca.gov)
SWRCB: Prop 1 Technical Assistance Funding Program	Open: rolling	https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/grants_loans/proposition1/tech_asst_funding.html
DWR: Water Desalination Grant Program	Open: rolling	https://water.ca.gov/News/Public-Notices/2020/Sept-2020/Water-Desal-Grant-CAP
WaterSMART Grants: Water and Energy Efficiency Grants for Fiscal year 2022	November 3 at 3:00 PM	https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/view-opportunity.html?oppId=335103
WaterSMART Environmental Water Resources Projects for Fiscal Year 2022	December 9 at 3:00 PM	https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/view-opportunity.html?oppId=335081

Next RAC Meeting:

- December 1, 2021 – 9:00-11:30 a.m. via virtual platform.

The meeting schedule for 2022 is included below. Please add them to your calendar:

- February 2, 2022
- April 6, 2022
- June 1, 2022
- August 3, 2022
- October 5, 2022
- December 7, 2022

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