



**Regional Advisory Committee (RAC) Meeting #108**

February 5, 2025

9:00 am – 11:30 am

**Virtual Meeting**

**NOTES**

**Attendance**

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**RAC Members**

Richard Whipple (Chair), County of San Diego  
Anne Bamford, American Water Works Association  
Bronti Cash and Tim Murphy, City of Oceanside  
Charlie de la Rosa and Kelly Craig, San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance  
Chris Trees and Mike Thornton, San Elijo JPA  
David Walker, San Diego Audubon Society  
Erika Wolski, Ramona Municipal Water District  
Julia Chunn-Heer, Surfrider  
Kimberly O'Connell and Amanda Loeper, UCSD Clean Water Utility  
Marissa Potter, Santa Fe Irrigation District  
Michelle Berens, Helix Water District  
Oscar Romo, Alter Terra  
Patrick McDonough, San Diego CoastKeeper  
Rob Hutsel, San Diego River Park Foundation  
Toby Roy, RCAC  
Tory Walker, Tory Walker and Associates  
Wbaldo Arellano, City of Imperial Beach

**RWMG Staff and Consultants**

Andrew Funk, City of San Diego  
Annica Ly, City of San Diego  
Arthella Vallarta, Woodard & Curran  
Bill Luksic, San Diego County Water Authority  
Elizabeth Lovsted, San Diego County Water Authority  
Ernesto Rios, City of San Diego Public Utilities Division  
Katie Huston, City of San Diego  
Loisa Burton, San Diego County Water Authority  
Neil Searing, County of San Diego  
Sally Johnson, Woodard & Curran  
Samantha Chaidez, City of San Diego  
Sarah Favrot, County of San Diego  
Summer Adleberg, San Diego County Water Authority

**Interested Parties to the RAC**

Alexandra Eisinger, Environmental Incentives  
Alicia Appel, Encina Wastewater Authority  
Amanda Flesse, City of Carlsbad  
Ann Baldrige, RCD San Diego  
Bri Martin, NV5  
Caleb Raspler, Association of California Water Agencies  
Daniela Mejia, Viejas Band of Kumeyaay Indians  
Grant Olsson, Varco & Rosenbaum Environmental Law Group  
Inken Mello, Woodard & Curran  
Kumiko Hayazaki, City of San Diego  
Laurie Broedling, Public  
Linda Hood, Campo Band of Mission Indians  
Mahmoud Thahab, Public  
Nancy Vogel, Department of Water Resources  
Richard Harmon, Woodard & Curran  
Sarah Hutmacher, San Diego River Water Park

**Welcome, Introductions, & Land Acknowledgement**

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Mr. Richard Whipple, County of San Diego (County), 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 and to update their names on Zoom.

Mr. Whipple read the Tribal Land Acknowledgment to the group, which was written to be 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 and Luiseño people. As we begin this meeting, we acknowledge and honor the original inhabitants of our region. A land acknowledgment 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.*

**Water Resilience Portfolio**

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Ms. Nancy Vogel, Department of Water Resources (DWR), presented an update on the state's Water Resilience Portfolio. The Water Resilience Portfolio was developed in response to Governor Newsom's Executive Order N-10-19. The Final Portfolio was released in 2020 and includes 142 actions that fall into four categories which are main and diversify water supplies, protect and enhance natural systems, build connections, and be prepared. Due to the 2020-2022 drought, the California's Water Supply Strategy was developed to ensure the state has the water needed for generations to come, which included creating storage space for up to 4 million acre-feet, recycling and reusing at least 800,000 acre-feet by 2030, freeing up 500,000 acre-feet through efficiency and conservation, and making new water available by capturing stormwater and desalinating ocean water and salty water in groundwater basins.

In 2021 and 2023, the state released the Water Resilience Portfolio Progress Report that tracks the state's progress in meeting the goals of the Water Resilience Portfolio. Ms. Vogel provided an overview of several projects:

- Modernize Delta Conveyance: Major infrastructure initiative aimed at modernizing the water transport system within the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta. It is currently in the permitting phase.
- Accelerate Smart New Water Storage Projects: This would provide approximately 1.5 million acre-feet in storage. It is currently in the water right stage.
- Remove Obsolete Klamath River Dams: Currently, four obsolete hydroelectric dams have been removed.
- Implement the Safe and Affordable Drinking Water: The State has provided over \$1.3 billion over 10 years to fulfill the human right to water.
- Support Local Implementation of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA): It is the 10th anniversary since Governor Jerry Brown enacted SGMA.
- Implement Voluntary Agreements: The voluntary agreements for the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers are collaborative efforts aimed at improving the health of these river systems and the Delta.
- Restore Multi-Benefit Floodplains: This is focused on returning waters to restore habitats.
- Update Regulations to Expand Water Recycling: The state has approved regulations for treating wastewater to meet or exceed current drinking water standards.

Ms. Vogel also provided an update on Proposition 4. IRWM is allotted \$100 million under Proposition 4. The DWR Financial Branch is currently updating the guidelines and it is anticipated that funding will be available in Fiscal Year 2027-2028.

Questions/Comments:

None.

**Administration Changes: Potential Effects**

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Mr. Caleb Raspler, Association of California Water Agencies (ACWA), provided an overview of the impacts California water agencies could expect due to the recent federal administration change. There are wide ranging impacts on California water and even water policy more broadly that can be affected with the new Trump administration such as water infrastructure, water management, water supply, and water quality.

The Trump administration has released several Executive Orders since taking office in January. The following Executive Orders may impact California water resources:

- Unleashing American Energy: Encourages energy exploration and production on federal lands and waters, rescinds the Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQ) rulemaking authority, and pauses federal funding regarding clean energy and climate initiatives from IIJA and IRA for a 90-day review period.
- Putting People over Fish – Stopping Radical Environmentalism to Provide Water to Southern California: Calls for an increase in California water supply by routing water from the Delta to other parts of California and requires a progress report within 90 days. This is a restart of similar efforts of the first Trump administration.
- Emergency Measures to Provide Water Resources in California and Improve Disaster Response in Certain Areas: Directs federal authority over California's water resources, wildfire prevention, endangered and threatened species, and disaster aid.
- Regulatory Freeze Pending Review: Pauses planned regulations, withdraws unpublished regulations, and considers the postponement of the effective date for published regulations for 60 days.

- Putting America First in International Environmental Agreements: Withdraws the U.S. from the Paris Agreement
- Declaring a National Energy Emergency: Directs federal agencies to submit separate reports to the White House identifying actions that may require emergency permits or waivers under the Endangered Species Act and Clean Water Act.
- Initial Rescissions and Harmful Executive Orders and Actions: Revokes many previous Executive Orders including efforts to mitigate climate impacts and implement infrastructure investments/
- Council to Assess the Federal Emergency Management Agency: Requires an examination of FEMA and proposals to make it more efficient.

Federal agency heads are appointed by the president and must be confirmed by the U.S. Senate by vote also has the potential to alter the regulatory landscape through the federal rulemaking process. Federal agencies that possess regulatory power concerning water issues include DOD, DHS, DOT, EPA, DOI, DOE, USDA, and HHS. Republicans now control both chambers of Congress, giving the Trump administration increased opportunity to enact his legislative agenda including aspects related to water resources that may impact California water.

Questions/Comments:

None.

### **Project Completion Report**

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Ms. Ann Baldrige, Resource Conservation District of Greater San Diego County (RCD), presented on the San Diego Healthy Headwaters Restoration Project. The goal of the project was to enhance the riparian habitat within the El Capitan sub-catchment of the San Diego River. RCD's project partners include U.S. Forest Service, Viejas Band of Kumeyaay Indians, City of San Diego, San Diego River Park Foundation, and Back Country Land Trust. The U.S. Forest Service focused on invasive plant treatment, invasive animal control, trail rehabilitation, and signage. The Viejas Band of Kumeyaay Indians assessed and treated invasive species with the Capitan Grande Reservation and nursery development. The City of San Diego assessed 11.4 acres of the El Capitan Reservoir and tributary creeks, treatment of invasive species, GIS mapping of all treated areas, and aerial monitoring. The San Diego River Park Foundation provided weed treatment, led education and outreach, and engaged training volunteers.

In total, 5,348 acres were surveyed, 102 acres were treated, 1,355 plants were installed, 64 educational events were held, 20 miles of trails were improved, and 222 animals were managed. The removal of invasives in remote and terrain and accessing private properties for project activities were challenging. The Viejas Band of Kumeyaay Indians' Resource Management Department continues to expand on the funding activities such as building two additional greenhouses. San Diego River Park Foundation is continuing to enhance project sites.

Questions/Comments:

- Ramona Municipal Water District is interested in implementing a similar project, but on a smaller scale. Where could we find more information about the costs per element?
  - Please feel free to email me and I can share more information.

### **State and IRWM Updates**

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Mr. Richard Harmon, Woodard & Curran, provided statewide updates. The Governor's draft budget would appropriate about \$1.07 billion for water related programs during FY 2025-2026. The proposed budget is roughly balanced but still relies on reserves. The California State Senate Budget and Fiscal Review

Committee have begun hearings to discuss the budget proposal. Due to wildfires in Los Angeles, wildfire funding in Proposition 4 could be increased and accelerated, potentially decreasing other areas for funding. In addition to Proposition 4 proposed appropriations, the budget would also cut \$51 million in recycled water funds. With budget approval in the summer, the earliest any program solicitations from Proposition 4 could be issued is Fall 2025. In addition to Mr. Raspler's federal updates, Mr. Harmon stated the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation are pausing executing funding agreements.

Ms. Elizabeth Lovsted, San Diego County Water Authority (SDCWA), presented on the future of San Diego IRWM Program. The RWMG has developed focus areas and proposed actions for the future of San Diego IRW and are asking for feedback from the RAC to understand where the program should allocate resources. Ms. Lovsted presented an overview of each focus area.

The first focus area is Collaboration, Information Sharing & Advocacy. The RWM is planning to focus on sharing information with state and federal agencies and considering opportunities to collaborate on regional issues. The current structure for RAC collaboration is hosting quarterly RAC meetings and alternating between virtual and in-person meetings. The RWMG proposes three options: 1) rotating RAC meeting locations, 2) pre-meeting activities, and 3) post-meeting activities to enhance RAC collaboration.

Questions/Comments:

- Recommend hosting a pre-meeting activity or mixer a day before the RAC meeting and informing folks ahead of time so they can plan adequately.
- Capacity is low at most organizations. Recommend getting the group together when there are actionable items that need to be discussed. We also need to define what we want to accomplish as an IRWM region.
  - Agree. Virtual meetings are easier to attend, but we have lost connectedness.
- Virtual meetings have been convenient, but we have lost human connection. Recommend going to an area that the region is concerned with, such as the Tijuana Estuary area, and seeing what we can do to help.
- Recommend discussing or presenting local planning documents such as Urban Water Management Plans.
- There are a lot of experts that attend RAC meetings. It would be great if we could get more presentations from RAC members.

The second focus area is Underrepresented Communities (URC) Support. Ms. Lovsted presented three options: 1) Advocate for URC Funding (Current Practice), 2) Provide guidance documents and resources, and 3) Increase technical services and develop an outreach plan.

Questions/Comments:

- Earlier it was mentioned that federal funding has been paused, and that Proposition 4 may increase wildfire funding. Would San Diego IRWM advocate to state/federal agencies to allocate more funding for URCs or make sure the funding that is already allocated for URCs remain allocated for URCs?
  - Great comment. San Diego IRWM already advocates for URC funding.
- All are great options, but URC support begins with advocating for URC funding.
- I would like to add that State Revolving Fund (SRF) is an important funding source for both small and large water systems. It would be important to keep advocating for SRF funding.

The RWMG revised the proposed RAC membership structure after receiving RAC feedback at the November RAC meeting. The revised proposed RAC membership structure would keep existing seats and eliminate terms. Departing members, or non-participating members, will be tasked with naming a qualified successor. If there is no successor named, the RAC will be asked to solicit a replacement.

Questions/Comments:

- Recommend revising “departing members, or non-participating members...” to say the organization will be responsible for naming a replacement.
  - Great comment. That will be an easy revision.
- If a RAC member cannot drive to a specific location for a meeting, would that make them non-participating?
  - Your alternate can attend a meeting on behalf of you. If you or your alternate is not available, you may send another representative from your organization. You would need to notify the RWMG ahead of time.

The third focus area is funding, which will focus on cost-sharing for grant applications. It is no longer realistic for the RWMG to fund the entire grant writing process for IRWM related grants. The RWMG is moving towards a cost share model for preparing grant applications. The RWMG has paid approximately \$1.4 million for the preparation of seven IRWM applications, securing \$132 million in grant funds. The RWMG believes that no other IRWM region pays for the entire grant application preparation.

The RWMG has identified two common types of applications expected to be pursued by the Region:

- Application Scenario 1: Traditional IRWM Application: Single application with multiple projects, each project with its own project sponsors. Three options for cost-sharing include:
  - Option 1: Divide cost evenly for all project sponsors
  - Option 2: Each project sponsor pays a baseline amount up to 50% of cost of application. The Remaining 50% of application cost split proportionally to each project’s grant request.
- Application Scenario 2: Single project with multiple components – each components managed as its own project, with its own project, with its own project sponsor.
  - Lead project sponsor reimburses RWMG for application cost.
  - Lead project sponsor passes costs to project partners.
  - Project partners responsible for establishing how they will split costs

Questions/Comments

- Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) may not have the money to pay for grant applications. Could NGOs be reimbursed for grant application costs?
  - Most grant programs do not reimburse grant application costs. DWR usually has a comment period after releasing the draft guidelines for grant programs and we can ask DWR to include grant application reimbursements.
    - This could be part of San Diego IRWM’s advocacy.
- Agree with the previous comment. Option 3 under Application Scenario 1 seems the fairest, but we need to protect NGO and URC participation.
  - There is an opportunity to partner with an organization who has the capacity to pay for application costs.
- Is it necessary to ask NGOs and URCs to start paying for grant applications?
  - The nature of grants and budgets are changing. We need to make San Diego IRWM Program more sustainable to pay for the management of the program.
  - There is an opportunity for larger agencies to partner with URCs. Leverage that partnership for a higher score.
- Could the proposed grant application fees be recovered through a technical assistance grant?
  - RCAC has received a technical assistance grant from the State Water Board, but I am not sure if DWR has a similar program.



- It may limit URC/NGO projects, but if there are only 1-2 URC/NGO projects, it may be possible for the agencies that can afford to pay to cover their grant writing cost. The addition of NGOs and DACs often makes the overall grant package more competitive so that would be the tradeoff.
- For Application Scenario 2, NGOs have grant writers on staff or under contract.

### **Grant Administration**

Ms. Loisa Burton, SDCWA, presented updates on grant administration. Total grant funding awarded to the San Diego IRWM Program is \$132.8 million for 84 regional projects. To date, \$106.5 million has been billed to and reimbursed by DWR, while \$26 million in grant funding remains to be allocated. Proposition 84, Round 4 is almost complete and has been extended until April 2025 to allow the remaining projects to complete their remaining work. There are currently seven active projects in Proposition 1, Round 1 and six projects are more than 70% complete. Three active projects remain in the Urban and Multi-Benefit Drought Relief program. Ms. Burton provided an update on the reallocation of funding for the Urban Multi-Benefit Relief program. The amendment to remove remaining work and reallocate funds are pending as DWR needs to approve the amendment. There are six active projects under Proposition 1, Round 2. One project is over 50% complete.

#### Questions/Comments

None.

### **State and Federal Funding Opportunities**

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

Project Types	Timing	Website
<b>CalEPA:</b> Environmental Justice Action Grants Program	Second round due: February 28, 2025	<a href="https://calepa.ca.gov/ejactiongrants/">https://calepa.ca.gov/ejactiongrants/</a>
<b>USBR:</b> Small-Scale Water Efficiency Grants	Fourth round due: July 8, 2025	<a href="https://www.grants.gov/search-results-detail/350845">https://www.grants.gov/search-results-detail/350845</a>
<b>USBR:</b> Small Storage Program	Second round due July 15, 2025	<a href="https://www.usbr.gov/smallstorage/index.html">https://www.usbr.gov/smallstorage/index.html</a>
<b>USBR:</b> WaterSMART Environmental Water Resources Program Reclamation and Reuse Projects for Fiscal Years 2023 and 2024	Second round due March 11, 2025	<a href="https://www.usbr.gov/watersmart/ewrp/index.html">https://www.usbr.gov/watersmart/ewrp/index.html</a>
<b>SWRCB:</b> Prop 1 Technical Assistance Funding Program	Open: rolling	<a href="https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/grants_loans/proposition1/tech_asst_funding.html">https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/grants_loans/proposition1/tech_asst_funding.html</a>

#### Questions/Comments

None.

### **Public Comments**

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- Mark Seits has retired and named Tory Walker as his replacement for the Other Members Caucus – Flood Management.

### **Summary and Next Steps**

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The next RAC meeting will be held on May 7 and will be in-person.

#### 2025 Meeting Schedule

- February 5
- May 7
- August 6
- November 5

Regular meetings to be held quarterly in 2025, alternating between virtual and in-person meetings.