

Mojave Region Update of Integrated Regional Water Management Plan

Stakeholder Group Meeting #4 - Summary

August 20, 2013

Mojave Water Agency Headquarters
Apple Valley, CA

Meeting Purpose and Overview

This was the fourth of eight scheduled meetings of the Stakeholder Group for the Update of the Integrated Regional Water Management (IRWM) Plan for the Mojave Region.

Objectives for the meeting were to:

- Review progress to date
- Discuss and decide potential IRWM planning Region expansion
- Present draft IRWM Plan sections
- Refine and adopt prioritized Plan objectives
- Review project screening and prioritization
- Discuss project submittals
- Present status of the Salt & Nutrient Management Plan

The stakeholder group spent the major portion of their four-hour meeting time discussing the potential planning boundary expansion and the prioritized Plan objectives. To end the meeting on time, a report on the status of the Salt & Nutrient Management Plan was rescheduled for the next Stakeholder Group Meeting on October 3. Also, during the meeting, a second Call for Projects was announced, with September 12 as the deadline to submit updated and new project proposals.

Thirty-eight individuals completed the meeting sign-in sheet. Ken Kirby, of Kirby Consulting Group and a member of the Consultant Team, served as the facilitator for the meeting.

Progress to Date and Public Outreach Update

Ken Kirby began the meeting with a brief review of the June 6 stakeholder group meeting, and by providing an update on the plan development schedule, commenting that the process has been relatively fast as this is an update of an existing IRWM Plan, rather than the start of a brand new Plan. The plan development process would be taking longer without the advantage of building on the foundation provided by the 2004 IRWM Plan.

Yvonne Hester, Community Liaison Officer for the Mojave Water Agency, provided an update on the public outreach process. During June, seven public and disadvantaged community (DAC) workshops were held throughout the Region:

- Lucerne Valley, June 4
- Barstow, June 5
- Victorville, June 6
- Newberry Springs, June 8
- Pinon Hills, June 10
- Helendale, June 11
- Yucca Valley, June 12

To provide flexibility for the public and ensure consistency in the information provided, a similar format was used for all the public and DAC meetings. The meetings were publicized on the project website (www.mywaterplan.com), through flyers distributed in public areas throughout the Region, and in local newspaper advertisements. Attendance ranged from a low of 3 to as many as 51 participants per meeting. Through small group discussions and rankings of water-related topics, five common areas of concern emerged from all the meetings:

- Rising cost of water
- Declining water quality
- Limited water resources
- Limited funding resources to address water-related needs
- Need for regional collaboration to carry out projects.

Mary Lou Cotton from Kennedy/Jenks Consultants added that public outreach was a very important part of the planning process. Information generated by these meetings will be used to complete the challenges and opportunities section of the IRWM Plan, to help develop IRWM Plan objectives and to prioritize those objectives.

Potential Expansion of the Mojave IRWM Planning Region

Lance Eckhart, from MWA staff, provided an update on the status of activities that had happened since the previous IRWM Plan Stakeholder meeting with four areas under consideration to be added to the Mojave IRWM Region: Afton Canyon, Twentynine Palms, San Bernardino Mountain Communities, and Wrightwood. Currently, the boundary for the Mojave IRWM Region corresponds to the MWA service area. DWR has recommended

considering adding these adjacent areas, which will enable the Mojave IRWM Region to encompass the entire Mojave River Watershed. The overall objective of DWR is to encourage and facilitate planning and management by watershed throughout the state rather than limit IRWM Plan regions to the boundaries of political jurisdictions.

Mr. Eckhart explained that invitations were sent to representatives in each of these four areas to determine if they were interested in joining the Mojave IRWM Region. If they were interested, they were asked if they could provide the needed background information for their area and to materially (financially) contribute to the Mojave IRWM Plan development effort. Each area was asked to respond by August 14. The current status of the response from each area was then presented; after which Ken Kirby facilitated a discussion to determine if there was broad agreement within the group to add each of these areas.

Afton Canyon (Lower Mojave River Watershed)

There is little to no population in this area. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is the principal landowner within the region. BLM will not materially participate, but is supportive of the IRWM planning process. Although outside the boundaries of its service area, MWA considers Afton Canyon to be an integral part of the watershed, has already made significant investments in this area, and established gauges and monitoring stations to collect data. The cost to add the Afton area to the Mojave IRWM Region is nominal (approximately \$2000) and MWA can absorb those costs, if the stakeholder group decides to incorporate it into the Region.

It was noted by a member of the stakeholder group, that Tamarisk removal is one primary issue in this area. If it becomes a part of Mojave Region IRWM, it could help BLM obtain additional funding for Tamarisk removal. Given all of these considerations, it sounds like a “no brainer.”

Following this brief discussion there was broad agreement within the stakeholder group to add Afton Canyon to the Region.

Twentynine Palms Area

Tamara Alaniz, General Manager for the Twentynine Palms Water District, provided the update for this area. She explained that four major stakeholders were approached. The boards for two, the City of Twentynine Palms and the Water District, enthusiastically support joining the Mojave IRWM Region and will financially participate to the level needed to cover the cost of adding their area. The Marine Base located in the Twentynine Palms area will not materially participate but is interested and expected to provide input.

There has been no response from the Joshua Tree National Monument, but with no population within the park area, it is not considered a significant factor for the planning process. Both the City and the Water District represent the populated areas and over time the remaining two entities may decide to participate. After a brief discussion, the stakeholder group agreed to include the area in the Region, with no one opposed.

Wrightwood Area

Both the San Bernardino County Special District and the San Bernardino County First District were approached but are not able to materially participate at this time. However, Perry Dahlstrom from the Golden State Water Company (GSWC), stated that GSWC potentially is interested in representing this area. The Board for GSWC needs time to review the proposal, but a decision on whether or not to materially participate is imminent. Ken Kirby recommended that the group wait until GSWC makes a decision. If its Board declines, a decision to include the Wrightwood area could still be made at another time in the future. The recommendation was accepted and this area was not accepted into the Region at this time. The Stakeholder Group will wait to see the decision by the GSWC's Board of Directors.

Mountain Communities (Upper Mojave River Watershed)

There are three organizations in this area, each representing a different part of the mountain communities area, but only one of them at this time is able to materially participate. Crestline- Lake Arrowhead Water Agency (CLAWA) is not interested in participating. Crestline Sanitation District is interested in participating but cannot materially participate at this time. Mark Patterson, General Manager for Crestline, stated they became independent of the County only two years ago, so the timing is not yet right for making a financial commitment.

However, the Lake Arrowhead Community Service District (LACSD) has committed \$8,300 toward participation. Leo Havener, General Manager for the LACSD, states that his Board is willing to pay their fair share of the cost to participate in the Mojave IRWM Plan, which represents about one-third of the area. In addition, they are willing to obtain background information needed from the other two-thirds of the mountain area as required for the planning process.

According to Lance Eckhart, the cost to include this mountain community area ranges from a low of \$9000, if all the data needed for the area is readily available, but could be as high as \$25,000. Ideally, this cost would be split between the three entities. Approximately 38,000 people live in the mountain communities. LACSD represents 12,000 of these residents, while the Sanitation District serves another 5,000.

Given the fact that only one of the three major entities representing the area is willing to materially participate, the group expressed a range of opinions on whether or not to add the area to the Mojave IRWM Region. Some felt it would be better to wait and add this area at a later time and only after there was a material commitment from all three entities, as complications could ensue with only part of the area represented. For instance, there was a question as to how to handle project proposals submitted from a part of the area that is not materially participating in the IRWM Plan. Kirby Brill, MWA General Manager, pointed out that the Board for the MWA would need to approve any measures to close a funding gap, should the addition of this area require it. Others expressed the belief that the strategic location of the area as the headwaters for the Mojave River made it crucial to include, even if there was not yet full consensus among all the entities representing the area.

Following this discussion, Ken Kirby made a recommendation to include the area at this time and do as much as can be done with the funding and in-kind services that are being made available by the organizations within the area. This means that the level of information included in this version of the Mojave IRWM Plan may not be as thorough and complete for this area as for the rest of the Region, but that this information can be improved over time. Ken emphasized that it was important to either take the whole area and not just a part, or not include the area at this time. Also, given that this area represents the headwaters for the watershed, it would be better to include the area even if the information currently available is not yet at the level of the rest of the watershed planning area. After asking for a show of hands, there was a broad consensus within the group to include the mountain communities in the IRWM Region and work with the available funding and in-kind services being made available by organizations within the mountain communities area.

IRWM Plan Development Status

Mary Lou Cotton from Kennedy/Jenks Consultants provided an update on the draft sections of the IRWM Plan which have been developed so far. The first two sections, Section I – Introduction and Section II – Region Description, were previously completed and are available on the project website at <https://www.mywaterplan.com/irwm-plan-documents.html>. Both sections will now need to be updated to incorporate information about the new areas that the stakeholder group agreed to include in the Mojave IRWM Region earlier in the meeting..

Section 3 of the IRWM Plan on Water Supply and Demand has just been updated and is available for review on the project website. Some information on topics such as climate change still need to be added. In the meantime, the stakeholder group was asked to review the draft and provide their comments by August 30 to comments@mywaterplan.com. Referring to Handout #7; Summary of Requested Review, Comments and Input, the group was specifically asked to consider three questions during their review.

There was also a brief review of comments that had been received since the last Stakeholder meeting on June 6. Most of the comments addressed the proposed objectives for the IRWM Plan.

Prioritize and Adopt Plan Objectives

Ken Kirby reminded the group that the Plan objectives are key to the development of the Plan as they drive the identification, screening, selection and prioritization of projects. He began by reviewing the draft Objectives, which were shown in two handouts. Handout #3a, Final Draft Mojave IRWM Plan Objectives, was a marked-up version of the objectives, so the group could see what had changed since the last meeting. These changes to the objectives reflected input from the comments they had provided through the project website, but also from the public and DAC workshops and Project Team. Handout #3b, Prioritized Final Draft Mojave IRWM Plan Objectives, presented the same objectives, but now re-ordered and grouped by priority in terms of importance and urgency. The prioritization reflected the stakeholder vote that had taken place at the last meeting as well as recommendations made by the Project Team.

For homework, the group was given a week to review the objectives and provide comments. To prepare for that assignment, however, Mr. Kirby reviewed each of the fourteen objectives and asked the group if they had any suggested revisions to the objectives and how they were prioritized. This review process also generated questions and comments throughout the discussion. Only those objectives which generated questions, comments or reprioritizations are summarized below. All other objectives remain unchanged.

During the discussion, it was pointed out by one of the stakeholders that 12 of the 14 objectives were either of high importance; high urgency or high for both terms, and this large proportion of highs diluted the meaning of “high”. For this reason, before all the objectives are finalized, an adjustment to the balance between “high” and “medium” ratings of the objectives will be considered.

Tier 1 Priority Objectives – includes all objectives viewed as having both High Importance and High Urgency.

#1 – Balance average annual future water demands with available future supplies to ensure sustainability throughout the Region between now and the 2035 planning horizon and beyond.

- Does this objective mean we have to reduce demand to balance the supply? - Not necessarily, but if the supply cannot be expanded to achieve the required balance, then it would under those circumstances be necessary to limit growth.

#8 – Protect and restore sensitive environmental areas in coordination with land use and conservation plans to support stewardship and awareness of environmental resources.

Some questioned why this was a Tier 1 objective as it was not considered as important as the water supply objectives. Others were concerned that by using the word “restore” the entire Mojave River (Region) could end up being considered an environmentally sensitive area. They expressed the view that human needs, i.e. social and economic, were more important than environmental ones, while others in the group thought it important to retain the current prioritization. The group agreed to retain the current prioritization as high importance and high urgency if qualifiers were added that show the link between this objective and water supply (e.g. overdrafts) and water quality. It was observed that water supply and water supply as they relate to human needs was a priority for the group.

#9 – Improve stormwater management throughout the Plan area.

Some in the group questioned why this was a Tier 1 objective, as it was ranked high for both importance and urgency. Capturing stormwater for recharge was not seen as a major water supply objective since such storms are too infrequent in the Region to be relied upon for water supply purposes, and there were already other water supply objectives that would be more important than this one. Others pointed out that this stormwater objective was meant to address flood risk as well as stormwater for water supply. Some proposed that this objective be reclassified as a Tier 3 objective of medium importance and medium urgency. It was pointed out by some that stormwater recharge was important in some areas of the Region but from a timing perspective it was not seen as addressing an urgent need. The group agreed to reclassify it as a Tier 2 objective, which meant it was still ranked high in importance but was now medium in urgency. Other comments included:

- This is not primarily a water supply objective, so from a local perspective it does not seem to be a high priority objective. This objective and other aspects of the Plan suggests that Plan development efforts are being shaped to conform more to State guidance than what is needed locally.

- It may seem that way, but it is important for the Plan to use language that will help qualify the Region for State funding but as a Region you get to set the priorities you want.
- From a statewide perspective, perhaps DWR would like to see the dry areas of the state such as Mojave used as a resource to store groundwater?
 - What you are suggesting represents a project idea rather than an objective. The way we are using objectives here we prefer that an objective define what you want to accomplish and not necessarily how it will be achieved. The how should be covered in proposed projects.
- Objective #9 is meant to also address flood risk and not just stormwater for water supply capture, but there is also a need to capture stormwater for groundwater recharge.
- It was suggested that that the phrase “floodplain management” be incorporated into the objective.
- Some downstream users along the Mojave River didn’t want any flood control structures/devices constructed so these same users would get all their “flood supply” waters that would eventually be recharged into their groundwater basin. For example, Barstow users didn’t want any users along the river to construct flood control devices because then Barstow wouldn’t get as much volume of flood waters to recharge their groundwater basin.

Tier 2 Priority Objectives - includes all objectives viewed as having both High Importance and Medium Urgency.

#10 Preserve water quality as it relates to local beneficial uses of water supplied by each source, including groundwater, stormwater, surface water, imported water, and recycled water.

- Concern was expressed that the level of urgency for this objective be shifted from medium to high. They observed that it takes time to address water quality issues (citing Hinkley as an example) and that it is critical to get out in front of these issues as soon as possible.
- It was pointed out that for the Region as a whole, water quality is being handled relatively well and these objectives are meant to reflect the overall needs of the Region, rather than more localized problems. For this reason, although the regional objective may only be of medium urgency, proposed projects that address specific water quality problems may very well need to be ranked as being highly urgent.
- There is a plume located east of Hinkley which may have regional implications.
- It was agreed to keep the prioritization of high importance and medium urgency.

#11 Obtain financial assistance from outside sources to help implement this Plan across a range of project sizes during the planning horizon

- What is a “small system?” –After discussion, the group agreed to define a small system for this objective as one that is not required to submit an Urban Water Management Plan.

#13 Identify and establish reliable funding sources to maintain, modernize and improve water infrastructure to ensure a high quality, resilient and reliable water supply.

- What is the distinction between modernize and improve? – There is a similarity between the two but the emphasis with “modernize” is the introduction of new technology while to “improve” refers to enhancements to the capacity.
- Some wondered why maintenance of infrastructure should be an objective when it is something that the operators and owners should already be doing.
 - For many reasons, deferred maintenance is an issue, especially in the public sector, and needs to be addressed as an objective. Grants will not be issued if the project sponsor cannot prove they have the ability to maintain the project they propose to develop.
- It was agreed to keep #13 as an objective, but that it should be reclassified as a Tier 3 Priority Objective of medium importance and medium urgency.

#14 Increase the use of recycled water in the Region while maintaining compliance with the Mojave Basin Area Judgment as applicable.

The group asked that this objective be reclassified as a Tier 3 Priority Objective of medium importance and medium urgency.

Tier 3 Priority Objectives – includes all objectives viewed as having both Medium Importance and Medium Urgency

#5 – Optimize the use of the Region’s water related assets to maximize available supplies to meet projected demands while mitigating against risks. Water related assets to be optimized include financial resources, groundwater storage programs, available imported water supplies, transfer and exchange opportunities, available physical infrastructure, and management policies.

It was asserted that the financial implications of optimizing water resources are significant. For this reason, the objective should be ranked as having high importance, rather than medium. To address this concern it was agreed that a sub-bullet (d) “financial measures to acquire water resources” should be added to Objective 5.

Other Comments

- Do not see treatment of waste water as an objective. Should this be added to objective #10? Golf courses should be able to use recycled water instead of potable water as they do now. Agreed to specifically add mention of wastewater treatment where appropriate in the Plan objectives.
- Climate change was dropped as an objective but monitoring impacts of climate change will be a commitment described in the Plan itself.

Project Screening and Prioritization Process

During the final part of the meeting Mary Lou Cotton reviewed results from the first Call for Projects. She introduced three handouts listing all 103 projects that had been submitted in response to the request for project ideas.

Handout #5a listed all the projects alphabetically by project title. All projects that came in by the deadline received a project number, but because so many projects had come in at once just before the deadline, not all were able to be processed by staff in time to include in the meeting handouts. Projects highlighted in grey are projects that have been carried forward from the 2004 IRWM Plan.

Handout #5b listed all the proposed projects arranged alphabetically by the lead agency submitting the project proposal.

Handout #5c provided a preliminary ranking of all the submitted projects except for 17 projects that had come in too late to be processed by staff in time to include in these handouts. The screening criterion for proposed projects (as described in Handout #4, Summary of Project Selection and Prioritization Process) was reviewed to explain the ranking:

- Contribute toward meeting one or more Plan objectives
- Appear to be technically feasible
- Appear to be economically feasible
- Not cause significant unmitigated negative impacts
- Have a committed project proponent that has the capacity to implement the project.

If projects passed the screening criteria, they were assigned a rating for importance and urgency that matched the priority of the one objective the review team considered the project to contribute to the most. The projects were then listed with the preliminary ranking of projects shown in Handout #5c.

In the next round of review, projects may be further reviewed according to 12 factors outlined on page 3 of Handout #4 using information provided by project proponents in their submittals in order to adjust the proposed project priorities.

While reviewing the prioritization process, it was pointed out that any one project cannot possibly meet all Plan objectives (but apparently many project submittals attempted to make that claim). Also not all projects can be considered high in importance and urgency. Projects submitted without an identified proponent were not considered as a feasible project.

A second Call for Projects was announced with the deadline of September 12. All new or revised project submittals must be received no later than 4:30 pm on that date. The group was referred to Handout #6, Opportunities for Integration and Second Round Call for Projects, for more information.

Project proponents were strongly encouraged to review the other proposed projects to see if there are opportunities to combine and integrate their project with others to create an integrated, multi-purpose project. If they do succeed in teaming up with others to submit an integrated project, project proponents were asked to indicate which projects should be removed from the project lists to avoid duplication.

As described in Handout #7, Summary of Requested Review, Comment and Input, project proponents were also asked to carefully review Handouts #5a and #5b to see if the Project Team made a request for more information about their project before it could be considered a viable project. If that is the case, then Project Proponents need to revise and resubmit their project form by the September 12 deadline. Also, if project proponents edit and resubmit their projects, they should highlight what they are changing and take a hard look at the objectives the project is really contributing to. When the projects were ranked as they now appear in Handout #5c, the reviewers identified the one objective they believed applied most directly and then prioritized accordingly.

If any single agency has submitted multiple projects, they are asked to indicate their preference for relative priorities among their proposed projects.

The group was also asked to review the carry over projects from 2004 to determine if they are OK as is or need to be updated. All comments about the proposed projects should be submitted by August 30 to comments@mywaterplan.com

A revised project list will be posted a week before the next meeting which is scheduled for October 3.