

Mojave Region Update of Integrated Regional Water Management Plan

Stakeholder Group Meeting #5 – Summary

November 5, 2013

Mojave Water Agency Headquarters
Apple Valley, CA

Meeting Purpose and Overview

This was the fifth 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
- Present status of the Salt and Nutrient Management Plan
- Discuss status of the planning boundary expansion
- Discuss and adopt prioritized Plan objectives
- Review results of project screening and prioritization
- Discuss next steps

A major portion of the 4-hour meeting was devoted to a review of the project screening and prioritization process and a discussion of the project submittals and preliminary recommendations resulting from that process.

Thirty-three individuals completed the meeting sign-in sheet. Ken Kirby, of EVOTO Company and a member of the Consultant Team, served as the facilitator for the meeting.

Introductions

The stakeholder group meeting began immediately following a brief session of the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) to the Mojave Water Agency (MWA). The TAC meeting was led by Scott Weldy, Chairman of the TAC, during which members of the TAC nominated and elected TAC officers and appointments to the TAC Executive Committee for 2014.

Kirby Brill, General Manager for the MWA, opened the stakeholder group meeting by asking Lance Eckhart, from MWA staff, to provide a brief overview of the agenda. Mr. Eckhart explained that the meeting will provide an opportunity to share results of the project prioritization process that had been underway since the last stakeholder meeting

on August 20. He indicated that by December they hope to have a final list of all the projects that will form the basis for the proposed Plan. He then turned the meeting over to Ken Kirby who reminded the group that the IRWM Plan they are now developing is not set in stone but will be updated over time. Between today's meeting and the next meeting on December 16, the process and conversation will determine those projects that will be included in the 2014 version of the Plan.

Mr. Kirby also provided a recap of Stakeholder Group Meeting #4 and reminded the group that summaries of all the meetings are available on the project website, www.mywaterplan.com, enabling them to review the ebb and flow of the Plan development process over the past year. He also provided an update on the IRWM Plan development process and restated the fact that the IRWM Plan is being written in stages so they can provide feedback as the process goes along, rather than being saddled at the end with the task of having to review and provide feedback on the entire document only during the final phase of the process.

Salt and Nutrient Management Plan Update

Lance Eckhart provided an update on the Salt and Nutrient Management Plan (SNMP), which is being developed in concert with the IRWM Plan. The SNMP is focused on water quality as measured by the accumulation of nutrients and salts in the groundwater of the Mojave River Basin and the Morongo Basin. Results from the IRWM Plan Update are being used to inform and guide development of the SNMP.

The goal of the SNMP is to provide a snapshot of existing water quality conditions in these two basins. It will also help answer the question as to whether water quality is staying the same, getting better or growing worse within different areas in the Region. Both Total Dissolved Solids (TDS) and nitrate have been selected as indicators of salt and nutrients. Water quality from over 100 different sites is being used by the SNMP Model to determine assimilative capacity in each sub basin (i.e. the amount of additional TDS that can be absorbed into the groundwater without exceeding the Basin Plan Objective), to project trends over a 20 year time period, and to determine the impact of proposed projects on existing TDS levels. It can also consider impacts stemming from a range of possible options, including different projects or no project at all (the base case).

Questions raised by the group in response to this presentation included the following:

- Can you provide us an example of the types of projects the SNMP model will be evaluating?
 - As an example, it can help us determine the respective impacts on water quality of a sewer system compared to septic tanks. Think of the SNMP

Model as a screening tool which will be used to determine the impact on water quality over a 20 year span.

- What is the ideal salt level? 500 mg per liter of TDS seems high.
 - Regulators will ultimately be the ones to determine the ideal salt level and this is often driven by drinking water standards.
- Is it fair to consider the Regional Water Quality Boards as our “salt cops?”
 - Yes, but the SNMP model will help make the Regional Board decision-making process more science-based and holistic.
- Are dischargers responsible for cleaning up to the background level or to drinking water standards?
 - It depends on each case.

Status of Mojave IRWM Planning Region Expansion

Lance Eckhart also provided an update on the expansion of the IRWM Planning Region, which had been a major item of discussion during the last stakeholder group meeting in August. Mr. Eckhart reminded the group that DWR is encouraging watershed-wide planning and management, rather than leave any geographic areas within a watershed as isolated islands outside the boundaries of an IRWM planning region. In the case of the Mojave IRWM Region, there were four such areas: Afton Canyon, Twentynine Palms, San Bernardino Mountain Communities (also called the Upper Mojave Area), and Wrightwood. During the last meeting, the stakeholder group agreed to add both Afton Canyon and Twentynine Palms to the Region, but there was still a question concerning the two remaining areas as there was a need to determine whether groups representing communities in the other two areas were willing to financially participate in the IRWM planning process. An incremental financial contribution was needed to carry out the data collection and analysis work required by the IRWM planning process in each of these additional areas. Since the last meeting, the County of San Bernardino has stepped in to financially participate in the IRWM planning process on behalf of both of these areas. All four areas will now be included in the Mojave IRWM Plan Region.

- Since it is the County of San Bernardino that is financially supporting the IRWM planning work in these two areas, do we know whether these communities will now actually participate in the IRWM planning process?
 - They can definitely participate if they choose to do so and it is our expectation that they will.
- Will these four areas now come under the Judgment?
 - No. The IRWM Plan has no impact on existing legal structures. The advantage of including these areas in the Mojave IRWM Region is that we

will now have a more integrated planning process that does encompass the entire watershed region.

Governance after Plan Adoption

Ken Kirby introduced the topic of governance during implementation of the Mojave IRWM Plan. The State has requirements that every IRWM Region adopt a governance structure for implementation of the Plan which will ensure the current region-wide collaborative process does not end once the Plan is adopted. It will be designed to foster implementation, track progress, and provide a structure for Plan updates.

At the next meeting on December 16, the Stakeholder Group will be presented with a governance proposal for their consideration. There are two major options. The first will be to continue with a similar governance structure that has been used during the development of the Plan. The other is to adjust the governance approach for implementation. There were no questions or comments from the Stakeholder Group at this time.

Review and Adopt Refined and Prioritized Plan Objectives

Ken Kirby began this topic by reminding the group that Objectives are the foundation for the Plan. It is hard to know what to do with proposed projects without first having clearly defined objectives. This is the reason the Project Team and Stakeholder Group have spent so much time throughout all the meetings identifying and refining the objectives. The purpose of today's discussion was to confirm and adopt the objectives.

Mr. Kirby then referred the group to two handouts: Final Draft Mojave IRWM Plan Objectives (Handout 1a), and Plan Objectives Arranged by Priority (Handout 1b). Unlike the first handout which shows the objectives in numerical order, Handout 1b organizes them in tiers so it is clear which objectives the Group has agreed are the most important. Handout 1a shows the changes made to the objectives during the discussion that took place at the last meeting. Mr. Kirby reviewed each of the changes and then asked if anyone had any questions or comments:

- How does Objective #7, "Provide support and assistance to disadvantaged communities..." which has been ranked high in both importance and urgency relate to small water systems requiring financial assistance as measured in Objective #11a, which ranked high in importance but only medium in urgency?
 - Actions taken to meet Objective 11 (Obtain financial assistance from outside sources) for small water systems can also help satisfy Objective 7 (Provide

support and assistance to disadvantaged communities). We can think of the actions taken to help provide financial assistance for small water systems as a subset of the potential actions that can be taken to support disadvantaged communities overall.

- Does California Fish & Wildlife agree with the changes made to Objective #8, “Improve environmental stewardship related to waterways and water management in the Region,” which originally was ranked High in both Importance and Urgency, but is now Medium/Medium? At this point, [Alisa Ellsworth] (a representative from Fish & Wildlife who was participating by phone) stated a concern about the proposed priority and asked that the group reconsider the ranking.
 - It was explained that the revised ranking reflected the views of the group as expressed during the last meeting, including the view that it was not as important as objectives that relate directly to balancing water supply.
 - The Fish & Wildlife representative and others offered the perspective that this environmental stewardship objective will help achieve the high priority water supply objectives.
 - Some pointed out that successfully addressing Objective #3 (which is ranked as High/High), “Maintain stability in previously overdrafted groundwater basins and reduce overdraft in groundwater basins experiencing ongoing water table declines,” will support riparian health. For this reason, they proposed that measurement 8a, “Measured by acres of sensitive environmental/habitat areas restored or new sensitive environmental areas set aside for protection,” be moved to Objective #3.
 - Rather than combining measurement #8a with Objective #3, it was proposed that the ranking for Objective #8 be changed from Medium Importance/Medium Urgency to High Importance/Medium Urgency. The representative from Fish & Wildlife agreed with this recommendation as did the rest of the Stakeholder Group. As a result, Objective #8 will be moved from Tier 3 (Medium/Medium) to Tier 2 (High/Medium).
- Will expending resources for Objective #8 detract from resources needed for our priority Objective #3?
 - It’s difficult to know for sure. However, these objectives are clearly interdependent. Actions taken to satisfy Objective #8 may qualify for outside funding sources that might not otherwise be available to us and in effect expand overall resources.

Project Screening and Prioritization Process

Ken Kirby reviewed the project selection and prioritization process as outlined in Handout 2. A total of 129 projects had been submitted to the project team. 61 of these projects were

combined to form 15 integrated projects. 9 projects were screened out. As a result, 68 projects are now proposed for the IRWM Plan. All of these project submissions were listed in four handouts which Mr. Kirby reviewed with the group.

Handout 3a: Mojave Region Plan Potential Projects (Project Summary) lists projects by the number they were assigned as they came in. However, projects highlighted in yellow were the newly integrated projects, which have been assigned new project numbers beginning with 1,001. Lance Eckhart explained that these projects had been integrated during a meeting in which sponsors of similar projects had an opportunity to come together for that purpose.

Handout 3b lists the nine projects that have been screened out along with the reasons why. In many cases the project did not yet have a sponsor, the applicant withdrew the submittal, or the applicant had not responded to a request for additional information about the project and so it was withdrawn.

Handout 3c provided a preliminary ranking of projects based on the priority of the primary objective(s) the project would contribute to. In some cases, Ken Kirby revised the expected contributions to objectives according to the information provided in the project submittals. These proposed revisions were shown in the handout. Project sponsors were asked to review these changes and to send in their comments if they disagreed with the revisions. The final column in the handout showed a Get Real Index (GRI) assigned to each project.

Mr. Kirby explained that projects submitted were initially prioritized based on the priority ranking of the primary objective(s) most likely impacted by the project. Since relying on objectives alone did not lead to a significant distribution of projects across the priority rankings (too many projects were in Tier 1), prioritization was considered based on other review factors as listed on page 3 of Handout 2. However, many of the proposed projects are in the conceptual stage of development and so do not yet provide much detail. In order to further refine the project prioritization, the Project Team reviewed each project and assigned a “Get Real Index” on a scale of 1 to 3.

GRI 1 - Well advanced, ready to proceed

GRI 2 - Very likely (there is momentum, funding and a committed sponsor)

GRI 3 - Needs work – not yet ready to move into implementation, no demonstrated momentum

Using the GRI review factor, Mr. Kirby recommended reclassifying projects that received a GRI of 3 as follows:

- If projects that received a GRI = 3 were initially ranked in High Importance/High Urgency or High Importance/ Medium Urgency then move them to High Importance/Low Urgency.
- If projects that received a GRI = 3 were initially ranked in Medium Importance/Medium Urgency then move them to Medium Importance/Low Urgency.

The result was a new project list with proposed priorities, Handout 3d: Projects Arranged by Proposed Priority. However, Ken emphasized that this initial screening and prioritization was meant to serve as a starting place for the conversation during the Stakeholder Meeting. Final decisions for whether a project is included in the Plan and where it is prioritized will be based on a broad agreement among the stakeholders. As a result of the project screening and prioritization process results, Mr. Kirby also proposed a modification of the priority tier structure to provide more meaningful distinctions between tiers. The changes are shown on the next page.

Original Priority Tier Structure

URGENCY	HIGH	TIER 2	TIER 1	TIER 1
	MEDIUM	TIER 3	TIER 3	TIER 2
	LOW	TIER 4	TIER 3	TIER 2
		LOW	MEDIUM	HIGH
IMPORTANCE				

Revised Priority Tier Structure

URGENCY	HIGH	TIER 2	TIER 1	TIER 1
	MEDIUM	TIER 4	TIER 3	TIER 2
	LOW	TIER 4	TIER 4	TIER 3
		LOW	MEDIUM	HIGH
IMPORTANCE				

Project Submittals and Preliminary Recommendations

After reviewing the project prioritization process and the four handouts (3a through 3d) that summarized results of that process, Ken Kirby invited comments and questions from the Stakeholder Group. The initial questions were primarily about projects that had been screened out (Handout 3b), or in one case a request was made about a project that did not appear on the current list of projects:

- What about submitted projects that appear to be missing?
 - Most likely these are projects that have become a part of one of the larger integrated projects, but we will check to make sure this is the case.
- What happens to projects that have been screened out?
 - They will not be included in the Plan but a record of the screened out projects will be indicated in the Plan, probably in an appendix.
- If a sponsor for a screened out project can be found, can they then be prioritized and included in the Plan?
 - Yes, if the reason for being screened out is a lack of sponsor, but in order to be included in the 2014 Plan being developed it will be important to identify a sponsor before our next meeting on December 16.
- Why was Project #12, the Cadiz Valley Water Conservation, Recovery and Storage Project, screened out?
 - The project proponent did not respond to a request for additional information needed based on the initial submittal.
- Project #48R, Mojave River Dam-Deep Creek Spillway Wetlands restoration, was screened out for lack of a sponsor. If the Army Corp of Engineers steps up as sponsor can it be put back on the project list?
 - Yes, any project that was screened out due to a lack of a sponsor can be included if a valid sponsor steps forward between now and December 15.
- Project #62R, Water Conservation Ordinance, has been screened out for not yet having a sponsor. Has the County and MWA been asked to sponsor this project?
 - It is recommended that the advocates for this project talk with the County to work through the details of the County's possible sponsorship. If there is not a sponsor now, this project can still be added at a later date when the Plan is amended.
 - Becoming a project sponsor does not mean that the organization is committing to executing the project outside of their normal review and decision making processes, but rather that the organization supports the project and agrees to move it through its normal processes in order to make a decision to implement or not.
 - The County Planning Department has expressed interest and is considering the proposed ordinance.

Many other questions and comments were offered related to projects that had made it onto the preliminary ranked list of projects (Handout 3c). During the discussion that followed, some stakeholders asked if the group could be persuaded to change the priority ranking of a project or its Get Real Index revised based on additional information or other project details.

- Is it possible to change the Get Real Index of Project #95, Adelanto Pearmain Relief Sewer Line, from GRI 2 to GRI 1? All the necessary elements are in place except for the funding. However, the need is urgent. In addition, this project will directly benefit a disadvantaged community.
- How do we determine whether or not a project is really shovel ready?
- Can the GRI of a project change as it moves forward? – yes
- Isn't the whole point of this exercise to get money for our projects?
 - It is a point but not the whole point. The number and scope of projects in the Plan will far exceed the grant funding that is available to us.
- Both Project #44, Lucerne Valley Small Water Systems Feasibility Study, and the integrated Project #1003, Assistance Program for Small Drinking Water Systems are in the same project category. I believe Project #44 fits with Project #1003. Is the group supportive of integrating them? The group agreed to this.
- Can the priority ranking of Project #32, Helendale Community Services District Tertiary Treatment Upgrade, be changed from High Importance/Medium Urgency (Tier 2) to High Importance/High Urgency (Tier 1)?
 - The project was ranked high/medium because the primary objective it impacts is water quality, which is a high importance/medium urgency objective. We are looking for consistency between objectives and the overall Plan.
 - There are no guarantees that high/high projects will be implemented first.
 - The stakeholders agreed as a group to change the ranking of Project #32 to High Importance/High Urgency.
- If a community or water provider is slapped with a water quality violation will that event change the prioritization of a wastewater project? It could, but it is likely the sponsors will move forward with the project anyway, regardless of the priority assigned in the Mojave IRWM Plan.
- Can the priority ranking of Project #93, Apple Valley and Hesperia Subregional Water, be changed from High Importance/Medium Urgency (Tier 2) to High Importance/High Urgency (Tier 1)? The project already has a GRI of 1, is on the verge of receiving \$1.5 million in funding and is ready to go.
 - The stakeholders agreed as group to change the ranking of Project #93 to High Importance/High Urgency.
- Two of the scores for the Objectives met by Project #18R, Commercial/Industrial/Multi-Family Cash for Grass Program (Objectives #1 and #3) were changed from 1's (Primary) to 2's (Secondary), but we disagree with this change. The primary reason for this project is to reduce water demand, so we would like it changed from a High Importance/Medium Urgency (Tier 2) to High Importance/High Urgency (Tier 1).

- Some argued that changing to tiered water rates would be a more cost effective strategy and based on past results will achieve better results. Others observed that most commercial properties are not on tiered rates and are less influenced by them where they do apply.
- After discussion and a show of hands, the stakeholders reached broad agreement to change the priority ranking of Project #18R to High Importance/High Urgency.
- The project category for Project #1012, Cedar Street / Bandicoot Detention Basin, should be changed from conservation and education to groundwater recharge. Also, MWA has agreed to be a partner for the project, so the GRI should be a 2, not 3, and the priority ranking should change from High Importance/Medium Urgency (Tier 2) to High Importance/High Urgency (Tier 1).
 - The Stakeholder Group agreed that the GRI for Project #1012 should change from 3 to 2 and the priority ranking should be High Importance/High Urgency.
- It is important to recognize that this is a dynamic process and rankings can change up or down over time. What we need to know today is what the rankings should be for the 2014 Plan.

Wrap Up/Next Steps

Lance Eckhart provided a brief funding update explaining that the second round of Prop 84 funding recommendations had just been announced. Given that the Mojave Region overlaps two funding areas, the Colorado and Lahontan, we have two possible bites at the apple. As it turns out, no funding was received for the High Desert Water District in the Colorado River Funding Area. In the Lahontan Funding Area, \$1.5 million of the \$3 million requested has been recommended for award. It was surprising that the remaining \$1.5 million has been shifted to other funding regions. As this represents a change of direction on the part of DWR, they have been asked to reconsider this decision and are in the process of doing so.

At the end of the meeting, stakeholders were asked to review all the project summaries (Handouts 3a to 3d) to make sure they were factually correct, to assess if recommended priorities were appropriate, and if they believed any of these proposed projects should not be in the Plan. If they did have any questions or comments, they were asked to submit them to the Plan Development Team by November 15 to comments@mywaterplan.com. Ken Kirby added that any project sponsorship changes should be sent in as soon as possible. The next Stakeholder Meeting is scheduled for December 16.