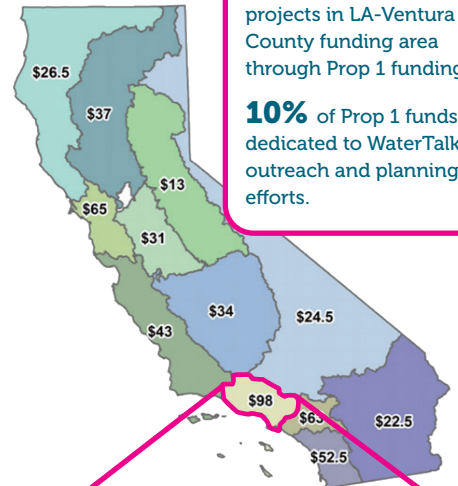


# UPPER SANTA CLARA RIVER NEEDS ASSESSMENT REPORT SUMMARY

## WHAT IS WATERTALKS?

WaterTalks is a public program designed to increase community involvement in planning a sustainable water future for California. Its goal is to help underserved communities identify and prioritize needs and develop proposals for grant funding. To prioritize and recommend water-related projects based on issues of greatest concern, the program explores the strengths and opportunities of 128 communities in Los Angeles and Ventura Counties that face ongoing economic and environmental pressure.

In 2014, voters approved “The Water Quality, Supply, and Infrastructure Improvement Act”—Proposition 1—to meet the state’s long-term water needs. Prop 1 funds are managed by the California Department of Water Resources. WaterTalks is funded by Prop 1.



**\$98M** will go to projects in LA-Ventura County funding area through Prop 1 funding.  
**10%** of Prop 1 funds are dedicated to WaterTalks outreach and planning efforts.

## WATERTALKS PROCESS

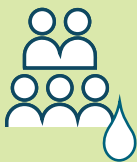
WATERTALKS IS BEING IMPLEMENTED IN THREE PHASES:



1

### OUTREACH/COMMUNITY INPUT

Inform through community workshops and gather input from surveys.



2

### NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Assess community needs and priorities based on outreach.

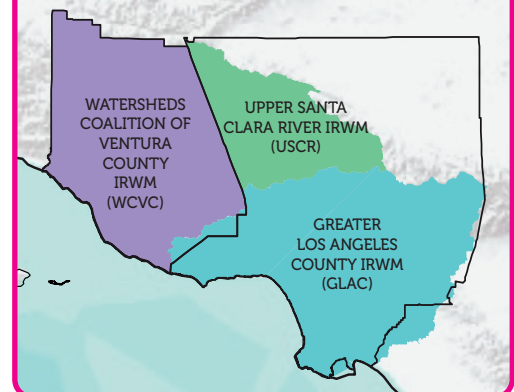


3

### TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Help develop selected projects and move them to implementation.

### PROP 1 LOS ANGELES-VENTURA FUNDING AREA



## WHAT IS IRWM?

Integrated Regional Water Management (IRWM) is a collaborative effort to identify and implement water management solutions on a regional scale. There are three IRWM regions in the LA-Ventura funding area:

- Greater Los Angeles County
- Watershed Coalition of Ventura County
- Upper Santa Clara River

Prepared by:



In Collaboration with:

- » TreePeople
- » The Council for Watershed Health
- » Center for Geospatial Science & Technology at California State University, Northridge (CSUN)

Learn more about WaterTalks and funding opportunities at: [watertalks.csusb.edu](http://watertalks.csusb.edu)

Date Published: 11/04/22

# 1 OUTREACH

The first phase of WaterTalks outreach events was designed to educate and engage disadvantaged communities (DAC) in Los Angeles and Ventura Counties, empowering them to engage in water planning, including subsequent phases of WaterTalks. Workshops were held and a survey was distributed throughout the communities during 2019–2020 to identify community needs and priorities. The survey is still live and accessible via the WaterTalks website.



## COMMUNITY SURVEY

The community survey was developed to collect feedback from people living in identified DACs in each region. The survey was translated to Spanish, Korean, Cantonese, and Farsi to meet the language needs of all three IRWM regions.

The survey included questions about:

- Demographics
- Community character
- Water-related concerns in the community
- Interest and involvement in community programs, politics, and planning

## INSTITUTIONAL INTERVIEWS AND SURVEY

An email blast was sent to a list of institutions based on the percentage of people in their service area that live in DACs. Institutions were also chosen based on their willingness to assist in spreading knowledge about WaterTalks and their ability to get community members to take the survey. Institutions that responded either filled out the institutional survey or were interviewed.

The survey included questions about:

- Needs and strengths of the community they serve and are a part of
- Barriers to equitable access to the benefits of water, wastewater, and stormwater infrastructure
- Their own governance and decision-making processes and engagement strategies
- Future challenges and opportunities

## TRIBAL ENGAGEMENT

Outreach is currently underway to gather feedback on water-related strengths and needs from Tribal members in the Upper Santa Clara River (USCR) IRWM Region. Data and responses will be reflected in this section when the process is complete.

## OUTREACH METHODS USED:



Virtual events



Printed WaterTalks newspapers and WaterTalks surveys mailed to community residences



WaterTalks bookmarks distributed to local libraries



Social media posts



Paid online and newsletter advertisements



Email blasts (eblasts) to community partners, institutions, and agencies



Phone banking to residents



Institutional and school outreach

Take the WaterTalks Survey: <https://watertalks.csusb.edu/>

Find Community Toolkits here: <https://watertalks.csusb.edu/upper-santa-clara-river-watershed>

## 2 NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The second phase of WaterTalks entailed compiling and analyzing the data received during the outreach and surveys conducted in Phase 1.



### COMMUNITIES

Respondents noted that community strengths included self-reliance, retaining traditional values, a clean and safe environment, friendly residents and business owners, family activities, the rural nature of the landscape and amenities, good schools, proximity to the beach, and affordable homes. The Needs Assessment Report for the USCR IRWM Region identified these water-related issues:

- Poor drinking water quality
- Lack of water available for fire and agriculture
- Limited access to clean safe water
- Strain on overburdened utility infrastructure due to new development
- Failing septic systems
- High water costs
- Burdensome water quality regulations
- Groundwater depletion and pollution

Broader concerns with crossover to water-related issues included climate change, homelessness, the need to increase green space and parks, and more civic engagements and regulatory oversight of industrial operations, including local landfills.

Results from the *Community Needs Assessment* will inform future outreach and engagement in the following ways:

- Provide a database of contacts for future outreach and engagement
- Help local governments match suggested/potential projects with agencies and community groups in those areas
- Assist community groups and local governments with generating new project ideas that further help meet community needs.

*"I like the paseos, our great neighbors, and the neighborhood is lovely, safe, and clean."* - USCR Resident

*"We need better roads, fewer new homes and neighborhoods that lead to more congestion, and better representation in local issues."* - USCR Resident

### FACT SHEETS

Fact sheets have been developed for each DAC included in the survey to highlight its specific needs. The communities within the USCR area are:

- Acton
- Agua Dulce
- Bouquet Canyon
- Canyon Country
- Castaic
- Lake Hughes
- Newhall
- Santa Clarita
- Val Verde

### NEEDS ASSESSMENT DASHBOARD

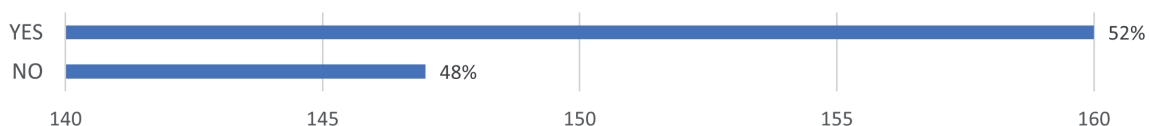
The *Needs Assessment Dashboard* displays the data received in an accessible, user-friendly, and graphic way. It can be used to quickly identify community concerns and needs.

[https://bit.ly/USCR\\_Dashboard](https://bit.ly/USCR_Dashboard)

#### DISCLAIMER:

The map dashboard should only be used as a general informational planning resource. The WaterTalks team has scheduled at least one update to the dashboard for new surveys submitted since June 15, 2021. New survey data is expected to be incorporated in November 2022.

### WHEN ASKED WHETHER THERE WERE CONCERNS ABOUT DRINKING WATER QUALITY, RESPONDENTS ANSWERED:



## 2 NEEDS ASSESSMENT (CONTINUED)



### INSTITUTIONS

Water institutions surveyed felt that assets to communities throughout USCR were:

- Community members' high level of engagement in a variety of issues, including ground and potable water quality, water-related natural hazards, and human-induced toxic burdens.
- Several key community groups that are consistently engaged in community issues often collaborating with various public service and nonprofits to meet emerging water and community service needs.

Institutions shared various needs associated with aging infrastructure, compliance with shifting and new regulations, and financial barriers associated with changing regulations that drive the need for infrastructure upgrades and additional monitoring.

### STAKEHOLDER CONNECTS AND DISCONNECTS

Both water institutions and community organizations connected through their recognition of:

- Strong town councils and regular public meetings attended by community members who are engaged in emerging issues.
- Changing regulations coupled with natural hazards, and legacy and emerging toxins that create a myriad of water quality concerns.
- Changing regulations that result in financial barriers.

Disconnects among stakeholders include:

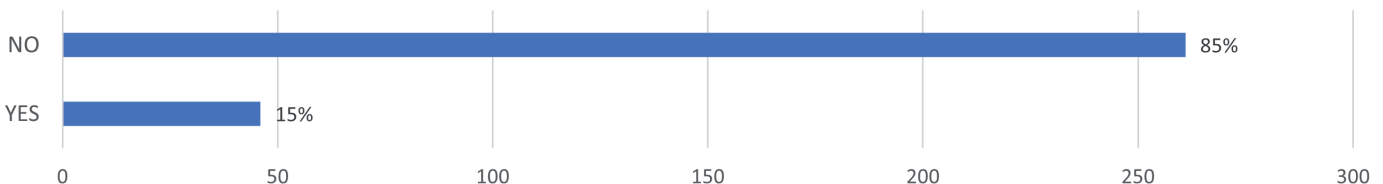
- Communities' desire to remain independent of county and water agency governance.
- Water institutions suggesting community engagement is selective only occurring when water issues affect local communities versus water issues across the region.

### TRIBAL AND INDIGENOUS ENGAGEMENT

A majority of water institutions surveyed indicated that they do not engage with Tribal or Indigenous communities; however, one water agency serving high-stress DACs across urban and rural communities noted that they have worked with the Tataviam Band of Mission Indians in relation to meeting the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) requirements.

### IS THE COMMUNITY ENGAGING IN WATER PLANNING?

Respondents in DAC communities were asked whether they participated in water-related planning in the community:



# 3 TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE



The third phase of WaterTalks included identifying projects using data from the Strengths and Needs Assessment. These projects were further vetted with community surveys and discussions. Technical assistance from professional design teams will further develop these through spring of 2023, with a goal of submitting them for funding to multiple sources. WaterTalks also built an application to assist in evaluating projects for funding.

## EDUCATION SERIES

In spring of 2022 a series of online training webinars was launched, to share guest expert speakers and topics of interest related to water projects. These were designed around multiple themes and audiences:

### WaterTalks for Agencies and Electeds

Hosted by Council for Watershed Health, participants learn about the Systems Thinking approach to water and land-use planning in relation to the Integrated Regional Water Management and the Safe Clean Water Programs. Attendees will hear from local government representatives about how these programs have benefitted their constituents and communities.

### Tribal Allyship Training

Hosted by Sacred Places Institute for Indigenous Peoples and TreePeople, participants learn regional history, understand state law in working with CA Native American tribes, and learn best practices for engaging and supporting local indigenous communities in water infrastructure and related planning efforts.

### WaterTalks for Community

Six online or in-person training sessions will be held in 2023 focused on a variety of topics, including:

- Sources of water serving the area
- Indoor drinking water quality
- Wastewater management
- Green infrastructure and nature-based solutions to water challenges

## PROJECT EVALUATION

Projects will undergo a data-driven evaluation process via the \*TAPPED application. TAPPED allows IRWM representatives to interact with multiple data points to compare and prioritize potential technical assistance projects. This includes community and institutional needs assessment data.

### \*TAPPED APPLICATION

TAPPED stands for the Technical Assistance Proposed Projects Evaluation Dashboard. This online tool shows information in a more understandable way so that it is easier to see how projects submitted for funding could meet community and institutional needs.

## WANT TO LEARN MORE?

Check out recordings of past sessions (Agency & Elected):

<https://www.watershedhealth.org/watertalks>

Check out recordings of past sessions (Tribal Allyship):

<https://bit.ly/TribalAllyship>

Watch CA Indigenous Perspectives on Sacred Waters:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NvMDtohObGo>

Submit a project for consideration:

<https://bit.ly/USCRProjectForm>

## MAJOR FUNDING SOURCES FOR WATER-RELATED PROJECTS:

IRWM DAC Involvement Program:

<https://water.ca.gov/Work-With-Us/Grants-And-Loans/IRWM-Grant-Programs/Proposition-1/DAC-Involvement-Program>

Urban and Multi-Benefit Drought Relief Funding:

<https://water.ca.gov/Water-Basics/Drought/Urban-Multi-Benefit-Drought>

LA County Safe Clean Water Program:

<https://portal.safecleanwaterla.org/scw-reporting/map>

Small Community Drought Relief Funding:

<https://water.ca.gov/Water-Basics/Drought/Drought-Funding/Small-Community-Drought-Relief>