

Disadvantaged Community Participation in Integrated Regional Water Management



Integrated Regional Water Management

Definition of IRWM

Integrated Regional Water Management, or IRWM, is a model for managing water and related resources at the regional scale. IRWM promotes collaboration to increase regional self-reliance, reduce conflict, and manage water to concurrently achieve social, environmental, and economic objectives. This approach delivers higher value for investments by considering all interests, providing multiple benefits, and working across jurisdictional boundaries. Examples of multiple benefits include improved water quality, better flood management, restored and enhanced ecosystems, and more reliable surface and groundwater supplies.

IRWM encourages agencies to utilize regional water management strategies to develop plans to protect communities from drought, improve and protect water quality, and improve water security at local levels while reducing dependence on imported water. It acts as a grant program, to fund water resource projects, and as technical support for integrated, multi-benefit projects that meet local water resource needs for each of the States' 48 IRWM regions.

History

The IRWM story began in 2002, when the Integrated Regional Water Management Planning Act (SB 1672) was passed by the California State Legislature. The legislation set the parameters and priorities for IRWM planning and directed State agencies to give preference to projects developed under the IRWM umbrella. The act also encouraged local and regional agencies to work together through Regional Water Management Groups (RWMGs). IRWM is administered at the State level by the Department of Water Resources (DWR).

Following the Integrated Regional Water Management Planning Act, three additional bond acts have been passed: Proposition 50 in 2002, Proposition 84 in 2006, and Proposition 1 in 2014.

IRWM Regions

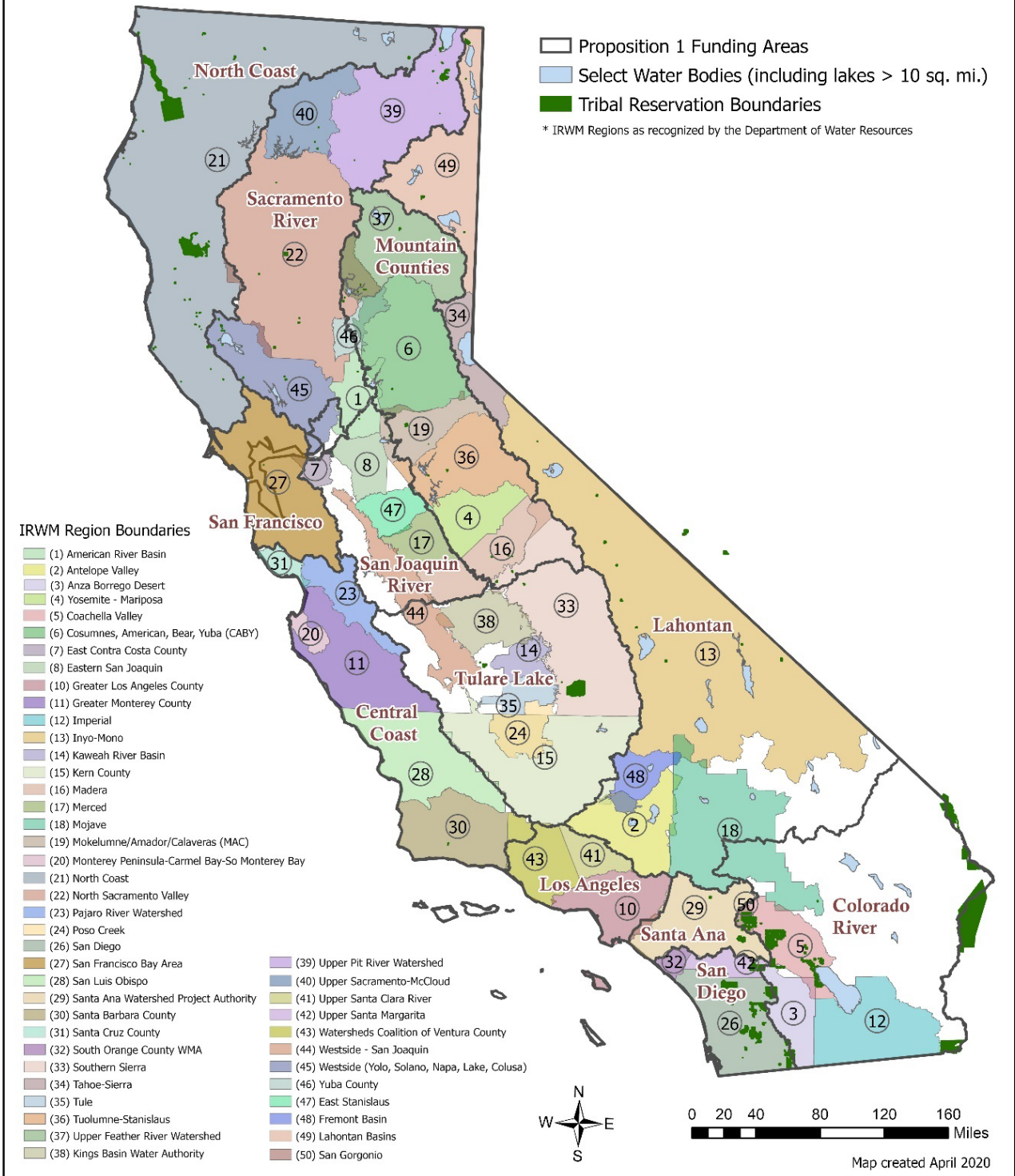
The Integrated Regional Water Management Planning Act provides standards for identifying an IRWM region. The regions are self-formed based on geography and communities with the only guidance provided by the State being that regions should follow watershed boundaries when possible. Regions are then combined into funding areas, each of which contains 1-10 IRWM regions.

The intent of IRWM is that it is an open, inclusive process that takes into account the priorities and desires of a diverse set of stakeholders, including underrepresented communities and Tribes. Once a region is approved by DWR, it can then participate in the IRWM funding programs.

As shown below, the 48 IRWM regions in California cover 87% of the state's geographic area and 99% of the population:

Integrated Regional Water Management

Funding Areas | IRWM Regions*



<https://www.roundtableofregions.org/irwm-region-map>

Region Acceptance Process

The Region Acceptance Process (RAP) is a component of the IRWM grant program and is used to evaluate and accept an IRWM region into the IRWM grant program. RAP requires regions to describe their proposed boundaries and justify why those boundaries make sense for their regional processes. Every region must have a Regional Water Management Group (RWMG) and must demonstrate stakeholder inclusiveness, public involvement, and a governance structure.

Regional Water Management Groups

Regional Water Management Groups (RWMGs) are composed of three or more local agencies, at least two of which have statutory authority over water supply or water management. RWMGs typically consist of water, wastewater, and groundwater agencies; local, state, and federal agencies; environmental organizations; community-based organizations (CBOs); Native American Tribes; academic institutions; and local residents who are engaged in integrating water resources planning across multiple sectors.

The governance structures of RWMGs vary widely among the 48 regions. Some RWMGs form Joint Powers Authorities (JPAs) to manage that region's IRWM program, while others may enter into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) or Agreement (MOA), which are less formal and official than JPAs but communicate the intention of IRWM stakeholders to collaborate on water management issues. Similarly, decision-making structures and processes are diverse. In some IRWM regions, a small handful of stakeholders are designated to make decisions for the entire region, whereas in other regions, all interested stakeholders are eligible to be part of the decision-making process. Decisions in some regions are reached by majority vote while other regions use an all-or-nothing consensus process.



IRWM Plan

IRWM Plans present regional water management objectives, as agreed upon by the stakeholders, including goals and measurable objectives and strategies, and represent an integration of multiple planning efforts and documents. IRWM Plans reflect integrated planning in the region that balances water supply, habitat restoration, surface water and groundwater quality, and flood management priorities. Plans enumerate projects that will help meet the objectives. The IRWM Program Guidelines, released by DWR, lay out the Plan Standards that IRWM Plans must adhere to. Some of the required elements in the Plan Standards include stakeholder involvement, governance structures, outreach efforts, relation to local water and land use planning, climate change, and Plan implementation.

DWR then reviews the region's Plan through the Plan Review Process to determine whether it adequately meets the Plan Standards. IRWM Plans are updated on a regular basis, based either on new IRWM Program Guidelines or an IRWM region's own Plan update schedule. Each IRWM region must prepare and adopt an IRWM Plan to be eligible for IRWM funding.

Disadvantaged Communities

Since the beginning of the IRWM Program, DWR has emphasized outreach to disadvantaged communities (DAC). A DAC is defined as a census geography (Census Designated Place, Census Tract, or Census Block Group) whose median household income (MHI) is 80% or less of the statewide median household income. DACs may be cities, small towns, or unincorporated rural areas. It is recognized that DACs have had less opportunities to participate in IRWM and its governance structures and may have water supply and water quality needs that have gone unmet. Therefore, the State has designated specific funding in Prop. 84 and Prop. 1 to foster DAC involvement and inclusion in IRWM and has incentivized IRWM regions to prioritize projects that benefit DACs.

More recently, the concept of underrepresented communities has become more commonplace. This term recognizes that there are communities that may not meet the quantitative definition of DACs but that are still not adequately represented in regional water management efforts. Examples of such communities include unincorporated rural areas, minority populations within larger urban areas, Economically Distressed Areas (EDAs), and communities whose DAC eligibility varies over time as data changes. The EDA definition attempts to capture communities that have an MHI between 80 and 85 percent of the statewide annual MHI, and also considers factors such as financial hardship, unemployment, and population density.

Tribes

The emphasis on tribal inclusion and outreach has changed over time. While some IRWM regions have included tribes from their inception, other regions are just now starting their tribal outreach. Tribes are included in the governance structures of few IRWM regions. Prop. 1 funding encourages the inclusion of tribes in all aspects of IRWM planning and implementation, including governance and project funding.

Ventura IRWM Region

The Watersheds Coalition of Ventura County (WCVC) IRWM Region serves as the “region” responsible for IRWM planning and implementation. The County benefits from rich natural, economic, social, and cultural resources. Due to a long history of collaborative management of water resources in the County, the existing IRWM program was built on a strong, established foundation. The WCVC encompasses the majority of Ventura County, apart from a portion of the Malibu Creek Watershed as shown below and serves a population of approximately 854,000.



History

In the 1970's a Water Quality Management Plan was adopted by 23 local agencies, and since then, water management and planning has occurred in Ventura County at the regional level. In 1994, a County-wide Water Management Plan was adopted. The WCVC started in 2006 after the passage of Proposition 50 and the Integrated Regional Water Management Planning Act. In December of 2006, the first WCVC IRWM Plan was adopted. WCVC has been very successful in bringing diverse interests together to manage water resources at a regional level. The region has a thriving agricultural industry, miles of coastline and rivers offering recreational opportunities, a strong economy, a mix of urban and rural communities, research institutions, naval base operations, valuable and abundant pristine ecosystems and forest land, local groundwater and surface water reserves, and access to imported state water.



Governance

Two agreements, the MOU and the Charter, guide the management of the WCVC IRWM region. The WCVC MOU was adopted in 2008 and is extended by an amendment every five years. The MOU and the Charter collectively lay out the organization of WCVC and the roles and responsibilities of the various entities participating in the coalition, including individual stakeholders. There is a fee structure in place to fund ongoing planning efforts of the WCVC, which includes twenty-one member organizations (cities, water and sanitation agencies, County entities, etc.). Non-governmental agencies are not required to provide funding support, though they receive the same benefits of participation as those providing the funding.

The WCVC structure consists of five committees: three Watershed Committees (Calleguas Creek, Santa Clara River, and Ventura River), the Steering Committee, and the General Membership (comprised of all WCVC stakeholders). WCVC General Membership and Steering Committee meet two to six times per year, while the individual Watershed Committees meet eight to twelve times per year depending on the need.

The Steering Committee is the leadership group for the WCVC and is comprised of two appointed representatives from each of the three major watersheds and the Program Director, for a total of seven members. The County of Ventura serves as the Program Director and, in most cases, as lead agency to apply for, receive, and administer State IRWM-related grants on behalf of WCVC. As such, the County also serves as liaison with the State and administers ongoing IRWM activities. The Program Director is not a voting member of the Steering Committee. Steering Committee members represent the interests of their individual watersheds and integrate those interests into the broader regional plan. They also keep the stakeholders of their respective watersheds informed of actions taken at the regional level. The Steering Committee provides programmatic and fiscal oversight to the ongoing IRWMP process and directs both the work plan and cost allocations for the twenty-one agencies providing financial support for the regional effort.

The General Membership (Ventura's RWVG) has the ultimate decision-making authority on behalf of the IRWM region, acting on recommendations of the Steering Committee. Decisions are made by consensus, and there is rarely any dissent when a vote is taken.

The top priorities of the WCVC IRWM Region are:

- Protect and improve water quality
- Protect, conserve, and augment local water-supply portfolio
- Protect people, property, and the environment from adverse flooding impacts
- Protect and restore habitat and ecosystems in watersheds
- Provide water-related recreational, public access, stewardship, engagement, and educational opportunities
- Prepare for and adapt to climate change

Stakeholders

The stakeholders involved in the WCVV include incorporated cities, water agencies, counties, non-profit organizations, state and federal agencies, universities, wastewater agencies, agricultural interests, business groups, and Native American tribes. The table below lists participating stakeholders:

Agency or Organization
Cities
City of Camarillo
City of Fillmore
City of Moorpark – water service provided by County of Ventura Waterworks District #1
City of Ojai –water service provided by Casitas MWD
City of Oxnard
City of Santa Paula
City of Port Hueneme
City of Simi Valley
City of Thousand Oaks
City of Ventura (San Buenaventura)
Wholesale Water Agencies
Calleguas Municipal Water District
Casitas Municipal Water District
United Water Conservation District
Retail Water Agencies¹
Camrosa Water District
Meiners Oaks Water District
Ventura River Water District
Pleasant Valley Mutual Water Company
Ventura County Waterworks District #1 - Moorpark
Ventura County Waterworks District #8 – Simi Valley
Golden State Water Company
Fillmore Irrigation Company
Channel Islands Beach Community Services District
County Agencies
Ventura County Public Works Agency
Ventura County Executive Office – Sustainability Division
Ventura County Resource Management Agency
Ventura County Watershed Protection
Ventura County Board of Supervisors
Ventura County Agricultural Commissioner
Ventura County Fire
Ventura County Office of Emergency Services
Environmental Stewardship Organizations
Friends of the Santa Clara River
Santa Clara River Conservancy (newly formed)
Matilija Coalition
Ventura County Resource Conservation District
California Wildlife Conservation Board
California Native Plant Society

¹ There are more than 160 smaller water purveyors, primarily mutual water companies, which are not listed.

Agency or Organization
Ojai Valley Land Conservancy
Ventura Hillside Conservancy
The Nature Conservancy
Wetlands Recovery Project
Trust for Public Land
Surfrider Foundation
Ventura Coastkeeper
Santa Barbara Channelkeeper
Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy
Sierra Club – Ventura Chapter
State, Federal, and Regional Agencies and Universities
Regional Water Quality Control Board – Los Angeles Region
California Coastal Commission
California Coastal Conservancy
U.C. Cooperative Extension – Farm Advisor
University of California – Santa Barbara
California State University – Channel Islands
California Department of Fish and Wildlife
California Department of Water Resources
Southern California Assoc. of Governments
California Department of Parks and Recreation
U.S. Forest Service – Los Padres National Forest
Natural Resources Conservation Service
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Naval Base Ventura County
Wastewater Agencies
Ojai Valley Sanitary District
Camarillo Sanitary District
Saticoy Sanitary District
Ventura Regional Sanitation District
Groundwater Basin Management Authorities/Sustainability Agencies
Fox Canyon Groundwater Management Agency – per California Water Code
Ojai Basin Groundwater Management Agency – per California Water Code
Santa Paula Basin Pumpers Association – court adjudicated
City of Fillmore/United Water Conservation District – groundwater managers of Fillmore and Piru Groundwater Basins per AB 3030 provisions. Now known as the Fillmore-Piru Groundwater Sustainability Agency
Arroyo Santa Rosa Groundwater Sustainability Agency
Mound Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency
Upper Ventura River Groundwater Sustainability Agency
Community Organizations and Recreational Interests
Association of Water Agencies of Ventura County
Santa Monica Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority
Rancho Simi Recreation and Park District
Pleasant Valley Park and Recreation District
Conejo Recreation and Parks District
League of Women Voters

Agency or Organization
NAACP of Ventura County
Flood Management Agencies
Ventura County Watershed Protection District
Native American Tribes
Individual members of various bands of the Chumash/Barbareño Tribe and Wishtoyo Foundation
Agricultural and Business Groups
Farm Bureau of Ventura County
Building Industry Association
Ventura County Economic Development Association
Coalition of Labor Agriculture and Business
Limoneira Ranch

WaterTalks (<https://watertalks.csusb.edu/ventura-county>)

In 2016, the WVCV Disadvantaged Community Involvement Grant Program (DACIP) was formed. It involves DACs, Community-Based Organizations (CBOs), and stakeholders in IRWM planning efforts to ensure balanced access and opportunity for participation in the IRWM planning process, and to increase the understanding of water management needs of DACs.

WaterTalks is the Ventura-Los Angeles DACIP, funded by DWR and Proposition 1, intended to increase community involvement in IRWM and support collaborative planning efforts across 128 communities in Ventura and Los Angeles counties. WaterTalks is implemented in three regions in the

Ventura – the Los Angeles funding area: the Greater Los Angeles County Region, the WVCV, and the Upper Santa Clara River. In Ventura County, collaborative efforts are supported in nine communities: Casitas Springs, El Rio, Fillmore, Nyeland Acres, Oxnard, Piru, Santa Paula, Saticoy, and West Ventura, each with community-specific toolkits and resources.



The WaterTalks process is implemented in three phases. The first phase is outreach and community input. Workshops to identify community needs and priorities are held alongside surveys that collect data and input for future events and phases. The second phase, Needs Assessment, assesses community needs and priorities based on the data collection from the first phase. The third phase, Technical Assistance, helps develop selected projects and move them to implementation stage. WaterTalks outreach strategies include:

- Virtual events
- Mailing WaterTalks newspaper and surveys
- WaterTalks bookmarks
- Social media posts
- Newspaper and online advertisements
- Email blasts & Phone banking
- School and institutional outreach

Other WCVV Programs

The WCVV region has many other programs that address and work with water-related issues:

- Association of Water Agencies of Ventura County (AWA) provides a forum for the exchange of information on local and regional water issues. AWA includes a variety of entities (agriculture, municipalities, water purveyors, small systems, industrial water users, private business, concerned citizens, students, etc.).
- Groundwater is an important resource in Ventura County, supplying more than 63% of the county's water needs. Seven Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSAs) have been formed to ensure the proper management to meet the current and future demands of urban, industrial, agricultural, and in-stream water uses.
- Ventura Countywide Stormwater Quality Management Program (VCSQMP) works to improve stormwater quality, monitor the health of watersheds, and meet Ventura County Stormwater Permit compliance. The program is conducted through residential outreach; business outreach and inspections; design, installation, and maintenance of trans capture and runoff diversion devices; and additional best management practices.
- Ventura County Watershed Protection District addresses planning for risks associated with flooding, post-fire debris flow, and dam failure. Flood hazards are identified and profiled, assets are identified, and vulnerability as well as capability is assessed. A mitigation strategy for reducing potential hazards, including goals, objectives, and actions, is also included. The Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan for Ventura County has taken the place of the Flood Mitigation Plan and was most recently adopted in 2015.

Non-governmental organizations and community-based organizations have been instrumental in connecting DACs and underserved communities to the IRWM process, and in assisting these communities in applying for funding. Organizations such as the Central Coast Alliance for a Sustainable Economy (CAUSE) and Friends of the Santa Clara River (FSCR) conduct community outreach and perform needs assessments. The WCVV can help connect communities to these organizations for assistance.



Project Solicitation and Prioritization

IRWM has provided over \$1.5 billion in State funding to support and advance integrated, multi-benefit regional projects. The primary source of funding for IRWM projects are grants included in Prop. 50, Prop. 84, and Prop. 1, as well as funding from State Clean Water Revolving Loans (low-interest loans), fisheries grants, other chapters of water bond legislation (i.e. Stormwater Flood Management, Groundwater Sustainability, and Water Use Efficiency), and federal grants.

Eligibility

A list of project preferences and priorities, eligibility requirements, and program requirements are laid out under the IRWM Grant Program Guidelines.

The following entities are eligible for IRWM grant funding:

- Public Agencies
- 501c Non-profit organizations
- Public utilities
- Federally recognized Indian Tribes
- State Indian Tribes listed on the Native American Heritage Commission's Tribal Consultation list
- Mutual Water Companies



DWR provides three separate grant programs, each with specific requirements and selection processes:

- Planning grants: support the development and updating of IRWM Plans
- Implementation grants: support on-the-ground water and wastewater construction projects
- Disadvantaged community grants: aimed at increasing the engagement and involvement of disadvantaged communities, EDAs, and underrepresented communities in the IRWM process

Projects proposals must include a local cost share of at least 50% of the total project costs. Local cost share may include, but is not limited to, federal funds, local funding, or donated services from non-State sources. If the project directly benefits a DAC or EDA, then the local cost share requirement may be waived or reduced. DWR issues separate Proposal Solicitation Packages (PSP) for specific grant funding opportunities, which can be found on their website at: <https://water.ca.gov/Work-With-Us/Grants-And-Loans/IRWM-Grant-Programs/>

Project Submission and Selection

Entities that implement water and wastewater projects are called local project sponsors (LPS). Local project sponsors that wish to put forward projects IRWM funding should visit the WCVV website or directly communicate with the Program Director. Projects are submitted through an online portal, where more information about LPS and project eligibility requirements can be found.

Selection of projects in WCVV is determined by the consensus of the General Membership, based on the recommendation of the Watershed Committees and the Steering Committee. For each round of IRWM Implementation Grant funding, emphasis is placed on developing a geographically balanced and integrated suite of projects that best meet the needs of the Region, addresses the IRWM Plan Goals, fits the Resource Management Strategies, and helps the region adapt to climate change. The WCVV Project Review Process consists of the following steps:

1. Call for Projects and Programs
2. Watershed Committee Review and Selection
3. WCVV Steering Committee Review and Selection
4. WCVV General Membership Review and Approval

If the IRWM Plan is not currently being updated, the approved project list is published in an IRWM Plan Addendum. The new project list is then posted on the WCVV website and in the web portal and communicated to stakeholders through e-mail notifications.

Qualitative project assessment, as opposed to numerical analysis or weighted scoring, is done by the WCVV when reviewing projects submitted for funding and inclusion in the IRWM Plan. During the Watershed Committee Review and Selection, factors such as high priority projects, sufficient local match, and projects with new ideas that further the IRWM Plan goals are considered when ranking projects in priority order. For the Steering Committees Review and Selection, factors such as the project's benefits, elements, and readiness are all considered. The General Membership considers and approves projects for specific grant solicitation and authorizes the entity to apply for an Implementation Grant on behalf of WCVV and for the preparation of an IRWM Plan addendum for projects not already included.

Projects benefitting disadvantaged and underserved communities undergo a separate evaluation process. Funding considerations for these communities are made based on a project's ability to meet the specific needs determined by the DACIP Needs Assessment Report. Stakeholders determine how well the region's specific needs are met by a potential project through the Technical Assistance Proposed Project Evaluation Dashboard (TAPPED) Application, which allows comparability between proposed projects and community-determined needs. The TAPPED Application was created to serve as an ongoing mechanism for submitting projects, sharing information, and posting progress on projects and programs. The Project Evaluation Criteria list in the TAPPED Application contains more than 40 criteria and categorizes them into thematic groups (Project Description Criteria, General Reference Criteria, DAC Socioeconomic Criteria, DACIP Community Needs Assessment Criteria, and DACIP Institution Needs Assessment Criteria).

Project Examples

IRWM Implementation projects range from water treatment, water distribution, and water recycling to flood management, salinity management, and ecosystem protection. All these project types have been funded through the WCV. A list of the 42 WCV IRWM-funded projects are shown below, broken out by funding source.

Proposition 50

Calleguas Regional Salinity Management Pipeline- Hueneme Outfall
Waterworks District #1 Recycled Water System Phase 2
Calleguas Creek Arundo and Tamarisk Removal Project
Simi Valley Tapo Canyon Water Treatment Plant
El Rio Forebay Groundwater Contamination Elimination Project
Oxnard Forebay Groundwater Contamination Elimination Project
Fillmore Integrated Water Recycling Plant
Ventura River Watershed Protection Plan
San Antonio Creek Spreading Grounds Rehabilitation Phase 1
Senior Canyon Water Company Automation Upgrades
Salinity Management Pipeline Phase 1E

Proposition 84 Drought Round

Ventura County Agricultural Water Use Efficiency Program
Salinity Management Pipeline Phase 2D
Camrosa Pleasant Valley Well
El Rio Retrofits for Groundwater Recharge
Groundwater Replenishment and Reuse Project
Lake Casitas Aeration Project
San Antonio Creek Arundo Removal Project

Proposition 1

Calleguas – LVMWD Interconnection
Reclaimed Water Storage Reservoir
Los Robles Desalter
Eastside to Westside Waterline Interconnection Phase 2
Iron and Manganese Removal Project Phase 1

Proposition 84 Round 1

Ventura County Regional Urban Landscape Efficiency Program
Waterworks District #1 Recycled Water System Phase 2
Calleguas Creek Arundo and Tamarisk Removal Project
Simi Valley Tapo Canyon Water Treatment Plant
El Rio Forebay Groundwater Contamination Elimination Project
Oxnard Forebay Groundwater Contamination Elimination Project
Fillmore Integrated Water Recycling Plant
Ventura River Watershed Protection Plan
San Antonio Creek Spreading Grounds Rehabilitation Phase 1
Senior Canyon Water Company Automation Upgrades
Salinity Management Pipeline Phase 1E

Proposition 84 Round 2

North Pleasant Valley Groundwater Desalter
Moorpark Recycled Water Distribution System Expansion Phase 4
South Oxnard Stormwater Flood Management
Invasive Plant Removal Santa Clara River
Ventura River Invasive Plant Removal

Proposition 84 Final Round

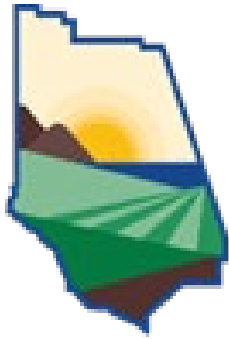
Water Wise Incentive Program
Camrosa Recycled Water Pipeline
Pleasant Valley Mutual Water Company Desalter
Moorpark Desalter Phase 1
Santa Clara River Steelhead Coalition Restoration

Participation in IRWM

WCV communications are carried out through the website (<https://watershedscoalition.org>), email lists, regular watershed meetings, General Membership meetings, and the WaterTalks website. Anyone can directly reach out to WCV for information on upcoming meetings, events, or to be added to the email lists. Similarly, DWR notifies the status of grants and important information through its website (<https://water.ca.gov/Work-With-Us/Grants-And-Loans/IRWM-Grant-Programs>), where one can sign up to be included in the email distribution list. The WaterTalks program has a committee that meets approximately every other month to discuss topics specific to DACs and underserved communities, assessing needs, identifying priorities, providing technical assistance for developing project proposals for funding, and ensuring that regional water resource management and planning consider the health, safety, welfare, and resiliency of lower-income community members. Anyone can attend these meetings. Meeting information can be found on the WaterTalks website (<https://watertalks.csusb.edu/ventura-county>).

Participating in meetings will directly involve community members with the decisions that are being made. Getting involved will help individuals understand what is happening at a local level and in their community.

To be added to the WCVC or WaterTalks email lists, or to obtain more information about the IRWM Program and WCVC, contact Lynn Rodriguez at lynn.rodriquez@ventura.org.



COUNTY *of* **VENTURA**

