

Introduction

This Integrated Regional Water Management (IRWM) Plan promotes coordination with state-wide water planning efforts (i.e. the California Water Plan) by seeking to align the regional roadmap for achieving sustainable water resource management with the State's Roadmap to 2030. This IRWM Plan presents a comprehensive water resource management approach focused on sustaining the region's water resources to meet current and future needs. It is built on the existing foundation of inter-agency cooperation. Sustaining and enhancing our existing balanced approach to water resource management will continue to rely on long-term strategies that integrate stakeholder participation, interagency partnerships, and environmental needs with regional water reliability needs and efficient resource management objectives and strategies including conservation and emergency response provisions.

Historical Management Efforts

The San Luis Region's historical water management efforts have been consistent with the State's IRWM approach. With a local culture that includes active environmental stakeholders, local land-use decisions have been subject to important debate and deliberations over the years with focus on the relationship of those decisions to water resource management and environmental needs, among other growth related concerns. The "quality of life" of the San Luis Region is an important cultural value that is being sustained through existing socio-political processes. The IRWM model developed by the State has likewise been locally embraced, in part because it is recognized as a tool that can be utilized to help improve the efficiency and effectiveness of existing dynamic processes.

While the region has a solid water resource management balance and has enjoyed significant accomplishments benefiting long term objectives, the process of continuously evaluating and self-evaluating institutional structures, policies, and approaches will help ensure that the region adapts to changing circumstances over time. In September of 2005 the San Luis Obispo County Board of Supervisors, sitting as both the County Board and the Board of the San Luis Obispo County Flood Control and Water Conservation District, voted to strengthen both existing institutional structures and general plan approaches to water issues, thereby ensuring that regional water management continues to be addressed in multiple forums.

Historical Accomplishments

Inter-agency cooperation has resulted in solutions to many of the region's historical water supply challenges, and while conflicts inevitably emerge from time to time, continued emphasis on cooperation has been instrumental in resolving those conflicts.

Several examples illustrate the San Luis Region's historical approach to integrating water management objectives, a few of which are listed below.

- Decisions on implementation of the Coastal Branch of the State Water project, which occurred in 1992 and 1993, included significant review of reliability concerns on the project and the importance of not developing a dependency on imported supplies.
- Since 1980, San Luis Obispo County’s Resource Management System (RMS) includes an annual review of the adequacy of five (5) vital resources, including water, needed for “smart” land-use development.
- The 1998 County-wide Master Water Plan identified goals associated with evaluating environmental water needs.
- The region’s Water Resources Advisory Committee has represented local stakeholders on regional water management efforts for over 50 years – essentially since 1945 when the State legislature created the San Luis Obispo County Flood Control and Water Conservation District (District) to act as the regional water management agency¹.
- Approval of inter-agency water delivery contracts in 2004 initiated the implementation of the Nacimiento Water Supply project and established the Nacimiento Commission – resolving decades of intra-regional water supply issues. The project will result in the completion of regional “backbone” facilities needed for long-term water supply reliability, and will open doors to groundwater banking and other conjunctive use programs.
- The County Office of Emergency Services’ response during the San Simeon earthquake of December 2003 included regional water officials that coordinated inter-agency cooperation and emergency equipment transfers to aid the continuity of water services for impacted communities.

The San Luis Region’s approach to its IRWM Plan

The District has prepared the San Luis Region’s IRWM Plan with stakeholders because it aligns with many of our existing water management efforts. With support and leadership at the State level, we maintain optimism that the IRWM approach to water resource management will further enhance our existing efforts by increasing stakeholder awareness of important issues, providing more opportunities for collaborative efforts, and improving efficiencies in government and water management.

¹ The San Luis Obispo County Flood Control and Water Conservation District Act was approved as Section 7205 of the Uncodified Water Act.

Implementation and Vision

While the Plan identifies several specific actions that are ongoing within the region, this Plan also recognizes that those actions are prompted by several different cues. Some actions are prompted by State legislation, others by local legislative actions. Regulatory actions prompt some; judicial decrees and settlements are yet another prompt to act. Likewise, while regional actions often provide the best avenue to implementing water related efforts, other actions are still best implemented by individual jurisdictions and/or sub-regional associations or partnerships. This Plan therefore focuses on identifying the efforts, goals and objectives of stakeholders overall while not attempting to dictate the specific method of implementation for the various activities that are ongoing within the region. Furthermore, the Plan includes a component for measuring the performance of water management efforts within the region, development of data associated with those efforts, and updating and modifying IRWM approaches to adapt to change - and to refine, improve and enhance. The following vision statement was developed for the San Luis Region's Plan.

The San Luis Region's IRWM Plan vision statement:

The San Luis Integrated Regional Water Management Plan seeks to enhance regional cooperation promoting sustainable water resource management while balancing economic, environmental and cultural values, and property rights; recognizing the role of regulatory agencies and the autonomy of individual jurisdictions.

Local Collaboration

The success of the San Luis Region's Plan, and water management within the region, will require ongoing collaborative effort by stakeholder representatives including cities and other local agencies, private water purveyors, agriculturalists, conservation organizations, and land use planners. Although the original intent was to develop a "functional equivalent" document, the number of water resource related plans in the San Luis Region muted our ability to point to one, a few, or several as characterizing the entirety of our regional efforts. In essence, they all reflect the region's collaborative efforts. Consequently, this Plan incorporates information found in existing Master Water Plans, Urban Water Management Plans, Watershed Management Action Plans, Land Use Plans, and other water resource management documents into an umbrella document covering the entire region.

This Plan reflects a turning point as well. It is the first Plan in the San Luis Region to attempt to illustrate the extensive efforts of the numerous environmental organizations that exist in the region together with the more traditional water planning efforts. So, while the San Luis Region has a successful track record of integrating water management objectives through the results of democratic debate and deliberations, this plan is the first

to provide a cornerstone document for future integrated efforts that will hopefully lead to more collaboration and efficiencies.

The San Luis Region also believes that it is extremely important to understand that promoting regional integrated efforts includes realistic awareness that water resource management is very dynamic and that the IRWM planning approach will not fit all situations. It is instead a document intended to express vision and promote efficient and cooperative efforts. Whether final actions are prompted by litigation, legislative actions, or cooperative efforts, the San Luis Region's IRWM Plan is intended to improve communication and cooperation and minimize conflict-generated solutions.

Plan Integration

This Plan integrates water resource management strategies to:

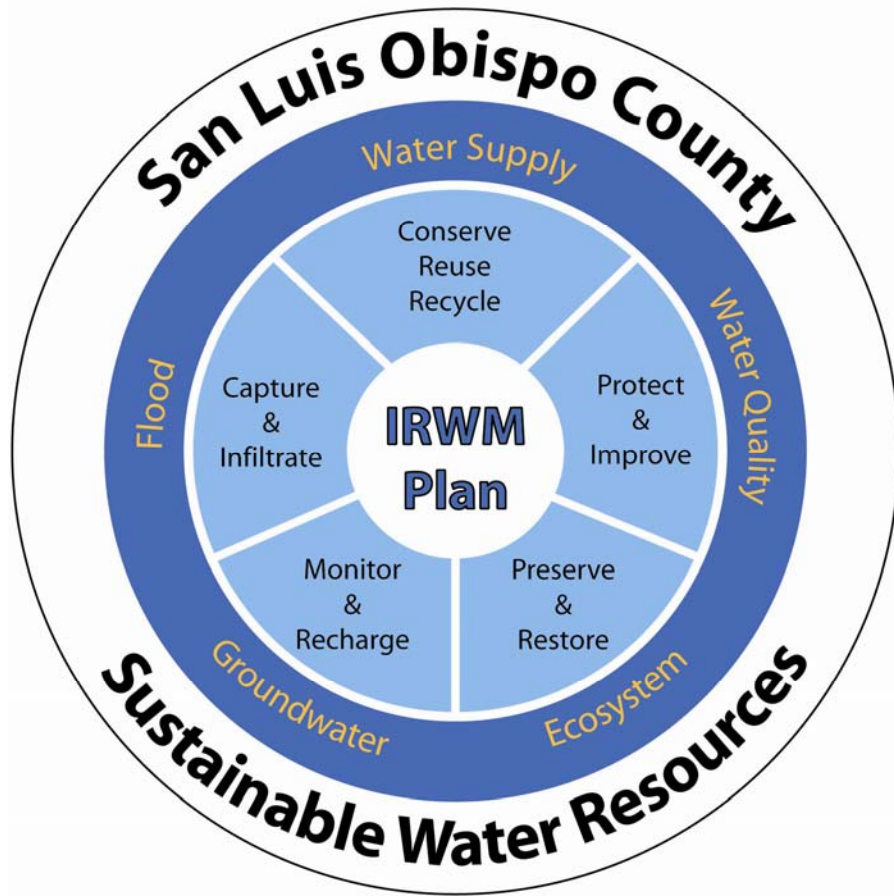
- Protect communities from drought;
- Protect and improve water quality;
- Avoid dependence on imported water;
- Reduce conflicts; and
- Achieve other multiple benefits and objectives.

This Plan identifies water resource management planning objectives and implementation strategies in the following five inter-related water management categories, and defines a path to achieving the region's highest priority objectives:

- 1) Water supply;
- 2) Water quality protection and improvement;
- 3) Ecosystem preservation and restoration;
- 4) Groundwater monitoring and management; and
- 5) Flood management.

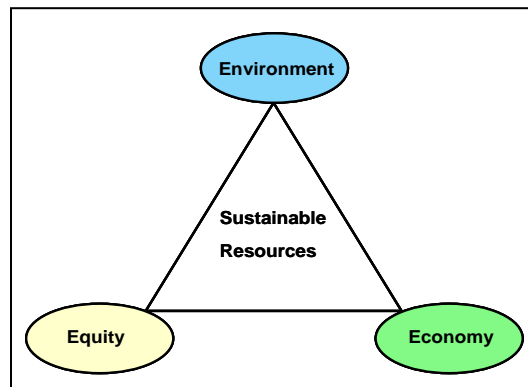
Multiple benefits are achieved when all five categories are considered during water resource planning and implementation. Figure I.1 illustrates the integration of water management strategies to achieve water resource management objectives for the five key water management categories covered in this Plan.

Figure I.1
IRWM Plan Wheel Diagram



Maintaining water resource sustainability means that the region will be able to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The concept of sustainability recognizes the relationship between economic growth, environmental protection, and social equity. The synergy of these goals promotes a healthy economy, a clean environment, and an involved citizenry. Figure I.2 illustrates the 3 “E’s” of Sustainability: **E**nvironment, **E**conomy, and **S**ocial **E**quity.

Figure I.2
The 3 E's of Sustainability: Environment, Economy, and Equity



This Plan also encourages ecologically sustainable water resource management in San Luis Obispo County. To ensure appropriate consideration of environmental issues, an ecological approach was applied during Plan development. The issues and needs for protecting, preserving, and restoring the region's key ecological processes and important environmental resources were considered as important Plan objectives.

The Plan is organized in fifteen sections, each representing the required sections of the State's IRWM Plan standards. Each section includes the applicable State standard and describes how it is achieved in the Plan.

- Sections A and B provide background information about the Regional Agency, the region's stakeholders, and a description of the region.
- Section C describes the IRWM goals and objectives developed by stakeholders for all five areas of water resource management.
- Section D describes the water management strategies considered to achieve the IRWM goals and objectives
- Section E describes how these strategies work together.
- Section F describes the regional priorities for plan implementation.
- Section G shows the details of the implementation action plan.
- Section H discusses the impacts and benefits of the Plan.
- Sections I and J discuss the technical analyses and data used to develop and monitor the Plan.
- Section J describes the data management techniques used.
- Section K provides information about potential funding for Plan implementation and ongoing project operation and maintenance.
- Section L describes the Plan and its relationship to statewide priorities, environmental justice and disadvantaged communities.
- Section M discusses the relationship of the Plan to local land use planning.
- Section N describes the stakeholder involvement and communication during plan development.

- Section O discusses the coordination needed with the State and Federal governments and any assistance that will be needed to implement the Plan.
And, the
- Appendices provide additional reference information.