

**Item No. 4 Public Outreach and Involvement****Requirement**

A description of the process being used that makes the public both part of and aware of the regional management and IRWM efforts. Discuss ways for the public to gain access to the RWMG and IRWM process for information and how they can provide input.

**Review Criteria**

Does the RWMG allow the public to participate in regular meetings? Is there an established method of posting meeting agendas, notices, and minutes? Are they posted with sufficient lead time for the public to participate in meetings?

Is it clear who the public should contact within the RWMG if they have questions regarding regional water management efforts or IRWM planning and implementation in the region? Are there public meetings held to solicit public comments ahead of major decisions to be made by the RWMG? What is the process for the public to provide input to RWMG on regional water management and/or IRWMP? And what is the process being used by the RWMG to evaluate and respond to that input?

Public involvement is critical to the success of the San Luis Obispo IRWMP process. Public outreach, coordination and participation will continue during implementation of the IRWMP.

Meetings of the Water Resources Advisory Committee (WRAC) have been and will continue to be the main forum for public participation in IRWM. The WRAC has 30 members representing a majority of the water management authorities and stakeholders within the region boundary. The RWMG's Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) (provided in Item 1) designates the WRAC as the RWMG's main advisor and the forum through which the RWMG will consider IRWM items. The WRAC is a "Brown Act Committee." Consequently, its meetings are public hearings with agendas, minutes, public noticing and a public comment period. The noticing requirement is 72-hours prior to the meetings; however, WRAC meetings occur regularly on the first Wednesday of the month, except July and August, from 1:30 to 3:00 pm. Future IRWM milestones are discussed at each WRAC meeting and published in the minutes, allowing sufficient lead time and providing an opportunity for public comments ahead of major decisions to be made by the RWMG. A wide variety of people receive electronic mail notices of WRAC agendas and minutes, including the media and non-governmental agencies, so the contact list is used to notify the public of IRWM workshops.

The MOU establishes the District as the lead agency in IRWMP, and the District serves as WRAC secretary, making District staff the clear contact for IRWMP in the region. WRAC and RWMG members consistently direct the public to the District on IRWM issues. Communication regarding availability of draft IRWM materials, meeting notices, agendas and minutes, have been accomplished via written letters, phone calls, and electronic mail. An effective communication and educational tool has been the IRWM website. The website is used for communication and posting of the IRWMP. If the public does not have access to the website or prefers hardcopies, the documents are provided at no cost to ensure equal access to all interested people.

Members of the public can provide input to RWMG on regional water management and/or IRWMP during the public comment period of WRAC meetings or via contact with the District. The District then provides the comment in its staff report for the WRAC meeting for WRAC and RWMG consideration. An

evaluation is made at that time as to whether the member of the public should be directly contacted or if it is appropriate to address the comment via consideration of IRWMP issues in general.

For over 50 years, WRAC hearings have been the primary forum for the regional review of water resource issues and details. WRAC's many purposes include developing recommendations to the District's Board, whose authority is coterminous with the region boundary - thereby making WRAC the most obvious forum for IRWM planning. Its preeminent role in water resource management is known throughout the region by members of the public who are interested in maintaining involvement in regional water resource issues. As a result, the WRAC provides a direct link to the majority of the water management authorities and stakeholders in the region and also provides a link to the public and other stakeholders interested in water resource management.

The following specific outreach needs have been identified, based both on the development and adoption of the IRWM Plan, as well as on implementation of the policies, concepts and projects identified in the Plan:

***Additional outreach to the non-English speaking community.*** Several communities within the region are composed of substantial numbers of Spanish speaking individuals. Additional work to ensure that these community members are fully engaged in the development of the Plan should be conducted. Production of the IRWM materials in both Spanish and English will be considered.

***Consideration of issues specific to economically disadvantaged communities.*** Several areas within the region, including whole communities in the north County, have been identified as economically disadvantaged. A review of IRWM Plan policies from the perspective of these communities needs to be conducted to ensure that the balance between resource provision, resource protection, and overall cost appropriately considers the economic conditions found in these communities.

***Cost Subsidies.*** A strategy to help pay for identified improvements needed in economically disadvantaged areas needs to be developed. Concepts from initial infrastructure grants to utility bill assistance should be included.

All communities in the region, whether disadvantaged or not, currently enjoy good access to public policy decision-makers. Because incorporated Cities in the region have smaller populations, access to elected officials, agency staff and public forums is excellent. In the unincorporated area, containing roughly half the region's population, a system of Board of Supervisor's Advisory Councils, together with numerous self-governing Community Services Districts, provides the average citizen, regardless of their race, color, national origin, or income, broad access to public agency decision making.

#### History of Public Outreach and Involvement

The following describes the history of stakeholder outreach and public participation in the development of the region's IRWMP.

In 2004, the County of San Luis Obispo's Public Works Department (District) took the lead in initiating the IRWM Plan development. In order to start the stakeholder participation process, an IRWM Team consisting of the following District staff was formed:

- Deputy Director
- Environmental Division Manager

- Utilities Division Water Resource Engineer
- Environmental Resource Specialist
- Utilities Staff Engineer
- Other support staff

The Team then worked with the Water Resources Advisory Committee (WRAC) as the appropriate forum to initiate and implement stakeholder participation. The WRAC is an appointed body, made up of citizens and governmental representatives, including elected officials, that advises the District's Board of Supervisors on water resource projects and policies in the region. WRAC has 30 members representing a majority of the water management authorities and stakeholders within the region boundary. For over 50 years, WRAC hearings have been the primary forum for the regional review of water resource issues and details. WRAC's many purposes include developing recommendations to the District's Board - thereby making WRAC the most obvious stakeholder group for IRWM planning.

The WRAC developed an IRWM subcommittee with representatives of municipalities, private water purveyors, agricultural and environmental stakeholders. A WRAC IRWM Subcommittee was formed consisting of members representing the following interests:

- Environmental
- Environmental and Coastal
- South County
- Agriculture
- North County
- Non-governmental Water Purveyor

The Subcommittee's purpose was threefold:

1. Review IRWM Plan Objectives & Strategies
2. Identify & review IRWM projects
3. Review & recommend project prioritization.

The subcommittee involvement occurred through workshops and meetings. In addition to the Subcommittee members, workshops were also open to any WRAC member and the public. Also, the City of San Luis Obispo's Utilities Conservation Coordinator was nominated to serve as an ex-officio member along with County staff. The WRAC members chosen for the Subcommittee resulted in a balanced representation of water interests.

Additional stakeholders invited to participate in plan development include State agencies including the Regional Water Quality Control Board and Department of Health Services; local Resource Conservation Districts; Central Coast Salmon Enhancement; the Planning and Conservation League; other governmental entities including the County of Santa Barbara; and land trusts and other non-governmental environmental organizations in the region.

The IRWMP process has focused on identifying as broad a range of stakeholders as possible. Traditionally, stakeholders coordinated on narrowly focused projects or specific water management strategies. There is increasing awareness that it is beneficial to integrate the efforts of these stakeholders groups. Furthermore, stakeholders recognize the need to work together given their shared

dependence on limited local water supplies in the region and to develop programs that provide multiple benefits to the region. The IRWM planning process has created a forum for many of these stakeholders to come together to work collaboratively on their shared and/or overlapping issues. In order to make this forum most effective, steps have been taken to identify as many of the potential stakeholders with water management interests in region as possible, and to make them aware of and participants in the IRWMP process.

The IRWM stakeholder process was initiated in 2004. The District sent a letter to the stakeholders requesting water-related documents. These documents were collected and reviewed to begin developing IRWM objectives and begin IRWM planning in the five areas of water management: water supply, groundwater management, ecosystem restoration, water quality, and flood management. Public workshops, noticed through the WRAC email and mail distribution lists and the District website, were then conducted identifying IRWM objectives and projects. Public workshops were open to any WRAC member and the public. Several workshops were held to review and solicit input on the IRWM objectives, identify IRWM projects, and evaluate IRWM project priorities. The IRWM objectives, projects, and priorities were modified to reflect stakeholder comments and recommendations.

Upon receipt of feedback from the State on the San Luis Region's IRWM Plan, the Director of Public Works implemented the first step of the five-year update plan: "Review the plan's goals, objectives, strategies, and priorities with stakeholders. Amend Plan." To implement the first item in the 5-year update plan, the District held a public workshop to review the proposed amendments to the IRWM Plan. Feedback at the workshop and via email from stakeholders included recommended changes to the high-ranking, immediate-term projects for grant proposal consideration. Based on the feedback, the IRWM Plan was amended and supported by the WRAC at a follow-up workshop.

Disadvantaged communities were involved in the preparation of the IRWMP through their involvement with the WRAC and the commitment by District staff to represent their interests. All of the region's communities are represented on WRAC through one of the 30 appointees. The continuing IRWMP process will take into account and be responsive to the needs of disadvantaged communities. Continued improvement and subsequent adoption of the IRWMP will require additional efforts to ensure that the disadvantaged communities' needs are fully considered.