

Chapter 5: Outreach and Engagement

Community and stakeholder involvement



Since its inception, the Inyo-Mono IRWMP has been committed to encouraging greater stakeholder involvement and outreach to potential participants. The RWMG recognized early in the process that because of the large size of the planning region and the breadth of water issues within the region, it would be important to create an inclusive process. As a result, the RWMG has maintained its commitment to public meetings, outreach to new stakeholders, and incorporation of Tribes and disadvantaged communities.

Process used to identify stakeholders

The original stakeholders of the Inyo-Mono Regional Water Management Group consisted of the Sierra Nevada Alliance, California Trout, and California Department of Water Resources, with facilitation provided by the Center for Collaborative Policy. One of the primary tasks of this initial group was to identify water-related stakeholders in the planning region and to encourage attendance and participation at RWMG meetings. Within the first few months of the IRWMP process, meeting attendance grew to 35-40 people. Throughout the first two years, effort was continually made to identify new stakeholders and invite them to participate in the process. This was mostly done through word-of-mouth through the existing RWMG participants.

Stakeholder composition

The I-M RWMG recognized early in the process that comprehensive stakeholder representation was essential to the success of the Group. From the beginning, effort was made on the part of Project Staff and existing RWMG participants to involve stakeholders from many different types of organizations that focus on water: government agencies, non-profit organizations, businesses, water suppliers, academic institutions, and Native American Tribes. Currently, all of these sectors are represented in the RWMG by at least one organization, and in many cases, several organizations. The specific composition of the RWMG can be seen in Appendix A.

In addition to the stakeholders who regularly attend meetings or otherwise participate in the IRWMP process, there is a list of stakeholders who receive communications about the I-M

IRWMP but who do not actively participate (Table 1-1). As time permits, staff and RWMG participants attempt to make contact with these entities and encourage increased participation.

Given the very large area of the Inyo-Mono planning region, it is not possible to reach out to and include every stakeholder with water interests. However, considerable effort has been put into ensuring that all communities and areas of the region are represented by at least one stakeholder group. A further challenge is maintaining levels of stakeholder involvement through staffing changes, budget cuts, and shifting priorities. If Project Staff observes that a previously engaged stakeholder has not been participating at the same level, they contact the organization and work to facilitate that entity's continued involvement. Having broad and consistent representation in the RWMG is key as the representatives bring many different opinions and points of view to discussions. The Inyo-Mono RWMG is truly a grassroots, member-driven organization.

Stakeholder involvement

I-M RWMG members are involved in a variety of ways. At the most basic level, RWMG members attend and participate in Group meetings. A subset (six) of RWMG members sits on the Administrative Committee, which provides guidance to staff and helps to resolve conflict within the RWMG. Staff relies on the Administrative Committee, as well as other RWMG participants, to provide feedback and advice on day-to-day decisions and operations. RWMG participants also have opportunities to participate in work groups that perform specific tasks or functions, such as developing budgets for grant proposals, researching issues as they arise, creating project review criteria, or assisting with writing assignments. Because of the large and remote nature of the Inyo-Mono region, many stakeholders only participate in RWMG meetings by phone, or if they cannot participate at all, they can stay informed about I-M IRWMP activities through the website or through contact with staff. Stakeholder involvement is welcome at any level.

Any member of the public is allowed to attend and contribute to RWMG, Administrative Committee, and work group meetings. In the summer of 2010, the I-M RWMG decided by consensus that it would conduct all its activities under the provisions of the Ralph M. Brown Act. Stakeholders and other members of the public can find meeting information on the I-M IRWMP website, in local newspapers, and at several posted locations throughout the region. Furthermore, each RWMG meeting agenda is presented to both the Inyo County and Mono County Boards of Supervisors and thus becomes part of the public record. Call-in locations are available and open to the public.

Stakeholders that wish to put forward projects for funding under the IRWM program are strongly encouraged to attend RWMG meetings and are required to sign the Memorandum of Understanding.

Disadvantaged communities

Through Prop. 84, DWR has placed emphasis on reaching out to and supporting disadvantaged communities in the IRWM Program. The initial Planning Committee recognized that the I-M IRWM planning region contains many DACs, as defined by 2000 census median income data. In addition, several unincorporated communities within the region are too small to be counted in the census data and thus are not considered DACs, even though they might fall into that category. The I-M RWMG will use 2010 census data, as well as median income data collected at the county level, to update the list of DACs found within the I-M planning region. The process of determining which communities in the region are DACs, as well as a list and a map of the identified DACs, is discussed in Chapter 1 (Development Process for the Inyo-Mono IRWMP).

Public outreach and education

The RWMG continues to refine its outreach and engagement methods, especially targeting disadvantaged communities and populations of low representation. Staff relies heavily on the knowledge and contacts of current RWMG participants and other stakeholders in determining which potential new stakeholders to contact. The Inyo-Mono IRWM Project Staff has developed written materials to aid in providing information to new stakeholders. New stakeholders have expressed that they find it difficult to learn about the history, process, and current activities of the I-M IRWMP, and written materials help to distill this information. These documents are available on the website or from IRWMP staff and are updated as needed.

Project staff and members of the I-M RWMG conduct outreach on a continual basis to encourage further participation from all groups within the planning boundaries that have interests in water resources management. Most often, outreach occurs through attending meetings of various entities throughout the planning region. Either IRWMP staff or RWMG participants attend such meetings to provide an overview of the IRWMP process and to answer questions. These meetings may be ongoing public meetings, such as



Mono County Regional Planning Advisory Committee (RPAC) meetings, individual meetings with stakeholders, or special IRWMP outreach meetings (described below). Outreach has also been conducted and is on-going with other Sierra IRWMP groups such as CABY, Upper Feather, Tahoe-Sierra, Southern Sierra, Mojave, Antelope Valley, Mariposa, Kern County and Madera County. This outreach builds rapport among other regional efforts and contributes to collaboration among other mountain-region and headwater RWMGs. In addition, the knowledge

gained from discussions with other IRWM groups has provided valuable information for structuring the Inyo-Mono RWMG.

In 2010, with the help of funding from DWR, the Inyo-Mono RWMG was able to secure assistance from the Center for Collaborative Policy (CCP) to conduct an intensive and targeted outreach campaign throughout the planning region. Sub-regions were identified that were previously under-represented at RWMG meetings. Evening meetings were scheduled in each of the sub-regions, and local groups and individuals were identified and invited to participate (although each meeting was also open to the public). At least one or two RWMG participants were present at each meeting, as well as IRWMP and CCP staff. The meetings attracted as few as two and as many as 12 new participants. In total, seven meetings were convened and 22 new participants were added to the RWMG contact list. These meetings were instrumental in identifying local water concerns and water management-related objectives.

Inyo-Mono IRWMP staff and one RWMG member visited the southeastern portion of the planning region in March, 2010, to conduct meetings with several potential stakeholders, including local residents of the communities of Shoshone and Tecopa, Death Valley National Park staff, and Timbisha-Shoshone Tribal staff. Staff returned to the area in October, 2010, to meet again with stakeholders and answer questions from the community. At this time, several specific water needs were identified.

Technology and information access

Communication between staff and the RWMG, and among RWMG participants, primarily occurs via email. IRWMP staff uses email to send out meeting notices and agendas, documents, announcements, and other relevant material. The project website (www.inyomonowater.org) is used as another primary tool for outreach and communication throughout the I-M IRWM planning region. On this website, visitors can find topics such as introductory information about the I-M IRWMP, member organizations, meeting summaries, and links to other IRWMP groups. Documents that are sent to the RWMG through email are usually also posted to the website. It has become evident, however, that email and the website are not always the best communication or outreach tools in this expansive, largely rural, and economically disadvantaged region. Many people in the I-M IRWMP planning region do not have adequate internet access; thus, Project Staff is working to identify the best means to keep everyone informed in the region, such as hardcopy newsletters that are sent via U.S. mail.

The Inyo-Mono IRWMP effort has been visible within local media outlets. The three most widely-read local newspapers have each run several articles about various aspects of the Inyo-Mono IRWMP, including interviews with IRWMP staff and RWMG participants. There are several documented cases of these articles contributing to the involvement of new RWMG participants. More recently, a staff member from one of the local newspapers has been regularly attending RWMG meetings and has been posting meeting announcements and agendas on the newspaper's website.

Governance and decision-making

Since the inception of the Inyo-Mono IRWMP in 2008, the group has been governed by a Memorandum of Understanding. The first MOU, which governed the pre-planning phase of the I-M IRWMP process, was adopted in November 2008 and was subsequently signed by 28 organizations (Appendix B). It was later agreed among RWMG members that the MOU should be updated and revised to reflect the group's progression into the planning and implementation phases. A work group made up of a subset of RWMG participants developed a new MOU that took effect November 15, 2010, with 22 signatories (Appendix C). Additional organizations may sign the MOU at any time, and a continually updated list of signatories is available on the website. The planning/implementation MOU will undergo a revision process in early 2011 as there were some outstanding comments that did not get addressed before the November 15 date.

Decision-making in the RWMG has always occurred through consensus. The I-M RWMG's operational definition of consensus is that all entities either approve or can live with the item being decided upon. If one or more entities disapprove, then no decision is made. Only MOU signatories can participate in this decision-making process. Every group has one "vote" and thus equal power, regardless of the size or influence of any given entity. Certain decisions that are not approved by the group are placed into a "parking lot" for consideration at a later date. More information about the governance and decision-making processes of the I-M RWMG can be found in Chapter 2 (Governance).

Integration of stakeholders and institutions

One of the most tangible, yet unquantifiable, benefits of the I-M IRWM process to date has been the practice of gathering water-related stakeholders at meetings on an almost-monthly basis to discuss the group, its activities, and water issues. Many of the organizations sitting at the table have historically been at odds over water issues. While it is not expected that the RWMG will solve water-related conflicts in the region, many participants have acknowledged the advantages of increased communication and cooperation among adversaries and allies alike. In addition, during the RWMG's visioning exercise in early 2010, several RWMG participants expressed the desire that the IRWMP process should help individual stakeholders overcome conflict and should allow the group to speak with one voice and from common objectives.

The I-M IRWM process has helped to educate stakeholders about each other's activities and priorities. Smaller water districts have sought advice from larger water districts on technical issues. Disadvantaged communities benefit by learning from groups with more experience in water management, and in turn, RWMG stakeholders have begun to understand the difficulties of maintaining high-quality water resources and ecosystem protection in small, rural communities.

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