



September 30, 2019

Nancy Vogel
Director of the Governor's Water Portfolio Program
1303 10th St., Suite 1173
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Submitted electronically to: input@waterresilience.ca.gov

Re: California Water Resilience Portfolio Initiative

Dear Ms. Vogel:

Interested parties in the Sierra recently attended the Sierra Water Workgroup's annual Summit on September 12 – 13, 2019. This year's theme was *Sierra Nevada Watershed Resilience Summit: Approaches to addressing catastrophic fire, water supply, water quality, flood and environmental protection*. During the Summit, a Water Resilience Portfolio Listening Session was held on September 13, 2019. The following are the recommendations and comments offered by the group.

1. The State should make the Sierra a priority by aligning funding to benefits.

The Sierra Nevada Region plays a critical role in California's water supply and hydrological system. More than 60 percent of California's developed water supply originates in the Sierra Nevada, yet less than 5% of water bond money is invested in the region that is the source of that water.

Water originating in the Sierra serves end users throughout the State. Los Angeles receives most of its water from the east side of the Sierra; San Francisco receives its water from the west side of the Sierra. Additionally, 75% of the fresh water that flows into the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta (Delta) comes from the Sierra. The Delta is the hub of the State of California's water system, providing water to more than 25 million Californians and three million acres of agricultural land.

Climate change experts predict more precipitation and less snow in the next 50 years. Snowpack in the Sierra region provides a natural form of water storage, and Sierra forests and meadows play a role in ensuring water quality and reliability. Investments in forest management and meadow restoration projects have been proven to hold the snow pack and slow run-off. Similarly, forest thinning and prescribed burns are a proven method for

preventing or reducing the severity of catastrophic wildfires that reduce infiltration and worsen water quality.

The State should review the rate structure for large water deliveries from the Sierra and consider amending the rates to fund investment in the Sierra.

2. The State should protect what's left in the Sierra.

Investment in water resiliency projects requires more than building dams and replacing leaky pipes. Especially because of the ways that climate change is altering the State's ecosystems, investments in water and forest management projects will have multiple and greater benefits for most Californians. We believe that supporting projects that improve forest health, reduce risk of catastrophic fire, protect water supplies, restore watershed and meadow function, sequester greenhouse gas emissions, and conserve land to protect key public benefits, such as water quality and quantity is critical for securing California's future water resilience.

We also believe that the State should put a priority on multi-benefit landscape-scale projects. These larger, coordinated projects provide exponentially more benefits than piecemeal restoration projects. The State should also focus on land conservation and watershed conservation including rivers, streams and wetlands. Projects should involve all stakeholders including private landowners.

3. The State should adopt IRWM as the principal framework for implementing the Portfolio.

A lot of progress has been achieved though State, Tribal, regional, and local investments in Integrated Regional Water Management (IRWM), but there is more to be achieved. IRWM is a collaborative effort to identify and implement water management solutions on a regional scale. The practice of IRWM in California was significantly advanced when the California Legislature passed the IRWM Planning Act of 2002. Forty-eight IRWM planning regions were formed and subsequently reviewed and accepted by the State. Today, IRWM Regions cover more than 87% of the State's land area and 99% of its population. Fourteen IRWMs in the Sierra address issues include water quality, local water supply reliability, better integration of water and land use management, resource stewardship and ecosystem protection.

One of the key principals of IRWM is collaboration supported by open, inclusive, and transparent stakeholder involvement processes. This advanced form of collaboration is essential for building trust, fostering relationships, and reducing conflicts. IRWM region stakeholders include state, local and federal agencies; water providers; wastewater agencies; flood control agencies, resource conservation districts, environmental and other community organizations, disadvantaged and other under-represented communities, Tribes, academics, and business and labor leaders.

The Portfolio should build on the investments made and progress achieved to date. IRWM is essential for integrating local, regional and even State water efforts to achieve sustainable

water management in the most effective and cost-efficient manner. Among its many attributes, IRWM fosters cooperative decision-making, multi-benefit approaches, efficient use of resources, conflict reduction and resolution, increased regional self-reliance, financial leveraging, pooled funding, and the sustainable management of water and related natural resources to concurrently achieve social, environmental, and economic objectives¹. The majority of participants in the IRWM regions are collaborating regularly to efficiently plan and implement improved water management solutions that could not be achieved alone.

Ideally the Portfolio will not only embrace IRWM regions but help them evolve to be even more effective. IRWM regions, as collaborative groups of local partners, should play a larger role in determining how water is managed regionally. They should focus on multi-beneficial projects that support a broad range of stakeholders. Most importantly, to become less dependent on bond funding, IRWM regions should have fee authority like groundwater sustainability agencies (GSAs).

There is broad support for the practice of IRWM statewide. The IRWM Roundtable of Regions, the California Stormwater Quality Association (CASQA), and the Association of California Water Agencies (ACWA) support IRWM's comprehensive approach to overall regional water management planning. In addition, the Department of Water Resources (DWR) California Water Plan Update 2018² states that "*holistically managing California natural resources will require collaboration among stakeholders*" and cites IRWM regions as an option to encourage effective collaboration among diverse interests. The DWR-published *Stakeholder Perspectives – Recommendations for Sustaining and Strengthening Integrated Regional Water Management*³ notes that IRWM provides synergistic opportunities for resiliency planning. IRWM regions cover most of the area of the state and can provide a suitable forum for implementation of other multi-stakeholder planning efforts.

4. The State should work with IRWM Regions, and other interested organizations and stakeholders, to continue to address vulnerable communities.

The IRWM framework provides an extremely effective (and sometime the only) mechanism for bringing rural, disadvantaged, underserved, underrepresented, and Tribal voices to the statewide table. IRWM regions play an important role in identifying their needs, and providing technical assistance to develop and implement critical projects that bring benefits not only to those communities but also to the rest of the state. Continuing to support these efforts is crucial to holistic California water resiliency.

Further, the State should expand the definition of "Disadvantaged." Currently, many State agencies use CalEnviroScreen to determine disadvantaged communities (DACs). As currently configured, CalEnviroScreen 3.0 focuses more on pollution hazards and less on

¹http://content.yudu.com/A2991h/lpg.to.irwm/resources/index.htm?referrerUrl=http://www.water.ca.gov/irwm/other_resources/publications.cfm&skipFlashCheck=true

² <https://water.ca.gov/-/media/DWR-Website/Web-Pages/Programs/California-Water-Plan/Docs/Update2018/Final/California-Water-Plan-Update-2018.pdf>

³ https://water.ca.gov/LegacyFiles/irwm/docs/IRWM_Recommendations.pdf

the other factors, resulting in the complete absence of eligible DACs in the Sierra, the North Coast, and many inland rural areas.

5. The State should provide assistance to rural communities to transform their existing project concepts into project proposals that are ready for funding.

Many rural communities lack the capacity to formalize engineering and technical concepts and create project proposals that are sufficiently ready for funding. They need assistance to take a project from concept to implementation. We recommend that the state consider creating an incubator facility to assist vulnerable communities to make their projects “shovel ready.” Another option would be to build on DWR’s Prop 1 Implementation Grant pre-application workshops to assist stakeholders in preparing project proposals that are eligible for funding.

When soliciting projects from underserved and low income communities, state agencies should delete the requirement for “shovel ready” projects or include funding and/or assistance to make projects shovel ready. Most small communities do not have the resources to do CEQA review – and sometimes struggle to move a project from a concept to a proposal.

6. The State should create a robust education and outreach program to promote public awareness of watersheds and their value.

We suggest that the state invest in a public awareness campaign that informs the public about the connection between the source waters and end users. Educate the public (with a focus on the next generation) on how their everyday actions impact our natural resources. Promote a theme of “Water is Life.” Consider billboards across the state with messages such as, “you are entering a watershed,” “healthy forests provide clean water,” and “my water comes from the mountains,” etc. Build a website letting the public learn about their watershed, then publicize the website using utility bill stuffers. Help people get excited to log onto the website and see the accomplishments of their watershed.

7. The State should both seek and provide Tribal Support.

Traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) and practices used by the tribes, including the use of fire, water conservation, forest management, and stewardship of the land (to name a few), should be more broadly embraced by state agencies and land managers. The State can continue to learn from traditional tribal forest and land management practices.

Tribal communities’ opportunities also differ depending if the tribe is federally recognized, state recognized, or unrecognized. The engagement process for each category is different. The State should recognize that opportunities for tribal projects need to work with the tribe’s governance structure. In some cases, technical assistance and project funding is needed to meet the needs of those communities. Broadly distribute the tribal specific brochure developed by the Department of Water Resources.

8. The State should make the permitting of projects more efficient.

The governor should establish a forum of state and federal agencies to support the planning and permitting of watershed management and ecological restoration projects, similar to the Bay Regional Restoration Integration Team (BRRIT) model in the Bay Area. The forum should meet at least quarterly and be comprised of the heads of the Department of Water Resources, CALFIRE, Central Valley Flood Protection Board, Department of Fish and Wildlife, Tribal representatives, State Water Resources Control Board, Office of Planning and Research, other state agencies, and their federal counterparts. The purpose of the Forum should be to reduce the time and cost of permitting for multi-objective, sustainable management of watersheds to increase climate resilience including the objectives of catastrophic fire reduction, water quality improvements, water supply improvements, ecosystem improvements, and flood protection.

9. The State should assist communities lacking safe drinking water.

Small systems lack economies of scale. In some cases, they can't provide safe drinking water. The State should consolidate small systems that are failing or provide an entity that can operate a failing system. Passage of SB 200 allows the State Board to provide operations and maintenance funding.

10. The State should modify Prop 218.

We need to recognize that these watershed areas are an asset to all and need to be managed as an asset.

In summary, we request recognition of the value the Sierra Nevada region offers the State - and request commensurate investment in the region to maintain and enhance the benefits provided. We also strongly urge the agencies preparing the Portfolio recommendations to adopt IRWM as the principal framework for implementing the Portfolio.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on development of the Water Resilience Portfolio. If you have any questions or wish to discuss these ideas further, please contact Jodie Monaghan, at jodie@jmconsultants.net or (916) 616-1134.

Respectfully,

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