

# **QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS**

## **Pajaro River Watershed IRWMP**

### ***1. What is an Integrated Regional Water Management Plan (IRWMP)?***

An IRWMP is a new planning process created by state water agencies to promote cooperative, “big picture” water planning at the regional level. Historically, individual water agencies have pursued smaller, localized water projects and often competed against neighboring agencies for water and grant funding. Even worse, unincorporated communities, non-profit groups and private water agencies were often left out of the process due to limited staff and funding resources. With the passage of state Proposition 50 in 2002, the state began requiring that applicants seeking state water grants first work together to establish a collaborative, regional approach to water management and find areas of mutual benefit. This requirement also applies to portions of Proposition 84 and Proposition 1E funds.

### ***2. Is state grant funding the only reason to participate in the IRWMP process?***

Not at all. In addition to facilitating periodic grant-funding opportunities (Prop 50/84/1E, etc.), the IRWMP will also serve as the primary vehicle for regional water planning for the foreseeable future. The Pajaro River Watershed covers 1,300 square miles, five water agencies, four counties, several cities, and dozens of smaller communities and water purveyors. The watershed also faces large-scale problems such as flooding, degrading water quality, storm water, interlinked riparian habitats and the need to develop new water supplies. No single agency has the ability or authority to manage all the water related issues for the entire watershed. Therefore, an IRWMP provides a systematic and publicly accessible way for all stakeholders, both public and private, to work towards mutually beneficial goals.

### ***3. Is an IRWMP required for all future water projects?***

No. Participation in an IRWMP is voluntary. However, if an agency or group is seeking IRWMP grant funding, then the project must be included in an IRWMP and the project sponsor must adopt the IRWMP if the grant is awarded. However, water agencies and groups can still independently pursue projects using their own funding sources. Adopting an IRWMP is not a requirement for federal funding or for non-IRWMP related state funding.

### ***4. Who is leading this IRWMP and who else is involved?***

The State Guidelines require that the IRWMP identify the “Regional Water Management Group” (Group) with the authority and responsibility for implementing the IRWMP. In this case, the Group is made of three water agencies: the San Benito County Water District, the Santa Clara Valley Water District and the Pajaro Valley Water Management Agency. All have legal authority to manage the water resources within their respective areas. They are formally known as the Pajaro River Watershed Collaborative but most often are called the Partners. Please see Section 1 of the IRWMP. While the Partners lead the effort, the State Guidelines require an inclusive and thorough stakeholder outreach process. A “stakeholder” can be anyone that has an interest in the IRWMP. Over 40 stakeholders have been identified so far (Table 1-1).

### ***5. Who is administering the grants awarded to our region?***

At the state level, the grants are being administered by the Department of Water Resources and/or the State Water Resources Control Board. At the regional level, the original \$500,000 Pajaro River Watershed Planning Grant is being administered by the San Benito County Water District with matching funds from the SCVWD and the PVWMA. The \$25 million Round 1 Implementation Grant, awarded in November 2006, is being administered by the PVWMA.

#### ***6. Is CEQA analysis required to adopt an IRWMP?***

No. Because an IRWMP is only a planning tool and is not considered a “project” under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA Guideline Sections 15262 and 15306). However, the individual project sponsors, i.e., those seeking to construct specific projects, will be responsible for complying with all local and state environmental requirements (e.g., General Plans, Coastal Plans and CEQA). Therefore, participation in an IRWMP does not change the timing or level of any environmental analysis for each project within an IRWMP.

#### ***7. Is an IRWMP the same as a Basin Management Plan (BMP) or an Urban Water Management Plan (UWMP)?***

No. An IRWMP is a catalyst to promote regional water planning. In contrast, BMPs and UWMPs satisfy more specific, legal requirements. For example, a basin management plan is an official document that directs how an agency (with legal authority to manage a groundwater basin) will manage that basin. An UWMP is required by state law for all water purveyors serving over 3000 connections and documents the water system’s capacity to provide water to existing and future users over a 20-year time frame. Adopting an IRWMP does not require adopting an amendment to the BMP or an UWMP. However, if a new beneficial project is identified in the IRWMP, a local agency can choose to incorporate it into their BMP or UWMP-- if it makes sense for that agency. Also, a project that is currently part of a BMP or an UWMP would be encouraged to participate in the IRWMP process, especially if the project has regional benefits and the local agency wishes to seek state funding.

#### ***8. Why is the IRWM Plan organized this way?***

The State IRWMP Guidelines are very specific in what must be included in any IRWMP. State staff will review each IRWMP to confirm the Guidelines have been met. Therefore each of the 15 Sections in the Plan address a corresponding sub-section of the Guidelines and are presented in the same order as they are listed in the state Guidelines.

#### ***9. Why are the project descriptions (Section 4) so brief?***

An IRWMP is a “reconnaissance-level” planning document intended to allow for the Partners and the stakeholders to assess the opportunities to integrate projects on a regional level. The Plan is not meant to replace the more detailed project descriptions found in CEQA documents, engineering studies, feasibility studies, etc. Therefore each project description only needs enough detail to allow the stakeholders to understand what potential synergies might exist with other projects and to be able to score and rank the projects.

#### ***10. Who defines what is “regional” and how do all the state programs and mandates fit in?***

Under Proposition 50, the Partners and the stakeholders define the region. Over fifty IRWMPs are underway across the state and the approaches to defining the “region” are varied. However the state encourages regions to be as broad as possible while still identifying and addressing common issues. Within the central coast area there are six IRWMPs in various stages of completion. Some of the regions are based on watersheds, county lines or even sub-watersheds. For our Plan the entire Pajaro River Watershed was chosen as the “region.” However while the local agencies have some flexibility in setting their own goals, objectives and priorities they must also simultaneously consider a specific list of elements laid out in the State Guidelines (see list on page 4-1). Therefore, the most successful IRWMPs will identify truly regional issues and then methodically compare them against the state Guidelines.

***11. How will Proposition 84 affect the current Proposition 50 “regions”?***

There are six IRWMP efforts already underway in the central coast. However, Proposition 84 passed in November 2006, does not distribute funds based on the local definitions of “regional” but instead distributes IRWM funds based on the nine existing Regional Water Quality Control Board boundaries. \$52 million will be distributed to our Central Coast Region (RWQCB Region 3). How the multiple agencies and counties within Region 3 will allocate the \$52 million is not known, but is under active discussion. At a minimum, this means that the six central coast Regional Water Management Groups that have been working on their own IRWMPs are now also working on identifying common issues and equitable methods to pursue Proposition 84 funds.

***12. What does having a project listed within the IRWMP mean?***

At a minimum, it means that the Partners are aware of the project and have evaluated it in terms of how well it can be integrated into larger regional efforts. It also means that the project sponsor can apply for IRWM funding.

***13. What does having a project prioritized into one of the four programs (Section 5.2) mean?***

It means that because the project has a higher potential to provide integrated, regional benefits, that it will be evaluated further during the Implementation process (Section 7). It also means that it is better positioned for future grant funding opportunities.

***14. How does the June 2006 version of the Plan relate to the current version?***

The IRWMP is intended to be a “living document,” which means that it will continue to evolve and change as new projects are added to the list and as older projects are implemented or become outdated. Each of the eight project proponents who applied for funding under Proposition 50 (Implementation Grant, Round 1) were required to adopt the June 2006 version of the Plan. Since then, the IRWMP has been updated significantly and many more specific projects have been added, evaluated and prioritized. Key new sections in the current version include Section 5, which describes how projects are prioritized; and Section 7, which describes how the IRWMP will be implemented in the coming years.

***15. What is next after the May 2007 version of the Plan is adopted?***

The Partners will begin to implement the Plan. Because the \$500,000 Planning Grant will be exhausted, an early step will be to secure funding from the Partner agencies for staff time and consultant efforts. The Partners will meet to agree upon the details of how the Implementation effort will proceed. Four Program Teams will be formed (one for each of the four programs) and regular meetings will begin. A process will need to be developed to further refine projects and complete basic feasibility and cost-benefit analyses.

***16. How will future grant packages be chosen from within and across the four Programs?***

That process has not been determined. However key considerations in that decision will have to include: the degree of benefit, the specific state requirements for the particular grant, the amount of funds available to the region, and the readiness to proceed for each project.

***17. What does “Readiness to Proceed” mean?***

This generally means that the project will be ready to be physically constructed by time the grant funds are distributed. Generally, all CEQA analyses, permits, engineering, and design plans must be in place and the construction should be ready to begin within 6 months after the grant contract is actually awarded by the state.

***18. How can a new project be included in the IRWMP?***

An on-going responsibility of the Partners will be to continually update the list of projects in the IRWMP. At quarterly meetings, the Partners will keep each other informed of new projects being proposed by their respective agencies, or new projects brought forth by regional stakeholders. Projects that have been implemented or are outdated will be removed from the project list. The Partners will keep track of these changes, and once a year (or as necessary), the Partners will publish an updated project list. Updates to the project prioritization lists and modifications to the four regional water management programs will occur less frequently. As discussed in Section 6 of the IRWMP, the Partners realize that as projects are implemented or evolve, and as regional needs change, project priorities may shift. Given the significant effort involved in reprioritizing and reassessing programs, the Partners will likely need to limit reprioritizing projects to a two or three year cycle.

***19. Who is eligible to receive grant funding?***

Eligible grant recipients are public agencies and non-profit organizations. A “public agency” means a city, county, district, joint powers authority, a state agency or department, or other political subdivision of the State. A “non-profit organization” means any California corporation organized under Section 501(c)(3), 501(c)(4), or 501(c)(5) of the federal Internal Revenue Code. The project sponsor will be responsible for the project description, documentation, permitting, environmental analysis, engineering, matching funds, etc.

***20. Where can more information be found regarding the IRWMP Program?***

For more information on the IRWMP Program or the Pajaro River Watershed IRWMP, please visit:

[http://www.grantsloans.water.ca.gov/grants/integregio\\_planning.cfm](http://www.grantsloans.water.ca.gov/grants/integregio_planning.cfm)

[http://www.pvwma.dst.ca.us/project\\_planning/projects\\_irwmp.shtml](http://www.pvwma.dst.ca.us/project_planning/projects_irwmp.shtml)