

**Upper American River Watershed Program
Programmatic Watershed Plan**
Plan Advisory Group (PAG) Meeting #4 Draft Summary

January 20, 2023, 10:30 AM – 12:30 PM
El Dorado County (Conference Room D)
330 Fair Lane, Placerville, CA 95667

Meeting Objectives:

- Provide updates on the development of the Programmatic Watershed Plan (PWP) for the Upper American River Watershed.
- Review, refine, and confirm the identified watershed-level challenges.
- Identify watershed Resource Management Strategies (RMS) and associated management actions.

Attendees: See attachment on last page for list of meeting participants.

Action Items:

#	Item	Owner	Timeframe
1	Send out meeting slides, summary	Stantec	By January 27
2	Follow-up on plan feedback, requests, meetings	Stantec	By January 27
3	Provide information that should be considered in the PWP to Stantec	PAG members	By January 30
4	Contact El Dorado Water Agency if there is interest in joining an additional conversation on ecosystem service evaluation	PAG members	By January 30
5	Provide Stantec with Sierra at Tahoe Caldor Fire Economic Impact Report	County of El Dorado, Planning and Building Department	By January 30
6	Provide Stantec with University of Reno/County of Placer Contact related to Mosquito Fire Economic Impact Study	Placer County Water Agency	By January 30
7	Provide drafted sections of the PWP to the PAG for review	Stantec	By February 15

Presentation Materials: See attached PowerPoint slide deck.

Meeting Summary:

- 1. Welcome and Agenda Review**
 - All attendees provided self-introductions.
- 2. Recap Timeline, PWP Review Process, Main Comments**
 - A review of the PWP outline was presented, noting that the outline had not changed since the previous PAG meetings.
 - A summary of feedback and comments discussed during PAG Meeting #3 and the actions taken were presented.
 - The group reviewed the timeline and remaining tasks for development and completion of the PWP.
- 3. High-Level Review of Current Content of the Draft PWP**

- A high-level review of the current content of the Draft PWP and Section 3: Challenges was presented to the participants. Section 3 includes watershed specific challenges that were identified through research and discussions in the past PAG meetings.
 - It was suggested that a general vegetation map could be included in the PWP.
 - It was noted that certain strategies to handle issues and challenges will have different efficacy depending on the landscape. It was suggested that a menu of strategies could be proposed to lay out specific strategies that will be effective throughout the watershed's varying landscapes.
 - It was noted that County of Placer had previously connected with the University of Reno to quantify impacts of the Mosquito Fire, similar to the report that was done on the Caldor Fire economic impact to Sierra at Tahoe. It was recommended that the PAG follow-up with the University of Reno on this report. It was noted that the Resource Conservation Districts benefitted from this County action, demonstrating multi-benefit nature of economic evaluation reports. Information on these reports will be sent to the Agency for consideration in the PWP.

4. Discussion - Watershed Challenges

- A list of identified watershed related challenges were presented to the group to begin discussion, including environmental conservation challenges, vulnerability to flooding, forestland management and fire hazards, landscape not resilient to drought and other disasters, and lack of watershed approach to support agricultural economic development.
- The group discussed the provided list of challenges and suggested adding other watershed-related challenges to the list as follows.
 - **Funding and cash flow:** It was noted that there is difficulty in acquiring reliable long-term maintenance funding for existing facilities and infrastructures. Recent funding has been made available, but it needs to be used to ensure funding availability in future application cycles.
 - **Coordination and cohesion:** Participants noted that the agencies need to come to an understanding that resources need to be committed for collective use and effective collaboration. It was also noted that an administrative framework needs to be established to create cohesion between intra-agency activities. This should include clarifying roles, responsibilities, and expectations of collaborating agencies.
 - The new Office of Wildfire Preparedness and Resilience was discussed as an example. This structure will improve cohesion between all entities with overlapping interests in planning and implementing wildfire mitigation activities.
 - It was suggested that El Dorado Water Agency take a leadership role to prioritize challenges and management activities based on their regional knowledge.
 - **Public education and communication:** It was noted that integration of public involvement into management activities has always been a challenge. The PWP should discuss effective methods to handle advocacy and awareness.
 - **Wildfire-specific challenges and forest thinning:** It was noted that lack of workforce and resources, uncertain work conditions (due to the impacts of climate change, the duration for prescribed fire is getting shorter), and utilization of burned material (disposal) are specific challenges related to forest thinning that need to be considered in the decision-making related to wildfire management.
 - It was noted that these specific challenges may be present in other watershed projects as well.
 - It was noted that sufficient enrollment and support of Forestry education may be able to address workforce resource challenges. As an example, it was mentioned that El Dorado Water Agency and UC Berkeley (a member of the

PAG) have potential to work with the California College System for this purpose.

- **Undervaluation of the watershed:** Participants discussed that underlying causes for watershed challenges are often representative of undervaluing the watershed resources. It was suggested to follow an economic evaluation approach to communicate values of the watershed resources.
 - It was noted that care should be exercised when using economic valuation approach to discuss challenges related to cultural resources, practices, and services, as well as other non-market values where their importance is non-transactional including agriculture.
 - It was suggested that an additional conversation take place on the topic of economic valuation. Expedient action should take place due to present funding opportunities. It was decided that PAG members interested in further discussion email El Dorado Water Agency to join the conversation.
- **Coordination with Tribes:** It was noted that Tribes usually face various challenges, for example: 1) they are typically brought in during emergency events. Sacred sites need to be identified quickly, presenting difficult time constraints, and more sites are revealed as time passes (e.g., erosion could also uncover previously unknown cultural locations) 2) there is difficulty creating funding to protect sacred spaces for the Tribes and general population, 3) projects do not have to pay the Tribes unless the project is subject to Assembly Bill 52, and 4) inconsistent policies in conducting CEQA. These challenges constrain Tribes' opportunities to be involved early on a project and creates a reactionary process. Additionally, tribes may be engaged at the beginning of a project, but are not always re-engaged during project changes, especially post-implementation. It was noted that these challenges would need to be addressed at the policy level.
- **Proper land management:** It was noted that changes in land management may need to occur to expedite the proper use of lands at the proper space, acknowledging that climate change will likely change land use suitability. It was suggested that land use adjustment strategies could be adopted in the General Plan. Amending the General Plan is a lengthy process; therefore, it is important to track when General Plan elements are open for feedback and revision.
- **Challenges discussed should be specific to the watershed to be appropriately addressed by the PAG:** It was noted that identified challenges need to be specific to the watershed; listing climate change as a challenge is too broad. It was also noted that the County of El Dorado is updating the El Dorado County Adopted General Plan - Safety Element to incorporate climate change impacts.

5. Discussion - Watershed Resource Management Strategies

- Participants discussed the following watershed RMS during the meeting:
 - **Economic valuation:** It was noted that evaluating economic value of watershed resources will highlight their significance. Monitoring and measures (e.g., indicators) leads to accountability.
 - **Standardizing evaluation criteria/guidelines:** It was noted that a standardized approach is required for watershed projects evaluation to allow for Upper American River Watershed projects stand out in competitive funding opportunities.
 - **Establishment of a watershed network:** It was suggested that a centralized informational GIS database/platform for the watershed would address the potential misalignment of agencies' efforts. It was discussed that a Caldor Emergency Fire Database was created; however, it has not been integrated with El Dorado Water Agency online portal. The participants discussed the following:

- Establishing a watershed network is needed to support development of helpful tools, streamlined communication, and relationship building.
- The California Department of Water Resources - Water Plan is putting together a chapter on watershed resilience. The chapter establishes the concept of watershed networks using the Integrated Regional Watershed Management “Network of Networks” approach. The Water Plan can be used as an example to establish the watershed network.
- Establishing cooperative agreements between agencies and entities would improve information sharing, coordination, and collaboration.
- **Funding for operation and maintenance of watershed projects:** It was noted that a project investment is lost if the project is not maintained. Therefore, funding for both implementation and maintenance needs to be secured.
- **Adaptive management strategies:** It was noted that adaptive management is needed to address aging infrastructure that are not sized for the watershed’s changing hydrology.
- **Flood emergency response preparedness:** It was noted that communication about flood emergency actions could be improved. Participants provided examples of recent storms, where residents modified their lots in ways that detrimentally impacted their neighbor’s lots, and there was improper construction site flood response implementation.
 - It was suggested that a comprehensive study be undertaken to evaluate the impact of localized flooding in the watershed.
- **Fire emergency response preparedness:** It was suggested to adopt best management practices for postfire rebuilding and recovery.
 - One example was discussed: improve defensible space and home hardening education (e.g., follow best management practices such as using noncombustible materials for decks).

6. Next Steps

- Participants agreed on their availability for PAG Meeting #5 to be held on Friday, February 17th at 10:30 am, at the County building.

7. Adjourn

- With no further business, the group adjourned at 12:30 pm.

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Meeting Participants

* = virtual participant

Meeting Participant	Agency (in alphabetical order by agency)
Group Members	
Jeffrey Warren	County of El Dorado, Environmental Management Department
Karen Garner	County of El Dorado, Planning and Building Department
Lew Moeller	Department of Water Resources
*Barb Kildow	El Dorado County Farm Bureau
Mark Egbert	El Dorado County Resource Conservation Districts
Ken Payne	El Dorado Water Agency
Rebecca Guo	El Dorado Water Agency
Alexis Elliott	Georgetown Divide Public Utility District
Darin Reintjes	Placer County Water Agency
*Michelle Banonis	Regional Water Authority
*Ansel Lundberg	Sacramento Municipal Utility District
James Sarmento	Shingle Springs Band of Miwok Indians
Lynn Huntsinger	University of California, Berkeley
Brad Hubbard	U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
Lee Mao	U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
*Melissa Vignau	U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
Technical Support	
Bridget Childs	Stantec Consulting Services Inc.
Kari Shively	Stantec Consulting Services Inc.
Maliheh Karamigolbaghi	Stantec Consulting Services Inc.
Yung-Hsin Sun	Sunzi Consulting LLC