



**Regional Advisory Committee (RAC) Meeting #109**

May 21, 2025

10:00 am – 12:30 pm

**City of Escondido**

**Membrane Filtration Reverse Osmosis Facility**

**901 W Washington Ave.**

**Escondido, CA 92025**

**NOTES**

**Attendance**

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**RAC Members**

Charlie de la Rosa, San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance  
Erika Wolski, Ramona Municipal Water District  
Kay Kim, Sweetwater Authority  
Kimberly O’Connell and Amanda Loeper, UCSD Clean Water Utility  
Oscar Romo, Alter Terra  
Patrick McDonough, San Diego CoastKeeper  
Toby Roy, RCAC  
Tory Walker, Tory Walker and Associates  
Wbaldo Arellano, City of Imperial Beach

**RWMG Staff and Consultants**

Andrew Funk, City of San Diego  
Annica Ly, City of San Diego  
Arthella Vallarta, Woodard & Curran  
Elizabeth Lovsted, San Diego County Water Authority  
Ernesto Rios, City of San Diego Public Utilities Division  
Katie Huston, City of San Diego  
Loisa Burton, San Diego County Water Authority  
Mabel Martin, Woodard & Curran  
Sally Johnson, Woodard & Curran  
Sergio Angulo, City of San Diego  
Sarah Favrot, County of San Diego  
Summer Adleberg, San Diego County Water Authority

**Interested Parties to the RAC**

Alisa Nichols, Valley Center MWD  
Ana Crow, City of San Diego  
Brianna Martin, NV5  
Bryce Ohmstede, Viejas Tribal Government: Resource Management  
Eddie Grangetto, EGAP

Jameson Meyst, Mission Resource Conservation District  
Kara Matthews, Larry Walker Associates  
Kumiko Hayazaki, City of San Diego  
Mark Stephens, Public  
Mary Rodriguez, Mission Resource Conservation District  
Megan Otto, Geosyntec Consultants  
Stephanie Roman, City of Escondido  
Zoe Smith, City of Oceanside

### **Welcome, Introductions, & Land Acknowledgement**

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Ms. Elizabeth Lovsted, County of San Diego (County), welcomed everyone to the in-person RAC meeting, and read the Tribal Land Acknowledgment to the group.

Ms. Stephanie Roman, City of Escondido (City), thanked the San Diego IRWM Program for the opportunity to host the RAC meeting at the City's Membrane Filtration Reverse Osmosis (MFRO) Facility.

RAC members, Ms. Erica Wolski, Ramona Municipal Water District, Ms. Kimberly O'Connell, University of California, San Diego, and Mr. Patrick McDonough, San Diego Coastkeeper, each provided brief introductions about themselves and their respective organizations.

### **Water Resources and Agriculture.**

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Mr. Jameson Meyst and Ms. Mary Rodriguez, Mission Resource Conservation District (MRCDD), provided an overview of MRCDD. There are three resource conservation districts in San Diego County, which are MRCDD, Resource Conservation District of Greater San Diego, and Upper San Luis Rey Resource Conservation District. MRCDD's mission is to promote the conservation of soil, water, and other natural resources in the San Luis Rey and Santa Margarita watersheds through effective planning that ensures a healthy ecosystem and provides economic benefits and quality of life for landowners/land occupants and the general public.

MRCDD has three current programs – Carbon Farming Planning, Wildfire Prevention Program, and Water Education Technical Assistance (WETA). Carbon farming involves agricultural practices that increase soil organic matter, delivering a wide range of environmental and economic benefits. These practices boost soil fertility, enhance water retention, and improve crop resilience, which in turn supports higher yields over time. By building healthier soils, carbon farming also enhances drought and climate resilience while reducing erosion. It also captures and stores atmospheric carbon dioxide, contributing to climate change mitigation. Farmers implementing these practices may become eligible for incentive funding through programs such as the California Department of Food and Agriculture's Healthy Soils Program or the United States Department of Agriculture's National Resources Conservation Service Environmental Quality Incentives Program. Additionally, biodiversity-friendly methods like hedgerows and cover crops support pollinator and wildlife habitats. Altogether, carbon farming strengthens the long-term viability of farms by fostering both ecological and economic resilience for future generations.

The Wildfire Prevention Home Assessment Program helps residents reduce wildfire risk around their homes and properties. This program is a partnership among MRCDD, Fire Safe Council of San Diego County, San Diego Gas & Electric, Resource Conservation District of Greater San Diego County, California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, and California Fire Safe Council. In 2025, assessments will be available in Fallbrook, Julian, Wynola, Warner Springs, and Ramona.

The WETA program is funded by the California Department of Food and Agriculture, and it provides free irrigation efficiency analyses for farmers, including irrigation system efficiency tests, pump efficiency tests,

training and education on irrigation and pumps. This program is anticipated to run for the next two and half years.

Questions/Comments:

- Free services are often overlooked, and many struggle to act on emailed reports. In Temecula, low participation stems from a lack of incentives and confusion about implementation, especially around detecting leaks. We're exploring ways to boost engagement and simplify the process.
- I've used your services for years and now I'm in my third year with the Healthy Soils Programs. I couldn't have done it without your support. MRCD does so much for agriculture and organizations like yours are essential. Programs like these keep growers in business and sustain communities.
  - Thank you. MRCD's efforts are focused on assisting growers within the community.

**Project Completion Report**

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Ms. Roman presented on the City's MRFO Facility project. The Hale Avenue Resource Recovery Facility (HARRF) collects and treats all of the City's wastewater and has been producing Title 22 recycled water. Any water that is not used to produce Title 22 recycled water is discharged from the HARRF to the Pacific Ocean via the Escondido Land Outfall. As the City's population grew and the collection system aged, wet-weather events have overwhelmed the City's system, resulting in operational constraints within the Escondido Land Outfall. This has resulted in the necessary release of HARRF tertiary treated water into Escondido Creek, which is considered a reportable violation.

In an effort to preserve outfall capacity, expand beneficial reuse, and improve local water resiliency by offsetting potable use, City staff began to meet with local farmers to gain a better understanding of how recycled water with reduced chlorides would benefit irrigation of sensitive avocados and citrus. Through collaborative discussions, negotiations, and a feasible recycled water rate structure, the City began planning the MFRO Facility.

The MFRO Facility was funded through a combination of the City's Capital Improvement Program, a State Revolving Loan from the California State Resources Control Board, Proposition 84, Round 4 IRWM Implementation Grant, and a WaterSMART Title IVI grant from U.S. Bureau of Reclamation. The MFRO Facility was designed and constructed using a progressive design-build delivery method, which was the first design-build project for the City's Utilities department. Construction of the MFRO under a progressive design-build approach spanned approximately two years, overcoming industry-wide challenges such as COVID-19 and supply chain disruptions. The MFRO team partnered with H<sub>2</sub>OInnovations to integrate skid-mounted equipment, which accelerated construction of key treatment processes and streamlined system start-up.

The project will pump the Title 22 recycled water produced at the HARRF to the MFRO Facility. At the MFRO Facility, the water undergoes advanced treatment using membrane filtration and reverse osmosis, producing up to 2 million gallons per day of high-purity water. This water is blended with standard recycled water to create a high-quality supply, which is then pumped to the Intermediate Booster Pump Station and further boosted to the Hogback Recycled Water Reservoir. From there, it is distributed to the City's new agricultural customers in the first phase of the recycled water program. This investment supports water reuse, enhances drought resilience, and reduces strain on the City's wastewater infrastructure.

Questions/Comments:

- What is the breakdown of funding?
  - I do not have the numbers ready and would need to review the total cost of the project and all the funding the City obtained.
- What are the rates for water produced at MFRO Facility?

- The City negotiated the rate structure with the farmers. I do not have those numbers at the moment.
- The City's goal is to become more self-reliant and to reduce reliance on imported water.
- The City has been supportive of growers. They recognize that agriculture is an important part of the community. Without these types of projects, growers would be out of business.

### **State and IRWM Updates**

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Ms. Loisa Burton, SDCWA, presented on State and federal updates. Governor Newsom released the proposed Fiscal Year (FY) 2025-2026 State budget in January. Key priorities included fiscal stability, education, climate resilience, and homelessness. The budget is comprised of \$228.9 billion from the General Fund, \$86.8 billion from Special Funds, and \$6.5 billion from bond funds. Proposition 4 includes \$2.7 billion to begin implementing the \$10 billion Climate Bond approved by voters in November 2024. To leverage Climate Bond resources, \$273 million in prior General Fund obligations will be shifted, including \$51 million reduction in Water Recycling Program funds from General Fund to bonds.

On May 14, 2025, Governor Newsom announced a revised budget with anticipated revenue deficit of \$12 billion. To address a budget shortfall, California is implementing \$5 billion in program reductions—primarily in healthcare—alongside \$5.3 billion in revenue measures and borrowing, and \$1.7 billion in fund shifts, while continuing to expand climate investments and transitioning Cap-and-Trade into Cap-and-Invest to reduce emissions and fund major infrastructure projects. Despite fiscal constraints, the state remains committed to clean energy, wildfire prevention, and water infrastructure, including the Delta Conveyance Project. The Legislature is constitutionally required to pass a balanced budget by June, with negotiations ongoing and potential adjustments pending updated revenue and federal Medicaid decisions.

Proposition 4 included \$2.65 billion in funding, with 40% for water resilience, including safe drinking water, drought, and flood projects. Initial funding is expected in Fall 2025. Future budgets may include \$100 million for integrated regional water management in FY 2027–28, with ongoing advocacy for flexible funding models like block grants. Budget negotiations continue amid revenue shortfalls and potential federal funding cuts.

The executive orders from the Trump Administration have resulted in freezes in some federal funding. The Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) was created to eliminate fraud, waste, and abuse in the federal government. DOGE will review grants over \$50,000. Previously awarded or contracted U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (USBR) grants are expected to proceed as planned. Programs with Notices of Funding Opportunity (NOFOs) are currently on hold for review and may be reissued. Federal agencies are revising NOFOs, potentially eliminating or reducing points for criteria related to diversity, equity, inclusion (DEI), climate change, and environmental benefits. The USBR Temecula Office is on a potential closure list. Final decisions regarding staffing reductions, transfers, or full closure are expected in the coming months.

Ms. Lovsted presented on San Diego IRWM updates. Reminder, the Regional Water Management Group (RWMG) has developed focus areas and proposed actions for the future of San Diego IRWM. The RWMG has finalized the proposed paths for each focus area to implement.

The first focus area is Collaboration, Information Sharing & Advocacy. The San Diego IRWM Program will continue information sharing with State/federal agencies and will explore regional collaboration opportunities when they arise. RAC meetings will alternate between in-person and virtual and will be hosted at RAC member facilities or IRWM-funded projects. RAC members will also be given additional opportunities to share more about their work and to collaborate with others. The RAC structure and role will remain, but terms are eliminated. Departing members will have a replacement named by their organization. If no replacement is named, the RAC will solicit new members. The voting process is also retained. Workgroups will no longer require one representative from each caucus and anyone who

volunteers can participate. However, an imbalance in perspectives may result in an additional request for volunteers. Outcomes will still be shared with the RAC.

The second focus area is Underrepresented Communities (URC) Support. The San Diego IRWM Program will continue to advocate for URC funding, especially for application and funding costs, and will consider provision of additional guidance documents or resources.

The third area is funding. Cost sharing for preparation of a traditional IRWM application will be split proportional to each project's grant request. During the Call for Projects, the RWMG will provide a total grant ask the San Diego IRWM Program will pursue, a total number of projects the San Diego IRWM Program application will include, and maximum grant preparation cost. Cost sharing for a "mini IRWM" grant application (one project with multiple components and multiple project sponsors) will involve the lead project sponsor reimbursing the RWMG for application cost. The lead project sponsor will then pass the costs onto its project partners, based on a cost determined by the project sponsor and their partners. The RWMG will provide a cost estimate for grant preparation in advance of committing to preparing the grant.

The next steps of implementing the paths include the RWMG reviewing and identifying any San Diego IRWM policies that need to be updated. The RWMG will also initiate planning to implement the proposed paths.

Questions/Comments:

- Recommend the RWMG give the RAC with a minimum of two weeks' notice prior to any meeting requiring a vote.

**Grant Administration**

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Ms. Burton presented updates on grant administration. Total grant funding awarded to the San Diego IRWM Program is \$132.8 million for 84 regional projects. To date, \$107 million has been billed to and reimbursed by DWR, while \$25.6 million in grant funding remains to be allocated. Proposition 84, Round 4 is complete. There are currently seven active projects in Proposition 1, Round 1 and seven projects are more than 70% complete. Three active projects remain in the Urban and Multi-Benefit Drought Relief program. The amendment to remove remaining work from Project 2: Ballard Well Connection & Transmission Pipeline to Project 3: The Acres Water Consolidation Phase 1 has been approved by DWR.

There are six active projects under Proposition 1, Round 2. One project is over 71% complete.

Questions/Comments

None.

**State and Federal Funding Opportunities**

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Ms. Johnson presented a list of upcoming state and federal funding opportunities. They have been included in the table below.

Project Types	Timing	Website
California Financing Coordinating Committee: Funding Fair	May 21 and May 29	<a href="https://www.cfcc.ca.gov/">https://www.cfcc.ca.gov/</a>

Project Types	Timing	Website
USBR: Small-Scale Water Efficiency Grants	Paused	<a href="https://www.grants.gov/search-results-detail/350845">https://www.grants.gov/search-results-detail/350845</a>
USBR: Small Storage Program	Paused	<a href="https://www.usbr.gov/smallstorage/index.html">https://www.usbr.gov/smallstorage/index.html</a>
USBR: WaterSMART Environmental Water Resources Program Reclamation and Reuse Projects for Fiscal Years 2023 and 2024	Paused	<a href="https://www.usbr.gov/watersmart/ewrp/index.html">https://www.usbr.gov/watersmart/ewrp/index.html</a>
SWRCB: Prop 1 Technical Assistance Funding Program	Paused	<a href="https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/grants_loans/proposition1/tech_asst_funding.html">https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/grants_loans/proposition1/tech_asst_funding.html</a>

Questions/Comments

None.

**Public Comments**

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None.

**Summary and Next Steps**

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The next RAC meeting is anticipated to be virtual and may be held over the summer.

2025 Meeting Schedule

- Virtual Meeting - TBD
- In-Person November 5

Regular meetings to be held quarterly in 2025, alternating between virtual and in-person meetings.