

DAC Engagement and Outreach Recommendations Southern Sierra IRWM Group

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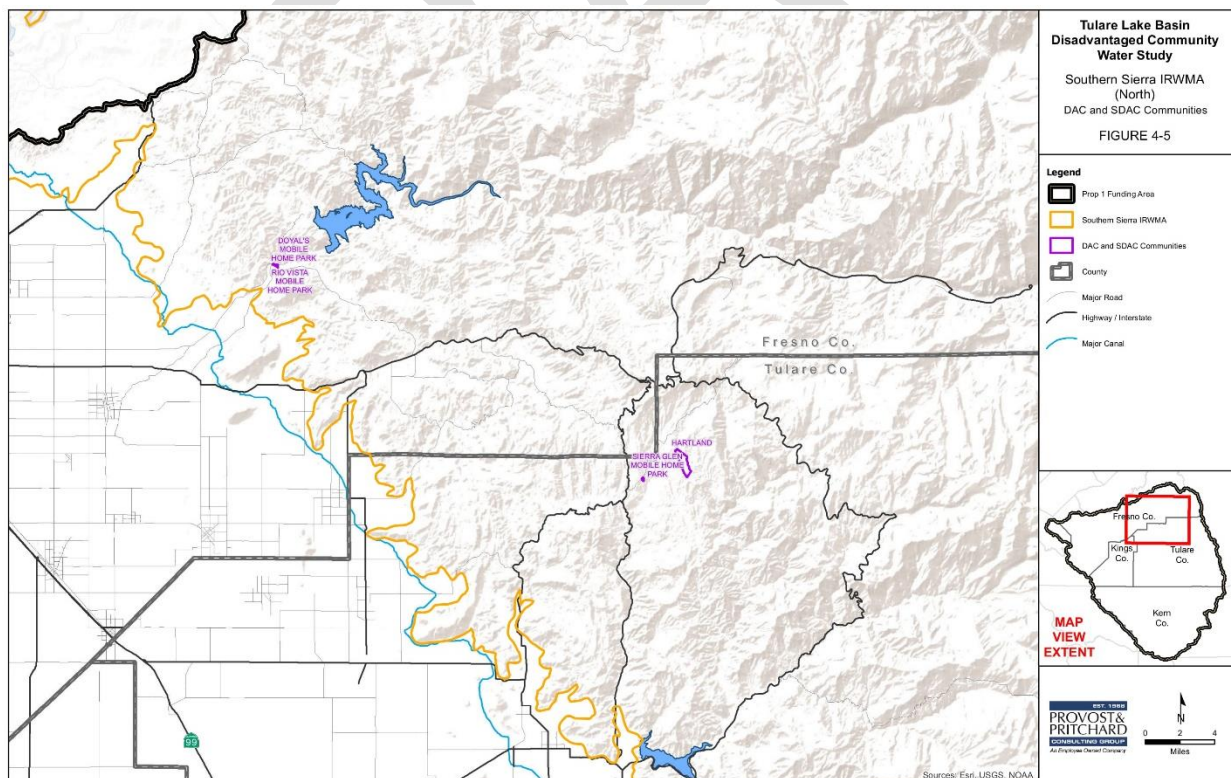
Objective

The Integrated Regional Water Management (IRWM) program is a statewide voluntary water planning and implementation program established in 2002 to incentivize regional collaboration among multiple local water agencies towards the implementation of multi-benefit projects.

The Tulare-Kern Funding Area (TKFA) Disadvantaged Community Involvement Program (DACIP) is a grant-funded effort aimed at improving the involvement of Disadvantaged Communities (DACs) in Integrated Regional Water Management (IRWM) planning. The Disadvantaged Community Education and Engagement Program (DACEEP) was implemented within the Tulare-Kern Funding Area, which encompasses most of Fresno, Kern, Kings and Tulare Counties. The DACEEP is focused on improving understanding of community water needs and the IRWM process as well as encouraging DAC participation and engagement in IRWM activities. As part of the DACEEP, DAC participation and understanding of IRWM were evaluated to develop individual DAC engagement and outreach recommendations for the Southern Sierra IRWM Group.

DACs Landscape

A Disadvantaged Community (DAC) is defined as a community with an annual median household income that is less than 80 percent of the Statewide annual median household income (Water Code §79505.5). The figure below identifies the disadvantaged communities within the Southern Sierra IRWM region boundary:



Recommendations to Improve DAC Engagement

These recommendations are tailored to each IRWM group based on the findings and feedback obtained during the meetings. It is recommended that the IRWM group review, prioritize, and implement the following DAC engagement and outreach recommendations. When IRWM boundaries were formed, there were DACs that fell outside the boundary of IRWM groups. To improve engagement of these white area DACs, several potential recommendations were developed based on the findings of the Assessment of Past and Present DAC Engagement and meetings with IRWM regions to review results of the Assessment.

Maintain an Updated DAC/SDAC Contact List: Maintain a contact list for the DACs/SDACs within the Southern Sierra IRWM to better conduct outreach and engage with these communities.

IRWM Educational Materials: Utilize bilingual educational materials already developed (e.g. Get to Know Your IRWM Factsheet and Tulare-Kern Funding Area DACIP Informational Sheet) to inform DAC representatives of the IRWM process. Develop new educational materials as needed for specific IRWM programs or opportunities.

Stipends/Sponsorship: Incentivize DACs by providing stipends/sponsorships for community members to attend meetings. Unlike IRWM group staff who may be paid to attend IRWM meetings, travel expenses and loss of work time can be a barrier to participation for DACs.

Water Quality Sampling: Conduct water quality sampling and identify any issues with the data based on data that other agencies/organizations have to ground truth.

Set Aside Budget for DAC Engagement: Account for DAC outreach, engagement and translation services when establishing and approving operating budgets, enacting fees and/or applying for state funding.

Leverage DAC Successes from DACEEP Program: Because decisions happen at meetings and e-connectivity and e-mail use in rural communities is nominal, using alternative forms of communication is key to reaching DACs. Outreach methods that have had success include bilingual flyers and hosting community meetings. Additional recommended strategies include social media (informational videos on Facebook), leverage water district and water purveyor contacts, and calling residents.

Using Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) or Community Based Organizations (CBOs) for Outreach and DAC Contacts: Conduct community outreach and education activities to engage DACs and enable DACs to participate in water management planning.

Continue Assessment of Present DAC Participation in IRWM: Conduct yearly assessment of DAC participation (e.g., who is currently participating and who has previously obtained IRWM funding) to address and respond to possible participation barriers and/or interest in participating in IRWM related activities. The survey tool utilized through the DACEEP could be modified for an annual analysis.

Access Funding: The IRWM could help DACs access storm water funding, Groundwater remediation funding or other potential funding sources.