

Integrated Regional Water Management Plan Frequently Asked Questions

What is an Integrated Regional Water Management Plan (IRWMP)?

An IRWMP is a voluntary and comprehensive non-regulatory planning document prepared on a region-wide scale that identifies broadly-supported priority water resources projects and programs with multiple benefits. An IRWMP relies upon specific and focused local and sub-regional planning efforts for its foundation, and investigates a broad spectrum of water resources issues including water supply, flood management, water quality, environmental restoration, recreation, land use, environmental justice, stakeholder involvement, and far-reaching community and statewide interests. A key difference in IRWMPs (as compared to other planning documents) is that IRWMPs integrate multiple water management strategies to solve multiple priority challenges. IRWMPs can help attract state and other funding to fund regional projects. Millions of dollars have been allocated for IRWMPs by the state through Propositions 50 and 84. Grants are awarded through the California Department of Water Resources (DWR).

Why is California focusing on regional water management/planning?

IRWM planning is a new 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.

With this inclusive systems approach, local agencies and governments, as well as other interested stakeholders, can be more flexible and act more efficiently. This approach makes better use of existing local resources. This approach also integrates multiple aspects of managing water and related resources such as water quality, local and imported water supplies, watershed protection, wastewater treatment and recycling, and protection of local ecosystems.

What are the benefits of regional planning?

- Encourages a broad, long-term perspective
- Identifies broad benefits, costs, and tradeoffs
- Promotes sustainable resource management
- Increases regional self-sufficiency
- Increases regional drought preparedness
- Uses open forums that include all communities
- Promotes coordination and collaboration among local agencies and governments
- Uses sound science, best data, and local knowledge
- Collaboration strengthens regional clout, reduces conflict, increases benefits across the region and may reduce costs for individual agencies.

What is integrated planning?

Integrated planning involves local agencies and interest groups working together to coordinate planning activities across jurisdictional boundaries. In this regional approach, individual agencies' efforts are combined in order to leverage resources and meet multiple water resource needs at the same time. For instance, water supply, water quality, and habitat projects might be combined with a flood control project in a manner that benefits a much larger area than the original jurisdiction. The result is a multi-objective approach that multiplies the benefits of any individual agency's single project.

Why is integrated regional water management planning a good idea?

Water suppliers that form partnerships with other entities in their region can accomplish projects and provide benefits that no single agency can do alone. For example, partnerships may allow agencies to improve their water supply reliability by establishing emergency connections with neighboring water suppliers; increase operational flexibility by participating in regional groundwater management and conjunctive use; protect water quality by participating in regional watershed management; reduce costs by cooperating with other agencies on water conservation and outreach programs; facilitate new projects by contributing to local habitat conservation plans; and help achieve many other regional resource management objectives.

Partnerships can lead to the preparation of integrated regional water management plans and regional eligibility for certain grant funds. Early coordination with land planning agencies may help water suppliers and land planners anticipate and plan for future growth, and make sure that additional regional growth will not exceed water suppliers' capabilities. Ultimately, regional partnerships will enable optimum management of water and other resources within a region.

Why prepare an IRWMP?

- Position for Proposition 84 funding
- Retain local control over water management decisions
- Build and strengthen long-term working relationships (intraregional and with adjacent partners)
- Forum to build new alliances and discuss planning for future challenges
- Inform state/federal agencies/legislators of regional needs and required projects

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.

What are the state requirements for development of an IRWMP?

- Leadership by regional management group
 - Identify regional water related objectives
 - Document range of water management strategies
 - Show "integration" - how water management strategies work together to achieve objectives
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- Implementation strategy, impacts and benefits, data management, relationship to local planning, stakeholder involvement

Will environmental analysis be 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 implement 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.

What is Proposition 84?

Proposition 84, Chapter 2, and Proposition 1E, Article 4 (Integrated Regional Water Management [IRWM] Grant Program), administered by DWR, provides funding for projects that assists local public agencies to meet long term water needs of the state including the delivery of safe drinking water and the protection of water quality and the environment. DWR is currently in the initial phases of the funding implementation.

Is an IRWMP another layer of government?

While IRWMPs may be administered by government agencies, the plan itself is non-binding and non-regulatory and is not creating a new “layer” of government. The effort does, however, develop stronger relationships between the various participating agencies and organizations which enables more efficient decisions to be made on water related projects within the planning area.

Where in California have IRWMPs been completed and what has resulted from these efforts?

For IRWM grant program purposes, Department of Water Resources has created eleven "funding areas" within the State. Within these funding areas, there have been over fifty regional plans developed so far.

For areas with completed plans, additional funds have been secured to fund projects that utilize multiple strategies resulting in multiple benefits. With increased coordination between the involved organizations, projects that improve water supply reliability; long-term attainment and maintenance of water quality standards; eliminate or reduce pollution in impaired water and sensitive habitat areas; planning and implementation of multi-purpose flood control programs; and drinking water and water quality projects that serve disadvantaged communities have all been undertaken.

For more specific information regarding specific IRWM efforts across California, visit the Department of Water Resources website:

http://www.grantsloans.water.ca.gov/grants/implementation/prop84/integregio_fundingarea.cfm