



In 2014, California voters passed the water bond (Proposition 1) allocating \$7.5 billion to fund watershed projects for the health of ecosystems and people. Part of the water bond includes funding for Integrated Regional Water Management (IRWM), a collaborative effort to address water issues at a regional scale through the formation of regional water management groups (RWMG). The Prop 1 IRWM Disadvantaged Community (DAC) Involvement Program is designed to increase the participation of underrepresented, underserved and low capacity communities in IRWM planning, including Tribes, non-English speaking communities, economically distressed areas, and dispersed rural populations often poorly informed or excluded from water management decisions.



## WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO INCLUDE DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES IN IRWM MANAGEMENT?

Integrated Regional Water Management (IRWM) was established as a way for communities to collaborate as a watershed to address regional issues. Though IRWM meetings are open to the public and many RWMGs have made efforts to engage disadvantaged communities and Tribes, DAC involvement remains limited. Additional effort is needed to include DACs, as many individuals are unable to afford to travel to meetings, volunteer their time, or may be hindered by the technical language used to discuss water management challenges. More work is also required to overcome cultural barriers, such as language gaps with non-English speaking communities, misunderstanding of Tribal governance processes, and lack of trust from historically disenfranchised communities. The purpose of the DAC Involvement Program is to require that IRWMs expand their efforts to engage all groups in IRWM participation and project planning, and allocates funding so that they can afford to do so.



# DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT PROGRAM

The Sierra Institute for Community and Environment (Sierra Institute) is coordinating the Disadvantaged Community Involvement Program (DACIP) for the Mountain Counties Funding Area (MCFA), a region that includes nine RWMGs covering most of the Sierra Nevada. One of the preliminary activities of DACIP is to identify disadvantaged communities by assessing not only their income, but also utilizing multiple socioeconomic and community capacity indicators to address water-related challenges. The program will conduct needs assessments of communities throughout the region to determine specific challenges in each community, project priorities and the tools necessary to build capacity. The grant runs for three years, and includes support for technical assistance training and workshops, capacity building and other activities as identified by the communities themselves during the needs assessments and targeted outreach. Sierra Institute will work closely with RWMGs to expand on existing outreach efforts and utilize consultants for help engaging specific populations (particularly Tribes). The grant takes a holistic and adaptive approach by bringing together nine collaboratives in the MCFA and reassessing grant activities annually.

## CHALLENGES IN THE MCFA

The California DAC Involvement Program provides funding for twelve areas across the state to meet the diverse water-related challenges of each region. Encompassing the majority of the Sierra Nevada, the MCFA faces unique issues related to water systems and IRWM participation. The region is predominantly rural, which makes it more difficult for residents to travel to IRWM planning meetings or participate in other water management opportunities. Much of the region struggles with poor internet connectivity limiting the flow of information and ability to participate in meetings remotely. Unique water-related challenges in the region include: dependence on a single water source, drought impacts on private wells, aging infrastructure, and low capacity to repair systems due to a shortage of skilled engineers.

The MCFA is also in the unique position of managing over half of California's drinking water. Headwaters of significant watersheds are located in the area, and the issues threatening these upper watersheds have impacts that extend beyond IRWM boundaries. The health of the upper watersheds is closely tied to wildfire and forest management, which involves its own set of funding and implementation challenges. The DAC Involvement Program will help build the capacity of communities in the MCFA to not only meet their water-related needs, but to become more capable stewards of the Sierra Nevada for the benefit of the state as a whole.

