



February 7, 2007

Ms. Tracie L. Billington, P.E.
Department of Water Resources
Division of Planning & Local Assistance
P.O. Box 942836
Sacramento CA 94236-0001

Ms. Shahla Farahnak
State Water Resources Control Board
Division of Financial Planning
1001 I St., 16th Floor
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Integrated Regional Water Management Plan Program:
Proposition 50 Implementation Grant Funding Recommendations
Propositions 84 IRWM Grant Program Concepts

Dear Ms. Farahnak and Billington:

The Community Water Center is a non-profit organization based in Visalia, California, whose mission is to act as a catalyst for community-based water solutions through organizing, education and advocacy in the Southern San Joaquin Valley. The Community Water Center submits these comments on behalf of itself and the many disadvantaged communities with which we work to secure safe, clean and affordable drinking water.

The Integrated Regional Water Management Plan (IRWMP) Program presents great potential to sustainably and effectively direct taxpayer funding for water projects that benefit the critical water needs of the various regions of our state. Unfortunately, thus far the program has failed to adequately ensure broad stakeholder involvement, thus making the plans overall uninclusive of the needs of disadvantaged communities, in particular.

Prop 50 Implementation Grant Funding Distribution

I was able to attend the January 23rd Scoping Meeting in Sacramento, where it was proposed the Prop 50 Funds be distributed to all Step 2 applicants that requested funding in the first round. We strongly oppose such an allocation of funding. Such a move would mean that those regions (including most of the San Joaquin Valley) that have been preparing and improving IRWMP plans for the second round of Prop 50 funding would be left without the ability to compete for this funding.

Proceeding with funding all of the first round grant proposals will reward regions whose plans were rushed through and fell short of the standards set in the guidelines, while regions that took the time to thoughtfully complete their plans, or regions without the resources to do planning, will be lose out. Funding should not go to those who were quickest to apply, but rather those that appropriately included broad regional involvement in the planning and development phases,



particularly those that included disadvantaged communities.

Furthermore, distribution of Prop 50 funds to all first round applications would mean that less money is available for technical assistance for disadvantaged regions and communities, which are always the last to be brought to the table. Prop 50 funding should be used to provide the resources needed for disadvantaged communities to participate in planning and project development so that the IRWMPs accomplish the purpose of meeting our State's most critical water needs.

Additionally, the proposed distribution of funds to all of the first round applicants will concentrate the rest of Prop 50 funds in urban areas. Instead, the DWR should use a second Prop 50 implementation grant round to encourage more applications from rural areas and allow them to catch up in the process.

Finally, it seems that everyone acknowledges that there are major flaws in the way in which plans and grants were scored. Saving the remaining funds for a second implementation grant round provides the opportunity to refine the scoring criteria and ensure that funded plans and projects truly reflect good planning and project development.

Criteria for Prop 50 Funding

In any second round of Prop 50 funding, the DWR should specifically not include the category of "statewide priorities." This standard was used to develop the list of Round 1 IRWMP applicants recommended by your agencies to receive Proposition 50 funds. All applicants from the San Joaquin Valley ranked as "low" to "medium low" in the "statewide priorities" standard, thus eliminating them from competition. This standard does not appear in the text of Proposition 50.

As an alternative, the DWR should prioritize projects that address critical public health and safety needs. In the San Joaquin Valley, hundreds of communities cannot secure safe water to drink. Clearly this vital need should not be ranked lower than other state-wide needs. DWR can encourage IRWMPs to include projects that address this need by giving priority to projects that address critical public health and safety needs, and include disadvantaged community involvement.

Additionally, a second round of Prop 50 funding should require that at least 25% of the planning and implementation grant dollars be used in a way that provides targeted benefit for disadvantaged communities. This would help ensure that disadvantaged community needs are truly given a place in the planning and implementation of plans, rather than a quick nod and token presence.

Proposition 84

At the January 23rd Scoping Meeting, a proposal was made to change the definition of a Disadvantaged Communities (DAC) from 80 percent of statewide median household income (MHI) to 80% of the MHI of the county or hydrologic unit. We strongly disagree with this approach since this would redirect the priority for funding from the neediest parts of the State. It is our understanding that, so far, the IRWMP Program has not funded many projects that directly benefit disadvantaged communities. Therefore, there is more reason than ever to target funding to the neediest areas of the State.



We strongly support DWR assisting DACs early in the process to make them part of the planning process. We suggest the following mechanisms to assist DAC involvement. First, DWR should provide funds for technical assistance for DACs to participate throughout the IRWMP process, in both planning and governance. Such assistance could come from the \$100 million in Section 75027 of Prop 84 that is set aside for “Inter-regional/Unallocated” funds. For example, \$25 million of this could be set aside for a technical assistance program for disadvantaged communities to facilitate their participation in both the planning and implementation grant processes.

Second, DWR should require that at least 25% of the Prop 84 planning and implementation grant dollars be used in a way that provides targeted benefits for disadvantaged communities. Again, this would help ensure that disadvantaged community needs are truly given a place in the planning and implementation of plans, rather than a quick nod and token presence.

Other Suggestions for IRWMP Funding

The proposal to move away from competitive grants to a performance based granting of the IRWMP appears to be beneficial if the intent is to encourage joint ventures between the State and local agencies to improve IRWM plans and projects in a cooperative manner. In either case, however, it is important to reward plans for the process, and not for the speed in which they put a proposal together. Allocation of funds on a first-come first-serve basis often results in funding going to those regions that already have resources, or who do not fully engage in a regional planning effort, which inevitably takes time to do correctly.

Additionally, it is important to make clear that projects which replace deteriorated infrastructure such as leaking pipelines and tanks that are likely to fail, in disadvantaged communities should be eligible for IRWMP funding.

Finally, funds, perhaps from the “Inter-regional/Unallocated” funding in Prop 84, should be allocated to update and gather data to update Basin Plans for Regional Water Quality Control Boards under Section 75027 (b). In the Central Valley Region, for example, due to chronic funding constraints, basin plan updates are generally limited in scope. Consequently, the current basin plans remain significantly based on the science available when the plans were first enacted in the early 1970’s. Basin Plan updates must be funded to provide a regulatory framework to protect water quality and to plan infrastructure investments to support population growth and sustainable economic development. This should qualify as regional water planning efforts that are eligible for funding.

Thank you for your consideration of our comments.

Sincerely,

Laurel Firestone
Co-Director & Attorney at Law
Community Water Center

Community Water Center, P.O. Box 7774 Visalia, CA 93290