

# Upper Sacramento, McCloud, and Lower Pit Rivers Regional Water Action Group (USRWAG)

Scope: Regional/Watershed

Location: California

## CONTACT INFORMATION:

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## SCOPE:

- Regional scope includes the Upper Sacramento, McCloud, and Lower Pit watersheds
- Originating at the Mount Shasta and Medicine Lake volcanoes in the Southern Cascades, these watersheds provide critical sources of freshwater to the federal Central Valley, and State Water Projects in California. Combined, the Upper Sacramento headwaters supply approximately 25% of the states water for drinking, agricultural irrigation, power generation, and industrial uses, as well as environmental flows to the Sacramento River and the Sacramento-San Joaquin Bay-Delta.
- The group is made up of 14 member entities, including local jurisdictions, tribes, and environmental organizations
- The USR RWAG's objectives are to:
  - Work together to more effectively and efficiently address resource issues in the region
  - Bring attention to the important work done by source water stakeholders in protecting water quality and quantity for environmental needs and downstream users
  - Coordinate efforts to finance major water infrastructure repairs and watershed restoration

## Collaborative Formation:

- Foundational planning and relationship building took place with the development of the Upper Sacramento Watershed Assessment, completed in 2010, as well as other prior regional coordination efforts. Participants in the Assessment began organizing the Integrated Regional Water Management (IRWM) planning process in 2010. IRWM is a State-guided process to encourage collaborative planning among diverse local stakeholders, and to position disadvantaged regions for competitive grant opportunities. The effort is entirely grassroots, and while part of the impetus for IRWM participation is to become eligible for future funding, the USR RWAG also encourages collaborative approaches to problem solving for water and natural resource challenges.

- The USR RWAG planning effort was funded with State of California Department of Water Resources (DWR) IRWM planning grant funds. Initial challenges included hurdles of communication, building trust between specific stakeholders, lack of administrative capacity to manage disadvantaged community projects, as well as building a relationship with the funding source. These were overcome through the coordinated effort of stakeholders – through proactive grassroots initiative, perseverance, political leverage, and communication – and through a facilitated planning process. Success has brought additional positive interest in the group.

## Structure/Funding:

- Volunteer participation/Grant funded

## Members:

### Jurisdictional entities

- City of Dunsmuir
- City of Mt. Shasta
- McCloud Community Services District

### Tribes

- The Modoc Nation
- Shasta Indian Nation
- Winnemem Wintu Tribe
- Pit River Tribe

### Private/non-profit organizations

- McCloud Watershed Council
- Pacific Forest Trust
- Siskiyou Land Trust
- Western Shasta Resource Conservation District
- Mount Shasta Bioregional Ecology Center
- We Advocate Thorough Environmental Review (W.A.T.E.R.)
- Trout Unlimited

## Water Concerns:

- Legacy sedimentation from private and federal timber management, unmaintained forest roads, and catastrophic wildfire
- Temperature and flow for endemic fish
- Nutrients, low dissolved oxygen, and water temperature in the Lower Pit River
- Dwindling snowpack and reduced supplies amidst severe and prolonged drought
- Groundwater and surface water are both considered by the USR RWAG, but there is much less known – and therefore greater future possible risk – associated with groundwater resources.

## Strategies:

- The USR RWAG stakeholders have identified a number of diverse strategies for managing the multiple complex issues in the region. These include strategies specific to the following:
- Operational and Management Efficiency: increasing the work produced per each drop of water means that more can stay in the stream, the region is better buffered against climate change, and costs for communities go down.
- Using Less Water: conservation results in financial savings for jurisdictional infrastructure, and also means that more water can be left in rivers for habitat uses.
- Land and Water Stewardship: most of these strategies require collaboration between two or more entities, the result of which builds local buy-in and ensures resource availability for multiple uses and for future generations.
- Water Quality Management and Protection: water of higher quality can be made available for a broader number of uses, and improves supply reliability for environmental and downstream stakeholders.
- Other strategies, such as flood management, economic incentives, and education diversify the management portfolio available to USR RWAG stakeholders and add flexibility and robustness to the region.

## Results:

- The planning process resulted in a comprehensive document that:
  - Prioritizes objectives;
  - Lists strategies for managing resources related to those objectives;
  - Characterizes geophysical attributes of a strategic source water region
  - Prioritizes projects related to strategies and objectives; and
  - Identifies funding opportunities so that this collaborative effort – and Plan implementation – may continue.
- Thus far, the USR RWAG has been awarded over \$10 million in DWR IRWM grant funds primarily for water infrastructure repairs and upgrades. A portion of the funds have also supported a Plan update, data acquisition, public education and disadvantaged community involvement.

Histories and ethnographies of Indigenous Peoples of this Region were included in the Plan to acknowledge the unbroken thread that connects them to their historic lands and waterways and to amplify their unified belief that the water is for all life in and around the water. The overarching goal is perhaps unique in this state: “It is the goal of the RWAG, through this IRWM plan, to embody both the letter and spirit of the laws protecting the dignity, rights, sites and cultures of our region’s indigenous peoples, and recognize that clean, pure water is much more than a commodity, but rather a vital necessity for everyone within the Upper Sacramento region and downstream.”

- Best practices and lessons learned:
  - Communication between stakeholders, and between project team members and stakeholders, is key for cohesive watershed management
  - Understanding and incorporating the needs and issues of multiple interests are essential elements in building trust and generating community support
  - Funding sources are necessary to maintain organizational structure, optimize collaborative processes and ensure implementation of priority projects. Source regions often lack the financial resources available to highly populated regions where water is delivered for economic benefit, and thus may have to generate innovative solutions and/or depend on public or foundation support. Over-reliance on volunteer efforts for watershed stewardship discourages participation, exhausts members, and is not commensurate with the tasks at hand. The proposed “Headwaters Stewardship Fund” project listed in the USR IRWM Plan aims to reverse California’s systematic devaluation of ecosystem services, by investing downstream stakeholders in source water protection.



**Information current as of November 2020. Please check with the Collaborative contacts (or website if available) for the most up to date information. To find other source water collaboratives across the U.S. or to add yours to the list, visit the Source Water Collaborative’s [How To Collaborate Toolkit](#)**