

2022 Upper Russian River Voluntary Water Sharing Program Implementation Report: Recommendations

1. Survey

RECOMMENDATION: In reviewing responses to the survey, the Steering Committee noticed that there were some questions and answer choices that could have been written more clearly. There were also some general survey formatting choices that could have been refined to improve clarity for respondents. Responses were also fewer than preferred, but still considered acceptable. With this in mind, the Steering Committee would recommend the following:

- Draft and send out surveys earlier in reporting process.
 - Use the same LYRIS service again to disperse the survey, but also utilize the Steering Committee network to share survey links.
 - Do one individual survey per respondent type (i.e. one survey link for agricultural uses, a different link for stakeholders, etc.).
 - Be explicit in all instructions.
 - Shorter, less interpretive questions and answer choices are preferred.
 - Continue to offer the choice of anonymity, with identifying information optional.
 - Give more consideration to who may be filling out the survey and draft additional questions accordingly (e.g., many water right holders use a contractor or outside company to manage the right and they may have a different perspective than the water right holder themselves).
 - Draft questions meant to help identify and close key informational gaps.
 - Incorporate the survey questions themselves, or at least a subset, into the Program's monthly reporting requirements.
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2. Water Sharing Program Steering Committee

RECOMMENDATION:

- It is anticipated that in the short-term, Steering Committee members will either need to plan to donate their personal time to the process and/or stakeholder interests will continue to support the time costs of Steering Committee member participation. As the Committee settles into its role and obtains Program specific funding, the Committee should work to further refine and reduce the time commitment needs and help encourage broader stakeholder participation.
- To improve the Committee's internal administrative processes, it is recommended that the Committee continue to discuss how to best improve things like: meeting notices, agendas, minutes, email communications, etc. as these were all handled by the State Water Board provided facilitator. Things for the Committee to consider going forward are:
 - Explore and identify sources of future funding. Additional resources would not only assist in streamlining time commitments from Steering

Committee members, but would also help improve communications within the Committee, Program participants, and the public.

- The establishment of a joint resource for document retention (e.g., meeting agenda, meeting notes, important resources, and Steering Committee decisions) to help maintain internal organization, but to also ensure all members on Committee have access to the same resources and a record of past decisions.
 - Adopt standing committees (i.e. funding or administrative committees) to assist in various administrative processes.
 - Further refine communications and Program requirements by creating an easy to use, online interface for participant enrollment and required reporting. This would assist in determining Program compliance more efficiently so that enforcement actions can be determined and taken timelier.
 - Develop a mechanism to validate Participant reporting and aggregate that data to ensure Program compliance, success, and future salience.
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3. Creating the Voluntary Water Sharing Agreement

RECOMMENDATION: Based on this year's experiences, the Steering Committee makes the following recommendations:

- Not all years will have an Emergency Declaration in place, which means that the Steering Committee must continue to research whether and how it may be able to operate in non- emergency years. Identifying ways to be more proactive in the face of water shortages by reducing our water use may help improve conservation of storage pools and help defer the need for curtailments.
 - Consult with the State Water Board on what potential options may look like.
 - The Steering Committee should continue to research what an expanded Program into the Lower Russian River Watershed may look like.
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4. Supply, Demand & Threshold Determinations

RECOMMENDATION:

- Continue to improve understanding of available waters in the Upper Russian River Watershed. In particular, surface and groundwater interactions, losses, and accretions.
- Better understand what, if any, other regimes should be considered as part of the demand- supply equation. Including, but not limited to, the Water Rights Decision-1030's 10,000 af reservation for Sonoma County and the pre-1949 protection for uses of water in Mendocino County, each of which is discussed further elsewhere in this report.

- Encourage and support the continued expansion of State Water Board staff and resources via the Water Rights Fund to enable quicker anticipation of hydrology and available water determinations.
- Improve access to real-time data on surface water flows throughout the system; such real-time data can be used not only to validate and calibrate existing models, but enables quicker determination of future Forbearance Thresholds in any future adopted Program iterations.

5. **Communications**

RECOMMENDATION: Based on this year's experiences, the Steering Committee makes the following recommendations:

- Adopt a standardized logo and branding materials for presentations and non-State Water Board facilitated communications. This will assist in immediate recognition of Program materials and provide consistency in overall representation of the Program, such that communications are not as easily missed and all presenters are aligned in messaging.
- Coordinate with and expand relationships with agencies working on the Potter Valley Project (e.g., FERC, PG&E, etc.) where possible so there is more lead time to respond to diversion flow changes in the Russian River.
- As the Potter Valley Project license surrender and decommissioning process continues to evolve, and diversion amounts and timing change, it would be prudent to be more proactive in water supply analysis such that the Program is set up for reduced flows and may later receive an unexpected boost, as opposed to not being prepared for those reductions and having to put the Program on hold indefinitely.
- Increase the number of available workshops and the different topics offered at each. Increase the number of communications around each of these events. This will provide further clarity to Program participants.
- Press release/statement prior to the 2023 Program enrollment process. o Consider releasing in conjunction with a press briefing.
- Conduct education workshops on key issues relating to and impacting the need for the Program to help inform the community and watershed stakeholders.
 - Areas in need of further clarity and education for participants include: determination and use of the 10,000 acre-feet reservation pool in Lake Mendocino; what rules and/or regulations apply to non-participants (i.e. curtailments); how water transfers may or may not be done within the Program; methodology around determining supply and demand; Program reporting processes; and how the Program benefits users.
 - Improve clarity for water rights reporting for water used/transferred under the Program.
 - Hold a meeting to present Implementation Report findings and receive feedback.

6. **2022 Program Enrollment**

a. Parameters & Process

RECOMMENDATIONS: Based on this year's experiences, the Steering Committee makes the following recommendations:

- Going forward, the Program should continue to be open to all water right holders (i.e. riparian and appropriative right holders) in the Upper Russian River (i.e. the mainstem and tributaries). The Steering Committee should continue to engage with the State Water Board staff to understand and refine the supply/demand assumptions that are relevant to the Program models so that this information can be relayed to potential participants on the mainstem and tributaries.
 - Prior to the start of 2023 enrollment, it would be beneficial to have members of the Steering Committee confer with potential participants on how to improve and clarify the enrollment processes.
 - Start the outreach and enrollment processes as early as feasible to ensure the Committee is not inadvertently hindering maximum participation, and that there is sufficient time available to answer clarifying questions and assist with enrollment.
 - Finalize any Program changes as early as possible so that the Steering Committee can begin outreach and host educational workshops for the community ahead of the enrollment period opening, as well as during the enrollment process.
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b. Numbers

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Begin implementation of Report recommendations to continue increasing awareness and confidence in the Program.
 - Continue to explore possible modes of Program authorization so that implementation is not delayed more than necessary and the Program can begin sign ups as soon as a water shortage is determined.
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c. Modes of Participant Implementation

RECOMMENDATION: Based on this year's experiences, the Steering Committee makes the following recommendations:

- Improve the reporting process.
 - To capture more information on conservation and other measures taken to meet threshold determinations.
 - To capture more information on utilization of alternative water sources.
- Establish a forum or other community resource base for participants to communicate with each other and share conservation ideas with each other.
- Increase emphasis on available conservation measures as a way to achieve threshold determinations, instead of merely supplementing with alternative water resources.

- For example, reconnecting and restoring historical floodplains is known to assist in groundwater recharge and helps increase soil moisture, delaying irrigation needs. This type of project helps reduce water demands later in the season, while restoring key environmental functions and overall health.
 - Another example is scientifically based groundwater recharge projects and State recognition of the importance of expediting certain processes to get approved projects implemented in a timely manner.
 - Incentives to implement more conservation measures are important to reducing water demands throughout the watershed; however, it is important that any incentives result in a measurable and quantifiable benefit without causing harm elsewhere.
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d. Realized Benefits of Program Implementation

RECOMMENDATION: It is recommended that the Steering Committee prepare a document with a range of benefits identified they hope to observe via Program implementation and then use that as a way to measure progress each year. These benefits could include a range of things: curtailment deferment and achieving regular harvest size to more equitable dispersion of conservation requirements and an option to donate water to environmental flows.

7. Potter Valley Project Variance and Effects on Program Implementation

RECOMMENDATION: Going forward, the Committee agrees that efforts to increase communications with PG&E and FERC will be important for the Program to be able to respond to ongoing changes with PVP such that the Program can adapt instead of being placed on hold. As our region continues to face climate change impacts and as PVP progresses through its own evolution, it is important that the Program also look at more additional, proactive measures so that the Program is able to be implemented for longer periods of time going forward.

8. Determining Program Compliance

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The Steering Committee should look for funding opportunities to assist with closing informational gaps that are necessary to long-term Program success.
- The Steering Committee should work with the State Water Board staff to further refine understanding of the various surface water supplies in the Russian River system, how those supplies have been allocated for use, and how they are used throughout the year.
- The Steering Committee should look at ways to increase the amount of information (e.g., water use, timing of use, projected uses, conservation methods,

alternative water sources, etc) collected from participants so that more informed decisions can be made.

- The Steering Committee should work to improve access to participant reports and participant information so that Committee members can follow-up with individual participants on an as needed basis.

INFORMATIONAL GAPS THAT NEED ADDRESSED:

- Accurate use data for participants (i.e. real-time metering and reporting) to facilitate and make threshold determinations more efficient, accurate, and timely.
 - This information is also necessary to confirm thresholds are being met, as well as to free up additional Program supply when demand is below determined threshold.
 - Analysis of direct and indirect impacts to other water uses (e.g., environmental uses, domestic uses, and agricultural uses).
 - For the Program to evolve and adapt fully, the Steering Committee must be aware of how Program benefits are being felt proportionally across all participant types.