Public Workshop | Highlights

Thursday, June 20, 4:00-6:00
Prepared by the Consensus Building Institute

Meeting in Brief

The Monterey County Water Resource Authority (MCWRA) hosted a public workshop for the Salinas River Long-Term Management Plan (LTMP) on June 20, 2018. Approximately 40 people attended the workshop. The workshop introduced attendees to the LTMP content and offered a forum to discuss the stakeholder issues assessment findings and process recommendations developed by the Consensus Building Institute (CBI). (*Hyperlinks to the meeting materials can be found at the end of this document.)*

Elizabeth Krafft, MCWRA, provided an overview of the LTMP and timeline for development and introduced the LTMP consultant team, led by ICF. Gina Bartlett, CBI, presented major findings from a recently conducted stakeholder issue assessment, then reviewed process recommendations for developing the Salinas River LTMP. Members of the public were invited to identify issues or concerns to add to the assessment findings and share feedback on the draft recommendations for collaborative engagement for developing the LTMP. Attendees underscored the need for the LTMP to be based on the best information available, broadly and locally supported, coordinated with existing efforts, and regionally sustainable and resilient.

Public Input

Attendees reinforced many of the recurrent themes in the assessment and generally supported CBI's proposed engagement process. Many asked issue-specific questions (e.g., US Geological Survey data incorporation, lagoon management, the Interlake Tunnel project, and reservoir release flows). LTMP project team explained these issues will be considered during LTMP development.

Additional input is summarized below.

Engagement and Outreach

- Engage the cities along the river who may be impacted by flooding.
- Ground truth possible outdated information with landowners (e.g., lower cottonwood population due to the recent severe drought). Ask those who have been on their lands for generations about pre-and post-effect of reservoirs.
- Conduct more outreach regarding the arundo issue.

- Ensure balanced representation between the Planning Group and Technical Design Team. An attendee suggested the Technical Design Team should consist of agencies and scientists, while the Planning Group consists of the diverse interests focused on the broader picture. Another attendee said these two groups are meant to work together; the Technical Design Team will delve into certain issues in greater detail than the Planning Group.
- Several attendees expressed confusion about the need for the LTMP and its connection to government permits (e.g., the Habitat Conservation Plan process).
- Attendees identified specific local efforts that require consideration and alignment, including Groundwater Sustainability Agencies' activities, San Luis Obispo LTMP, and the current Salinas River Stream Maintenance Program.

LTMP Development

- The initial Planning Group and Technical Design Team meeting should discuss and reach shared understanding of the LTMP's goals and constraints.
- Several attendees asked about funding for LTMP development, implementation, and future efforts/projects. A few queried specifically about funding for public participation in these processes.

Salinas River System

- Clearly define what is the desired natural river system (e.g., historical natural flows or flows 30+ years ago) and what are plausible risks for which to manage (e.g., frequency and severity of floods).
    - Janet Whitchurch, self-employed artist, offered images and descriptions to help envision the desired river system.
    - A few attendees cautioned that a fully meandering river system may have high flood and property damage risks. Several supported the concept of a more naturally operating river system as opposed to hardscape management (e.g., concrete levees).
- Attendees held different perspectives on current conditions of the river system. An attendee stated the river is flowing as well as it was 30 years ago, whereas another attended viewed the river as more congested today due to the rubber dam.
- There was a request for high-resolution imaging of the whole system.
- Describe the variability in the system (e.g., some streams are actually multiple channels).
- Identify sources of flood flows (e.g., Paso Robles sub-basin).
- Consider the relationship between flooding/high-risk areas and public infrastructure (particularly bridges).
- Describe how relatively slight increases in flow (e.g., 4-6 extra inches) can dramatically affect flooding. Consider issues that exacerbate flooding (e.g., trapped debris).

Next Steps

- CBI will update the draft assessment based on attendees' input, then share with interviewees for accuracy before finalizing the assessment.
- LTMP project team will coordinate the first Planning Group and Technical Design Team (scheduled for early August).

Meeting Materials

- LTMP Factsheet
- Workshop Presentation Slides