

Chapter 1 : IWRP BACKGROUND

1.1. Evolution of IWRP

Beginning in the late 1990s, eight watershed restoration plans and a number of other related assessments were undertaken for seven watersheds in Santa Cruz County (Scotts Creek, San Lorenzo River, Arana Gulch, Soquel Creek, Aptos Creek, lower Pajaro River tributaries, and Watsonville Sloughs). Over the next few years the focus shifted to ways to effectively implement these plan recommendations. Numerous stumbling blocks were identified from past experience, including:

- Competition between watershed partners for limited funding
- Wasted time and money spent preparing proposals on grants not considered high priority by funding agencies
- Few funding sources for project design and permits, resulting in stalled projects
- Limited guidance from agencies early in the design process, often leading to costly re-designs
- Confusing and time-consuming permitting process
- Shrinking resource and permitting agency staff time
- Lack of a formal watershed partner forum to discuss priorities
- Lack of a centralized watershed restoration information hub specific to Santa Cruz County

Staff from the Santa Cruz County Resource Conservation District (RCD), Coastal Conservancy, California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG), Coastal Watershed Council, and the City and County of Santa Cruz developed the concept for the Integrated Watershed Restoration Program (IWRP) for Santa Cruz County in 2002 to address these stumbling blocks. IWRP works to coordinate resource, funding, and permitting agencies to reduce staff time and help ensure that critical projects are identified, funded, and permitted. IWRP also provides resources to local watershed partners for developing projects.

IWRP is intended to be a focal point and framework to improve county watershed restoration efforts. It is a non-regulatory process, relying on the voluntary cooperation of landowners and collaboration of watershed partners. IWRP is not a guaranteed source of funding, but rather a mechanism to develop and implement high quality restoration projects and proposals.

1.2. Mission statement

To facilitate and coordinate projects to improve fish and wildlife habitat and water quality in Santa Cruz County watersheds using a voluntary, non-regulatory approach.

1.3. Objectives

1. Coordinate agencies on the identification, funding, and implementation of watershed restoration projects.
 - Project Identification/Funding/Implementation (PIFI) Technical Advisory Committee for Santa Cruz County (CDFG, Regional Water Quality Control Board, Coastal Conservancy)

2. Target proposals to critical projects supported by the resource agencies
 - Annual solicitation for new project proposals
 - Annual Watershed Partner Forum
 - IWRP project criteria
 - Proposal development consultations
 - Packaging of related projects where appropriate
3. Facilitate higher quality designs at lower cost
 - Design & Permitting Technical Advisory Committee
 - Project Work Program template
 - Review of consultants and contractors
 - Project Design & Permit Plans
 - Design standards
 - Pre-project review and site visits with resource and permitting agencies
 - Grouping of projects for engineering review
4. Simplify the permit process for watershed restoration projects
 - IWRP Design & Permitting Coordination Process
 - Design & Permitting Technical Advisory Committee
 - Design & Permitting Coordinator
 - Design & Permitting Coordination Process Guidelines Manual
 - “Partners in Restoration” Permit Coordination Program
5. Effect institutional change to improve watershed restoration efforts.
 - County and City departments
 - Special districts
 - Community groups
 - State agencies
6. Develop a countywide outreach and education program
 - Phase 1 Outreach and Education component
 - Watershed Activity and Resource Guide for Grades 4-12
 - Rural roads erosion control technical assistance program
7. Develop a countywide watershed restoration monitoring program geared toward future project identification needs
 - Phase 1 Monitoring component
 - GIS tools
8. Develop additional assessments and plans
 - Comparative Lagoon Ecological Assessment Project
 - Plans in other Santa Cruz County watersheds
 - Supplement existing plans with additional study addressing other species and/or scientific disciplines.
9. Serve as a watershed restoration information hub for Santa Cruz County.
 - IWRP website
 - Email listserves

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- Quarterly Blue Circle meetings
- Annual Watershed Partner Forum
- IWRP Progress Reports
- IWRP Annual Reports
- Grant programs and deadlines
- Watershed partner listings
- Tools for Project Leads
- Watershed plans

1.4. Partners

National Marine Fisheries Service	US Fish and Wildlife Service
US Army Corps of Engineers	Natural Resources Conservation District
CA Department of Fish and Game	Regional Water Quality Control Board
Coastal Conservancy	Coastal Commission
CA Department of Forestry	CA Department of Parks and Recreation
Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary	Fishnet4C
Santa Cruz County RCD	Coastal Watershed Council
County Dept of Environmental Health	County Dept of Public Works
County Dept of Planning	City of Santa Cruz
City of Capitola	City of Watsonville
Sustainable Conservation	
and numerous local watershed groups.	

1.5. Phase 1

Recognizing the value of the IWRP objectives, the Coastal Conservancy awarded \$4.5 million in June 2003 to initiate Phase 1 of IWRP and dedicated a staff position to coordinate the program. The RCD manages and administers this Phase 1 block grant. Phase 1 includes the following components:

- Establish and coordinate IWRP (*Coordination component*)
- Designs/permits for ~55 restoration projects (*Design & Permitting component*)
- Expansion of rural roads technical assistance program, including an additional 20-40 erosion control project designs (*Rural Roads component*)
- Comparative lagoon ecological assessment project (*Lagoon component*)
- Watershed education activity and resource guide (*Education component*)
- Countywide monitoring program development (*Monitoring component*)
- Countywide outreach program development (*Outreach component*)

1.6. Design & Permitting and Rural Roads components

The bulk of the Phase 1 funding is geared toward making the watershed plan project recommendations become a reality. Over \$3.2 million is dedicated to developing designs and obtaining permits for 75-95 restoration projects in the seven county watersheds. The Design & Permitting component will establish the IWRP Design & Permitting Coordination Process and provide mechanisms to assist Project Leads prepare designs and

apply for permits. Approximately 55 projects will be designed under this component. In addition, the Rural Roads component will identify another 20-40 rural road-related erosion control projects that will receive funding for designs and permits. By having completed designs and permits, these projects will be more competitive when applying for implementation funding over the next three to five years.

1.7. Benefits of the IWRP Design & Permitting Coordination Process

The IWRP Design & Permitting Coordination Process is described in detail in later sections of this manual, but it is important to highlight the benefits this unique process brings to Project Leads, consultants, and permitting staff alike:

Design & Permitting Coordinator: Single Point-of-Contact

The Design & Permitting (D/P) Coordinator is responsible for tracking the status of each IWRP design project, anticipating issues early on and elevating them to the appropriate permitting or IWRP staff. Most importantly, the D/P Coordinator serves as the liaison between the Project Leads and the resource and permitting agencies. This means that Project Leads have a single point-of-contact for all of their design and permitting questions, and the permitting agencies can deal with one person rather than numerous project applicants. The D/P Coordinator will also be responsible for scheduling site visits with all the appropriate resource and permitting staff.

Guidelines Manual

This guidelines manual brings together key guidance from the permitting agencies on acceptable design standards, permits and turnaround times, and information on analytical reports that may be required – all in one centralized location. This guidance should prove useful to Project Leads in planning for a particular project.

Advance Notice of Upcoming Permit Applications

By reviewing in advance the compiled list of upcoming projects that will be submitted for permits, the resource and permitting agencies can anticipate their upcoming workload and work with IWRP staff to develop batching and other strategies to accommodate time and staffing constraints.

Early Feedback on Design Approach

Perhaps one of the biggest time- and cost-saving advantages of the IWRP Design & Permitting Coordination Process is that it brings together Project Leads, consultants, and resource and permitting staff early in the process to discuss design approaches before they begin. By reviewing the project proposals and attending site visits, the resource and permitting staff can more fully understand a particular project, including its opportunities and constraints. Agency staff can then provide the Project Leads and consultants with guidance on selecting a design approach that will result in successful permit applications. This saves the Project Leads time and money by avoiding costly re-designs to satisfy permit requirements, and reduces the amount of time spent by permitting agencies reviewing permit applications.

Documentation of Agency Feedback

One of the cornerstone documents for each project in the IWRP Design & Permitting Coordination Process is the Project Design & Permit Plan (PDPP). The Project Lead

initiates this document by compiling information about the site location, problem to be addressed, design alternatives considered, and known environmental concerns. The resource and permitting agencies will review this document and determine whether they need to attend a site visit. The PDPP will be updated with feedback from the agencies on particular issues of concern, preferred design approach, and the specific permits and analytical reports that will be required. The PDPP thus becomes the project-specific plan that documents all agency feedback and agreements. This historical record will be useful both for project team members and for any new staff who become involved in the project.

CDFG and NOAA Fisheries Engineer Review

The D/P Coordinator will schedule review by agency engineers to review applicable projects at the 90% complete design stage. This will allow Project Leads to make any last minute adjustments prior to submitting the permit applications and should ensure timely approval.

Coordinating Preparation and Submittal of Permit Applications

One of the objectives of the IWRP Design & Permitting Coordination Process is to coordinate the preparation and submittal of permit applications to provide for greater consistency in the content of the applications, and equally important, to allow for the most efficient use of agency staff time. The D/P Coordinator will be responsible for this coordination and the reviewing of permit applications for consistency and completeness. As much as possible, project applications will be “bundled” for submittal to the agencies, allowing for agency staff to review several projects at once rather than tackling them on a project-by-project basis.

Coordinating Submittal of Permit Applications Relative to Implementation Funding

One of the important time lags associated with getting restoration projects on the ground, which the IWRP Design & Permitting Coordination Process addresses, is the length of time between when implementation funds are secured and when permits are obtained to do the work. It will be critical to coordinate the timing of the life of the permits with the anticipated availability of implementation funding. In some cases it may be necessary to hold off on submittal of permit applications if the availability of implementation funds are highly uncertain. It may also be possible to negotiate timelines with the permitting agencies so that life of the permit may be extended if necessary. The D/P Coordinator will work with the permitting agencies to alleviate these scheduling issues.

1.8. Project selection process – Phase 1 and beyond

For Phase 1, a preliminary list of 55 projects for the Design & Permitting component has been assembled and is currently under review by CDFG, the Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB), and the Coastal Conservancy. The criteria for project selection is as follows:

- a) Recommended in a watershed plan and/or supported by CDFG, RWQCB, or Coastal Conservancy staff.
- b) High priority or demonstration of compelling need
- c) High likelihood of receiving implementation funding
- d) Feasible and ready-to-go

In some cases, projects were included in the Phase 1 project list that were not identified in the existing watershed plans but were strongly supported by one or more of the resource

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agencies. This list of projects is being divided into three “batches” so as not to overload permitting agency staff and to allow the process to be perfected. It is anticipated that Batch 1 will begin in Spring 2004, Batch 2 in Summer 2004, and Batch 3 in Spring 2005.

While the funding is geared toward the 55 identified projects, there may be funding for additional projects should any projects fall off the list. To propose a project for consideration, first contact and receive the support of CDFG, RWQCB, or Coastal Conservancy staff, demonstrating the criteria above. Then fill out a Project Design & Permit Plan (see following sections) and submit it for review by the three agencies.

The 20-40 design projects in the Rural Roads component will be identified by the Rural Roads Technical Advisory Committee as that component gets under way and will follow the same design and permitting procedures outlined in this manual.

Project selection beyond Phase 1:

Each summer, solicitations for new projects will be sent out to the watershed partners on the IWRP email and mailing lists (contact the RCD to get on these lists). Partners will be asked to fill out project synopses that meet the project criteria and have the support of one or more resource agencies. These synopses will be compiled and discussed at the annual Santa Cruz County Watershed Partner Forum to be held each fall. Funding agencies will provide guidance on which projects will be most competitive for funding and offer suggestions for collaboration where appropriate. Partners will then develop proposals for funding.

The IWRP project selection process can also be used as a catalyst for the development of new watershed assessments for those watersheds where a plan has not yet been developed. The preparation of a new watershed plan can be proposed as a new project via the Watershed Partner Forum. A Project Lead would be identified to develop a proposal for funding.

As mentioned above, IWRP is not a dedicated source or guarantee of funds, but projects that have gone through this identification and development process will result in high quality proposals and thus will have a greater chance to receive funding. Perhaps the biggest advantage of these IWRP-selected projects is that they will then qualify for the IWRP Design & Permitting Coordination Process outlined in the rest of this manual.

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