

# AQUALLIANCE

DEFENDING NORTHERN CALIFORNIA WATERS

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Tom Stokely

## Consultants

Jim Brobeck

Tim Stroshane

## Web Site

[www.aqualliance.net](http://www.aqualliance.net)

Joe Yun

DWR

1416 Ninth Street

Sacramento, CA 95814

[jyun@water.ca.gov](mailto:jyun@water.ca.gov)

[DWR\\_IRWM@water.ca.gov](mailto:DWR_IRWM@water.ca.gov)

Dear Mr. Yun:

AquAlliance submits the following comments for the Proposition 84 Integrated Regional Water Management Planning Grant process and the Northern Sacramento Valley – 4 County Group’s proposal.

### **DWR Process**

AquAlliance found the DWR web site unclear and unfriendly. The notice that there is a comment period is easily found, but there is no sign of the proposals. Our voice mail message to Bill Hoffmann the week of December 13<sup>th</sup> was not returned. Clearly, DWR’s methods of communication fail to pass even a rudimentary test. This is not acceptable.

In addition, DWR’s notice of a comment period lacks any mention of the purpose for the comments and how they will be used. It appears to AquAlliance that this is window-dressing for DWR, so the legislature can be assured there was a “public process” when millions of dollars are being dispersed. This type of hollow sincerity is what causes public disdain for government in general and continues that massive waste of public funds for poorly designed proposals, such as the now defunct Sacramento Valley Integrated Regional Water Management Plan. It then comes as no surprise that DWR seems ready to approve the Northern Sacramento Valley – 4 County Group Proposal, which also provides the pretence of public involvement.

### **Northern Sacramento Valley – 4 County Group Proposal**

An IRWM region is not based solely on geographic considerations or characteristics. It is also defined by water management issues, its stakeholders,

and water-related conflicts. Table 1 of Appendix F of the Regional Acceptance Process (RAP) for IRWM indicates that evaluation value is given to: Stakeholder Inclusiveness requiring a listing of the stakeholders participating in the IRWM Plan including each stakeholder's tie to water management within the IRWM region.

The Northern Sacramento Valley Four County Group Integrated Regional Water Management Regional Acceptance Process, 2009 Application was not found on DWR's web site, but we located it at Butte County's ([http://www.buttecounty.net/Water%20and%20Resource%20Conservation/Four%20Counties/~//media/County%20Files/Water%20Resource/Public%20Internet/4%20Counties/RAP/Appendix%208%20\\_%20proposedparticipants.ashx](http://www.buttecounty.net/Water%20and%20Resource%20Conservation/Four%20Counties/~//media/County%20Files/Water%20Resource/Public%20Internet/4%20Counties/RAP/Appendix%208%20_%20proposedparticipants.ashx)). The application explains in *section 3.3.2 Develop Stakeholder List and Involvement Plan*, that the Four County Group has developed an initial working list of stakeholders from within the region through their outreach activities to date. The list is attached to this RAP application as Appendix 8, which displays the stakeholder group and the contact person for that entity. The author of the application assures excluded stakeholders that, "...this list will not be exclusive to these entities. Through various outreach efforts it is anticipated that the existing list will be expanded to incorporate other interested parties." These assurances ring hollow as the applicant chooses processes that exclude important stakeholders that have a proven record of interest in the region's water management.

Appendix 8 includes appropriate regional government agencies, irrigation and water districts, watershed conservancies, private utility water corporations, and county RCD's. But the proposed participants pointedly exclude certain stakeholder entities that have been involved in the region's water management process for over 10 years.

Two significant water policy leaders and their organizations are conspicuously missing from this list. Barbara Vlamis, former Executive Director of Butte Environmental Council and current Executive Director of AquAlliance has a long record of interest in regional water policy proceedings and is a leader in protecting the ground water and wetlands in northern California to sustain family farms, communities, creeks and rivers, native flora and fauna, vernal pools, and recreation. Barbara Hennigan, Executive Director of Butte-Sutter Basin Area Groundwater Users provides representation for the interests of all overlying groundwater-dependent users, with the goal of ensuring a sustainable supply of accessible water through promotion of sound science, participation in the public process, and by providing information and education for members and the public.

AquAlliance and Butte-Sutter Basin Area Groundwater Users are key players that must be involved in the foundation of a RAP. In the fall of 2007, participants in the Multi Party MOU approached the California Department of Water Resources (DWR), Division of Planning and Local Assistance (DPLA). They requested support for their efforts to advance regional water planning and management under the two MOUs. In particular, they sought DPLA's support for the engagement of the Center for Collaborative Policy (CCP), a program of California State University Sacramento. Participants looked to CCP to make recommendations for how participants could work more effectively both together and with other stakeholders in the 4 County Area in advancing regional water planning and management. Mss. Vlamis & Hennigan were recognized then as key participants and were interviewed at length along with about 50 other interviewees.

The CCP interviewers found that, “there did not appear a uniformly shared understanding among the public entity interviewees regarding the conditions for starting or maintaining a successful public policy collaborative...” and furthermore that, “comments made by some interviewees suggest that, at a minimum, some representatives of some public entities might benefit from some training, whether initial, refresher, or advanced, in these different processes and their relative appropriateness. Beyond these manifestations of limited understanding of collaboration, a few representatives of some public entities demonstrated skepticism or even hostility towards a more collaborative approach.” Pg. 12, Four County Water Planning and Management Assessment, [http://www.bigchicocreek.org/documents/groundwater\\_mgmt\\_4county\\_assessment.pdf](http://www.bigchicocreek.org/documents/groundwater_mgmt_4county_assessment.pdf)

The CCP report was issued on August 31, 2008, giving the 4CMOU planners/administrators ample time to follow through on the CCP Ultimate Recommendation:

“Within the 4 County Area, an Area-wide Visioning activity best matches the opportunities offered by collaboratively water planning and management with the challenges involved in such collaborative activities.” This approach would have allowed all stakeholders a seat at the planning table. Unfortunately Butte County, as the nominal head of the 4CMOU process, ignored the expert advice of the CCP and chose a process that presents select updates of the progress of the 4CMOU to the public during busy government meetings that are scantily described in various agendas and never described in detailed minutes of these meetings. “Butte County participates in outreach through many avenues including monthly meetings of the Butte County Water Commission. The Commission is a Brown Act body, which requires the posting and distribution of agendas seventy-two hours prior to each meeting. [pg. 35, item 4.1.1 of the RAP application] <http://www.buttecounty.net/Water%20and%20Resource%20Conservation/Four%20Counties/~media/County%20Files/Water%20Resource/Public%20Internet/4%20Counties/RAP/FourCountyRAP042609.ashx>

While most items on the Butte County Water Commission agenda have detailed background documents, the updates on the 4CMOU water commission’s meetings are sparse at best and totally lacking in detail in the agenda/minutes of the meetings. Here is an example of the monthly update excerpted in full from the agenda and MINUTES OF THE BUTTE COUNTY WATER COMMISSION dated November 3, 2010:7.

*Update on the Prop 84 application process for the Northern Sacramento Valley Integrated Regional Water Management planning grant within the Counties of Butte, Colusa, Glenn, Tehama, Sutter and Shasta. Information only, no action. Jim Brobeck addressed the Water Commission.*

During the past years the “4” county MOU has expanded its range to include 2 more counties: Shasta and Sutter. The Prop. 84 application mentions a 5<sup>th</sup> county (Sutter) but continues to describe the group as a 4-county effort. There is no mention of the 6<sup>th</sup> county (Shasta) which has been added to the group and extends the range of complex collaboration well beyond the Butte Basin aquifer system. This is not adequate documentation of the activities regarding the 4CMOU or dissemination of the material to the public. There should also be opportunities for in-depth public dialog with all the participants who are currently meeting privately.

The failure of the 4CMOU leaders to follow through on the CCP Ultimate Recommendation to open the planning effort with a broad Area-wide Visioning activity, the apparent deficit in understanding among these

planners regarding the conditions for starting or maintaining a successful public policy collaborative; the overt exclusion of the groups and leaders that represent groundwater dependent citizens and environmental; the addition of Shasta County which has a range of water management challenges entirely different from counties that overly the Butte Basin Tuscan and Tehama aquifer formations; and the failure of Butte County Water Department staff to provide details on the evolution of the 4CMOU activities are indications of an inadequate stakeholder involvement plan.

## **Conclusion**

AquAlliance believes that the 4CMOU has not created a credible structure and process for public involvement. To correct this here must be:

- *Detailed* documentation provided on a monthly basis and made easily available to the public.
- Opportunities for in-depth public dialog with all the participants who are currently meeting privately.
- Halt the 4CMOU until there is a Visioning Process as recommended by the experts at the Center for Collaborative Policy, "...the 4 County Area (defined as the geographic area within the boundaries of Butte, Colusa, Glenn and Tehama Counties could benefit substantially from an Area-wide water "visioning" activity," (p. 1 Four County Planning and Management Assessment).

AquAlliance also requests mailed notification of IRWM planning and implementation events, RFPs, and comment periods.

Sincerely,

Jim Brobeck, Water Policy Analyst  
AquAlliance  
P.O. Box 4024  
Chico, CA 95927  
jimb@aqualliance.net  
www.aqualliance.net

Cc; Assembly Member Jared Huffman