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Community Water Conversations throughout the Santa Ana Watershed

The Newkirk Center for Science and Society

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Executive Summary

From September 2019 through January of 2020, as a Water Resource Policy Intern (WRPI) working with the [Newkirk Center for Science & Society at the University of California, Irvine \(UCI\)](#), I supported the planning and implementing of community water conversations (CWC) throughout the Santa Ana Watershed. The community water conversations were a part of a larger project that the Santa Ana Watershed Project Authority (SAWPA) contracted the Newkirk Center to implement under the [Disadvantaged Communities Involvement Program \(DCI\)](#). The DCI program aims to ensure the representation of disadvantaged communities and economically distressed areas in integrated water planning and decision-making. As a part of the Newkirk team, I helped to conduct 3 community water conversations to report back a synthesis of the information about communities' strengths and needs regarding water that our team gathered in 12 listening sessions in communities across the Santa Ana Watershed.

During my internship, I learned how to reconnect with local communities with whom we held listening sessions at the beginning of the year. I learned about the relationships that local government and water agencies have with their local communities. Lastly, I learned about the opportunities that water agencies can have to work with local communities and the constraints they are under when trying to address issues or concerns that occur in communities. Through my time working with the Newkirk Center and SAWPA, I have gained a better understanding of the importance in creating spaces for local community members to give input about their communities. I have also gained a better understanding of the importance of dialogue and feedback for community members and a model for how they can communicate their strengths and needs with water districts and local governments.

Introduction

In this report, I will go in depth about the DCI Program and how I supported the community water conversation process. I supported several areas of the CWC project such as outreach and coordination with community members, organizations, and stakeholders. I also supported communications with the creation and development of promotional materials such as flyers, information graphics and by developing and editing presentations. These materials were used to

report back about prior listening session findings to community members, water agencies and local government representatives. In addition, I supported on the administrative side of the project as well. With fellow interns, I created sign-in sheets, surveys, feedback forms, email, and phone calls throughout the CWC process. Overall, in the CWCs our team aimed to provide community members with an opportunity to voice their concerns to local water agencies and governments. This is part of a broader effort to strengthen an efficient and comprehensive space for integrated water management and planning that is inclusive and aware of community needs.

Community Water Conversations within the Santa Ana Watershed

As a part of SAWPA's DCI program, a team of researchers from the Newkirk Center for Science & Society at the University of California, Irvine conducted 3 community water conversations between September and October 2019 in Orange, Riverside and San Bernardino counties. The Newkirk Center team provided simultaneous interpretation in English and Spanish in the three listening sessions. Spanish speakers are overrepresented in underserved communities. CWCs served both to support community engagement and conversation between water agencies and local community members about decisions that revolve around water and local community. It also provided data about strengths and needs that were found within the watershed to community members and water agencies. The findings were also included in the [Community Water Ethnography Report](#) prepared by Valerie Olson and her team from the Department of Anthropology at UC, Irvine.

During each community water conversation, the Newkirk Center team facilitated a report back and discussion based on the data analyses from prior listening sessions with community members and water agency representatives. Within that, water agency representatives were informed about the purpose of their participation such as answering questions or discussion of concerns, improvements, or other inquiries by community members about water and other related issues impacting their community.

Implementing CWCs required the Newkirk Center to reconnect with prior listening session participants, organizations, agencies, and governments who assisted with the first phase of the project. Once the Newkirk Center team identified where the CWC would take place, multiple

levels of coordination were needed. This process was also applied in connecting with previous water districts and local governments that assisted with the project.

Project Approach, Big Bear Community Water Conversation

Planning Community Water Conversation in Big Bear, California:

- **Step 1: Outreach and Coordination**

The Newkirk Center team began its efforts to reconnect with one local organization in Big Bear where they held a prior listening session during early stages of the community listening sessions (CLSs) of the DCI project. Three of the five listening sessions conducted in San Bernardino County were in Big Bear. In order to provide Listening Session participants the opportunity to engage with their local water and other resource managers, the Newkirk Center team planned one of the three CWCs in Big Bear. We called the leader of the first organizations with whom we held a listening session during the early phase of the project about doing a community water conversation that would include folks who participated from their organization and others from previous listening sessions in San Bernardino County. After connecting and confirming the use of their facility, we proceeded to reach out and connect with prior listening session participants, organizations and water and other resource managers that assisted us during the first phases of the CLS process.

- **Step 2: Collaboration and Planning**

During our collaboration and planning process, the Newkirk team kept in mind of the participants, organizations and water and other resource managers who participated in the CLSs in Big Bear. During the first phases of the project, we collected CLS participants, organizations and contact information through emails, phone calls or sign-in sheets to use as a means of contact for the future. We also kept a record of potential CLS participants, organization or water and other resource agencies in San Bernardino County that assisted in the collaboration and planning or did not know about the CLSs during phase one of the project.

We reached out by email or phone to water and other resource managers who assisted us during the first phases of the project in Big Bear. Most of the water and other resource managers were representatives of water districts from San Bernardino County, U.S. National Forest Agency and

SAWPA. Another means of contacting and informing water and other resource agencies in San Bernardino County but were not near the region of Big Bear, received several email blast reminders about the upcoming CWC in Big Bear and invitation to participate as panelists during the question and answer (Q&A) portion. During this process, the Newkirk team was able to connect with, identify and invite to attend new water and other resource managers that could assist and answer questions that CWC participants might have about their community. We informed water and other resource managers about the Q&A portion and assisted water and other resource agency participants in response preparation to community members questions or feedback. The Newkirk team scheduled phone calls with water and other resource managers one week before the scheduled CWC to go over the question or comments that were collected from the first phase of the project. We informed them that our team had analyzed and synthesized these questions into groups that fell under categories or themes reflective of issues or concerns impacting their community. During these phone calls, we went over the questions together to identify which water and other resource managers would be the most informed in providing an answer to community members. Once all questions were assigned and answers were assessed and provided to the Newkirk team, we reminded water and other resource managers to be mindful of their responses to community member concerns, questions, and sentiments during the CWC. We also informed water and other resource managers that the Newkirk team would be facilitating the CWC throughout the presentation, including the Q&A portion.

The same method was applied to organizations and CLS participants from phase one of the project. The Newkirk team reached out to organizations with whom we held prior listening sessions in San Bernardino County and informed them about the upcoming CWC in Big Bear. We sent out email blasts about the upcoming CWC in Big Bear to those organizations who were not near the region of Big Bear or who were unresponsive throughout the project. We wanted all organizations who were in contact or unresponsive throughout the project to be informed and connected about the CWC, whether they were to attend or not. CLS participants from all three locations in Big Bear and those who were unable to make it within San Bernardino County received the same email blast informing them about the CWC in hopes that we would have a large and strong turnout. Within this email, we mentioned that CWC participants would have an opportunity to ask questions or voice their concerns to water and other resource managers about

impacting their community CWC participants would also have another opportunity at the end to fill out a survey or question card with any comments that they did not have a chance to ask during the CWC.

- **Step 3: Deliverables and Outreach Materials**

On the administrative side, the Newkirk team wanted to provide outreach materials to organizations in Big Bear on spreading information about the CWC. Another intern and I supported with this task in developing a flyer in both English and Spanish since one of the three CLS organizations served a predominantly Spanish speaking population. There were several editing and revising phases of the flyers where we included the date, time, location, summary of the CWC purpose, QR code and URL link that lead to a registration form for the CWC. The Newkirk team contact information was also provided in the case where participants or organizations had questions about the CWC.

In addition, the creation and development of a presentation used to display findings from phase one of the project needed to be developed. Another intern and I supported by adding, editing, and revising the presentation that included all the findings from prior CLSs in Big Bear. Information about the scope of the project, themes identified from prior CLSs and information about Technical Assistance funding that was available for local organizations and water and other resource managers to apply for in the Santa Ana Watershed. The purpose of the funding was to support the development of programs and projects that were identified under the strengths and needs assessment (CLS). Lastly, another intern and I supported with printing and providing question cards and surveys for CWC participants to fill out and submit anonymously. Anonymous feedback/question cards were essential for CWC participants to ask questions or feedback related to the CLSs, CWCs and steps moving forward with communicating concerns or feedback to their local water and other resource agency.

Implementation of Community Water Conversation in Big Bear:

The Newkirk team and I arrived at Big Bear at a local community center to prepare for the CWC. We had practiced our presentation and queues on where interns would support and how to best keep the conversation and presentation flowing during the CWC. During set up, water and other

resource managers began to arrive and exchanged introductions. We waited for a prior meeting to conclude before we could go into the room to set up. Water and other resource managers and CWC participants waited out in the hall until set up was done.

The Newkirk team and I set up two projectors for the community, one in Spanish and the other in English. There was also a table set up where information and community resource flyers or business cards were left by the water and other resource managers, SAWPA and our team. A table for snacks was set up and available for CWC participants and water and other resource managers to enjoy. Another intern and I made sure that CWC question/survey cards were taken by each participant to fill out. Once all the participants and water and other resource managers arrived, our team began the presentation.

The Newkirk team provided information about the purpose of the CWC and details of what the Santa Ana Watershed is. Our team took into consideration that those who were attending the CWC may not have attended the prior CLSs and felt that an overview was appropriate. Our team provided information about identifying community strengths and needs across the watershed, in San Bernardino County, and in Big Bear. Within these community strengths and needs, themes were identified in relation to community concerns, issues, or strengths within their community. Key themes that were identified in Big Bear were: Economy, Mobility & Access, Water Quality, Open Space, Governance. Each theme's area of strength and improvement were discussed in the presentation along with questions provided from previous CLS participants. These questions were included in the presentation for water and other resource managers to address during the Q&A segment.

As mentioned, we provided water and other resource managers with these questions before the start of the CWC. During the Q&A segment, water and other resource managers, including SAWPA representatives, sat in front of the room for participants. Each water and other resource manager provided their information, including their position at their respective agencies. From thereafter, water and other resource agency knew which slide they were assigned to respond to the questions. Some questions were related to income, drinking water, high water rates, issues of infrastructure, conservation, and pollution in Big Bear Lake. Once the water and other resource managers had answered the prepared questions, participants could ask questions or discuss

concerns in Big Bear. Few attendees participated however there were questions that were related to the water bond in Big Bear and how that has impacted communities in Big Bear financially. Another question was related to Big Bear Lake and public health concerns. From thereon, the presentation continued with providing information to the public and water and other resource agencies about TA funding. The presentation concluded with ways to get in touch with their local water and other resource agencies and steps moving forward for agencies to work hand in hand with their community.

Project Outcomes

The principal project outcomes included the successful completion of 3 CWCs and the dialogue between community members and water and other resource managers about their experiences in the watershed. The CWC facilitated the distribution of about resources to community members, organizations such as rebates, discounted utility prices, conservation methods and practices, sustainable methods of water and community involvement with the outside environment that includes pollution pick up around Big Bear Lake.

Other project outcomes included the analyzing of question/survey cards that were collected at the end of the CWC. Another intern and I analyzed and shared these question/survey cards with water and other resource managers to respond to or address in later decisions.

Next Steps

The Newkirk Center team will connect back with previous listening session locations that we were unable to coordinate a CWC for the second phase of the DCI project. The Newkirk Center team will share back all the data and information with community members in the watershed in the form of an information graphic. The information graphic will be distributed to community members electronically and the Newkirk Center team will respond to community members and partner organizations if there are questions about the findings.

Conclusion

Through the continuation of my internship, I learned and developed many skills and participated in many roles as an intern. I learned the importance of building relationships with local communities and how inter-agency collaboration can be effective in future decision making. I stress this once more that it is important to seek input and gather data from communities that agencies serve to gain a better understanding of how to serve the public and to determine if future decisions are best reflective of the community, especially those communities who are left out of decision making processes in most cases. Lastly, I learned the importance of being a team player and how working collaboratively with the Newkirk team, outside organizations and water and other resource agencies can make a difference in the project outcome.

This internship has opened new doors for me in my career with water. In January 2020, I began another internship with the Chino Basin Water Conservation District as an Outreach and Public Affairs Intern to gain a better understanding about the importance of community outreach and education to underrepresented communities from a special district perspective. Working with the Newkirk Center during my internship has brought me satisfaction in knowing there are efforts to bridge dialogue among underserved communities and decision makers. I have learned much about the ups and downs that have to do with integrated water management, planning and its effects on underrepresented communities. However, I have grown a strong desire to pursue a career in community outreach and education in the field of water. Being able to work with local communities and water and resource managers towards collaborative decision making has taught me that there is more work to be done in the watershed and I want to take part in that effort. This internship has taught me how to navigate avenues not only within communities but also with public agencies as well and I plan to use those avenues to my advantage in empowering underrepresented communities and encouraging communication, dialogue and engagement from water and other resource agencies. I hope that with the knowledge and experience that I have learned over the past year with the Newkirk Center as a Community Water Intern, I can now apply it to a future career in serving communities, education, public policy and water once now that I have completed my master's program in Public Policy at UCI in June, 2020.

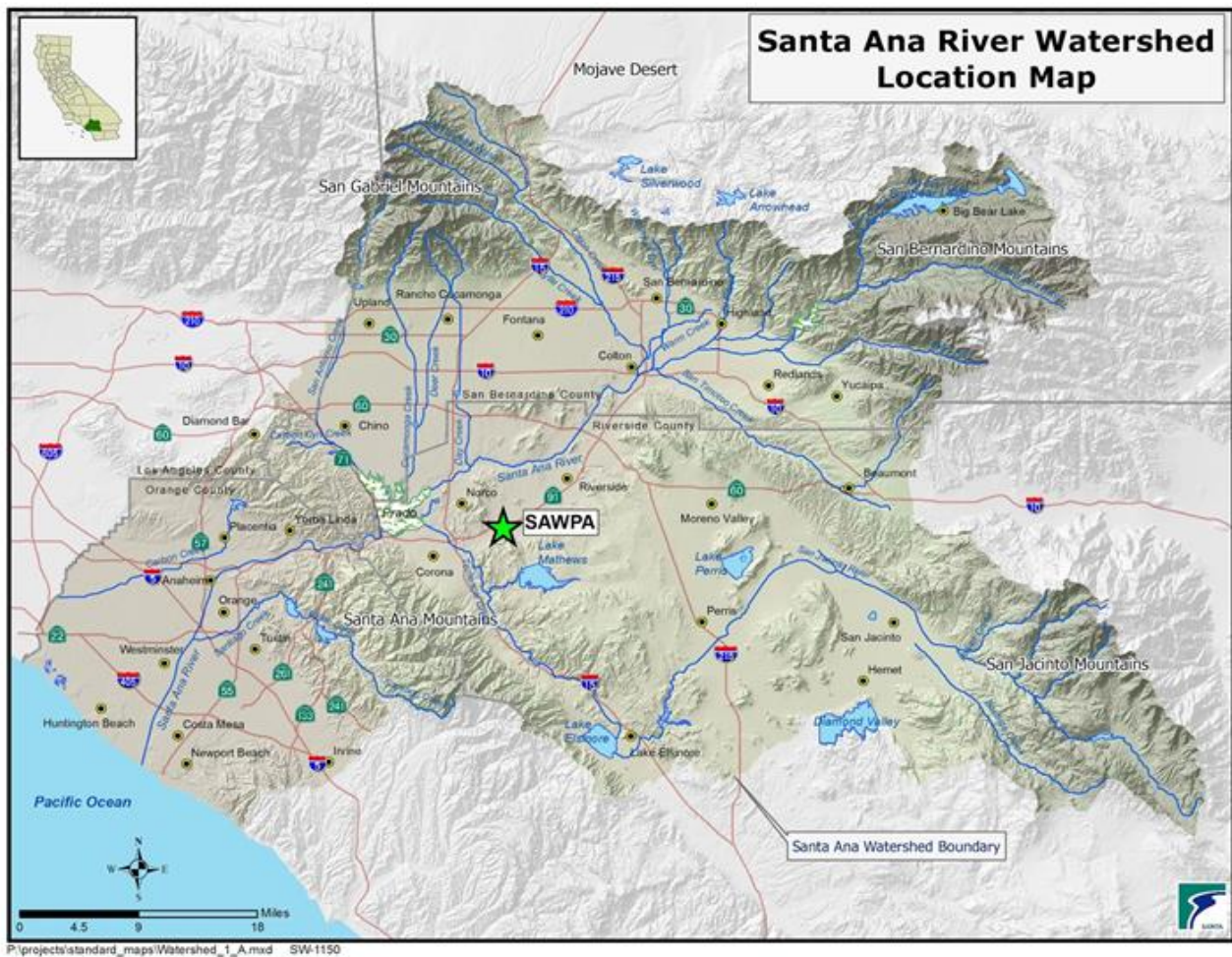
Appendices

Appendix A



Source: "Community Water Conversation held in Big Bear, California," The Newkirk Center for Science & Society, University of California, Irvine (September 2019).

Appendix B



Appendix C



Source: "Community Water Conversation held in Big Bear, California," The Newkirk Center for Science & Society, University of California, Irvine (September 2019).

Appendix D



Source: “Community Water Conversation held in Big Bear, California,” The Newkirk Center for Science & Society, University of California, Irvine (September 2019).