

Sierra Nevada Conservancy-Progress Report

**Sierra Nevada Conservancy Grant Program
Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control
River and Coastal Protection Act of 2008 (Proposition 84)**

Grantee Name: County of Inyo

Project title: Lower Owens River Recreational Use Plan (RUP)

SNC Reference Number: 070321

Submittal Date: 02/29/2012

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Check one:

6-Month Progress Report

Final Report

6-Month Progress Reports should reflect the previous six months. Final Reports should reflect the entire grant period.

Progress Report Summary: (Please provide a general description of work completed during this reporting period.)

In our first six-month report we described these accomplishments:

- Recruited Recreation Planning Consultant
- Held meetings between the Recreation Use Plan Consultant (MIG) and the Inyo County/ LADWP project planning/technical review committee (Management Team)
- MIG completed a review of an extensive list of technical and legal documents related to recreation use in the Lower Owens River Project (LORP)
- Toured the project area with MIG and Management Team
- Interviewed stakeholders, including federal, state, county and local government officials, Owens Valley tribal leaders, LORP area ranchers, conservationists, hunting and fishing groups, civic leaders, LORP recreation proponents, directors of local interpretive organizations, and area business owners.

In our second six-month report we described these accomplishments:

- Transitioned from information gathering to community outreach
- Released the report, *Lower Owens River Recreation Use Plan, Existing Conditions Memo and Map*
- Kicked off the public participation portion of the plan with a two day “rolling charrette”, which offered an interactive workshop experience. The events

were exhaustively promoted through our website, email invitations, newspaper ads and stories, broadcast radio ads, radio news interviews, canvasses of area businesses, distribution of hundreds of posters from Lone Pine to Bishop, one-on-one invitations to stakeholder, and presentations to community and agency groups. More than 80 people participated in the workshops, which were held in Lone Pine and Independence

- Online and printed surveys and questionnaires were developed and distributed at the workshops. Following the workshops these “What’s your Vision” surveys were promoted to non-participants through earned media, news interviews, and community announcements, and were made available on the County of Inyo/LADWP Lower Owens River recreation plan website (www.lowerowensriver.org)

Accomplished in the final months of the project:

- Based on field observations and document review, interviews with stakeholders, public workshops, and survey results, an initial draft of the RUP was developed by MIG and circulated to the County and LADWP
- MIG presented the initial draft to the County/LADWP Management Team
- MIG produced a final draft after receiving comments from the LADWP, County staff and Supervisors, and key stakeholders, including local ranchers
- The final draft was made available to the public on the Inyo County websites; www.inyowater.org and www.lowerowensriver.org. Sixty copies of the plan were published and distributed throughout the Inyo County Library system, and provided to key stakeholders
- The availability of the draft LORP RUP, and the upcoming public presentations of the plan were promoted on County websites, through PSAs and paid radio ads, radio interviews, newspaper announcements, through the distribution of posters from Lone Pine to Independence, by email alert, and by phone calls to stakeholders
- MIG presented the draft LORP RUP to the public at two events. An afternoon presentation was made to the Inyo-Los Angeles Standing Committee* in Independence. More than 40 members of the public attended this meeting. An evening meeting was held in Lone Pine, and at least 34 people attended this presentation, including local business and civic leaders, federal agency personnel, SNC staff, tribal representatives and conservation groups. Surveys were handed out at the meeting and responses were collected and recorded
- Follow-up emails and calls were made to stakeholders who were not able to attend the presentations
- A final report and project accounting was submitted to SNC

* The Standing Committee was created in 1982 under the terms of an MOU between the County and City. The purpose of the Committee is “...to work together to identify and recommend methods to meet the needs

of the Owens Valley and its water users and the needs of the City of Los Angeles and the needs of its users". Although Standing Committee approval of the LORP RUP would not be required prior to consideration by the Board of Los Angeles Water and Power Commissioners, representative on this committee include influential decision makers.

B. Deliverables or Outcomes completed during this Reporting Period or Milestones

Achieved: (Include specific information, such as public meetings held, agency participation, partnerships developed, or acres mapped, treated or restored.)

Four formal Management Team meetings and four public events were held during Phase I planning.

The Bureau of Land Management, CA Department of Fish and Game, National Park Service (Manzanar National Historic Site), State Lands Commission were contacted or participated directly in developing the plan. Local agency participants included the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, Inyo County Planning Department and Water Department, and the Inyo-Mono Integrated Water Management Group. Interest groups that were contacted or participated included, Ducks Unlimited, Western Paddling, Owens Valley Warm Water Fishing Association, California Waterfowl Association, Advocates for Access of Public Lands, Quail Unlimited, CA Trout, CA Cattleman's Association, Sierra Business Council, Lone Pine Fire Safe Council, Lone Pine Chamber of Commerce, Owens Valley Committee, and the Sierra Club. Tribal contacts include the Owens Valley Indian Water Commission, Bishop Paiute Tribe, Big Pine Paiute Tribe, Fort Independence Indian Reservation, and the Lone Pine Paiute – Shoshone Reservation. Educational institutes included the Eastern Sierra Interpretive Center, Owens Valley School, Eastern California Museum, and the Eastern Sierra Institute for Collaborative Education.

There are 77,657 acres of land in the RUP planning area, which include 62 miles of river, 1500 acres of wetlands and nine off-river lakes and ponds.

Based on input from Inyo County/ LA, discussions with stakeholders, and ideas and information provided to them by the public at the community charrettes, MIG produced a draft recreational use plan. The document presents a framework on which to structure final on-the-ground design and features. The plan describes three alternative levels of use to be considered: Option 1 proposes the lowest level of recreation, concentrating use at a few key points along the river; Option 2 adds several areas for recreation and upgrades the types of facilities; Option 3 provides a higher level of service in the number, location and types of facilities.

C. Challenges or Opportunities Encountered: (Please describe what has worked and what hasn't; include any solutions you initiated to resolve problems. If your project is not on schedule, please explain why here.)

Challenge: MIG staff was offered the opportunity to present to the Inyo/ Los Angeles Standing Committee*. The Committee was scheduled to meet in Independence the day of the Independence charrette. We had hoped to make a presentation about the development of the RUP for the LORP and encourage Committee members to participate in the Independence charrette, which was to begin close to their planned adjournment.

Unfortunately the Standing Committee meeting was canceled and this opportunity was lost. Eventually we were able to present to this influential group. This is described below.

*The Standing Committee members include: at least one member of the Los Angeles City Council, two Board of Water and Power Commissioners and three Los Angeles County staff. The Water and Power Commissioners will be asked to review and approve a final LORP Recreational Use Plan.

Opportunity: County staff distributed more than 250 flyers and posters to businesses and offices from Bishop to Lone Pine. Circulating these allowed staff the opportunity to engage business owners in conversations about the project. Much candid information was gathered from these exchanges and passed on to the consultant.

Challenge: Much of the expected growth in recreational tourism on the LORP will come from out of area users, primarily from Southern California. We received a limited amount of out-of-area participation in the Lone Pine charrette, and some input from people in Los Angeles who responded to our survey, but given our budget, we were unable to generate as much out-of-area participation as we had hoped.

D. Unanticipated Successes Achieved: (Please describe any additional successes beyond completing scheduled tasks or meeting scheduled milestones.)

At times, Inyo County and LADWP disagree on water related issues, and relationships can become strained, but on this project we have had good participation on the part of LADWP, and genuine interest in allowing recreational improvements on City of Los Angeles lands.

There had been concern that the public might ask for facilities that were financially beyond reach, or propose uses that are incompatible with the ecological goals of the LORP, or interfere with LADWP’s ongoing needs to maintain their water infrastructure; however the public mostly “got” these limitations and turned their attention to ideas that could conceivably be implemented.

E. Compare Actual Costs to Budgeted Costs: (Please refer to your grant agreement to list your deliverables/budget categories and budgeted costs compared to actual costs incurred during this reporting period in the table below.)

Actual costs are in line with the budget.

PROJECT BUDGET CATEGORIES	Budgeted SNC Dollars	Actual Dollars
Consultants (facilitator and plan writer, travel, lodging, per diem)	\$94,350.00	\$94,350.00
Printing and postage	\$1,000.00	\$986.65
GRAND TOTAL	\$95,350.00	\$95,336.65

F. Do you have information to report on the project-specific Performance Measures for your project? (If so, please list the Performance Measures below and describe your progress.)

- Hire a facilitator and plan writer: **completed**
- Hold stakeholder interviews: **completed**
- Hold two technical review meetings: **completed**
- Hold three public charrettes (workshops) and/or stakeholder meetings/presentations: **completed**. Small group meetings were held with Tribal representatives from Bishop, Independence and Lone Pine; with the MOU Parties (Owens Valley Committee, CA Department of Fish and Game, and the Sierra Club); and with LORP area ranchers. were conducted in Lone Pine and Independence
- Prepare a preliminary draft Recreational Use Plan that will include potential recreational uses, identification of potential adverse impacts, and management requirements for recreational use: **completed**. Consultants prepared a Draft Recreational Use Plan (RUP) for the LORP which was presented to the Inyo County/ LADWP project planning/ technical review committee. Consultants revised the plan and issued a final Draft RUP

G. Were there any other relevant materials produced under the terms of this Agreement that are not a part of the budgeted deliverables? If so, please attach copies. (Include digital photos, maps, media coverage of project, or other work products.)

- *Lower Owens River Recreation Use Plan, Existing Conditions Memo* and map
- Advertising of public meeting (press release, advertising materials, print ads)
- Earned media: Inyo Register, KCET TV, Aquaforia
- Survey: "What's Your Vision"; Initial survey responses (collected at workshops)
- Website see: www.lowerowensriver.org
- Posting of draft Recreational Use Plan on www.inyowater.org/LORP
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H. Next Steps: (Work anticipated in the next 6 months, including location and timing of any scheduled events related to the project.)

Based on broad background research, management meetings with Inyo County and LADWP, discussions with stakeholders; and with ideas and information provide to them by the public at the community charrettes and plan presentations, MIG has in their draft plan, produced three alternative approaches to developing and managing recreation facilities and use. The completion of a Recreation Use Plan requires a period of vetting of the three alternatives, selection of a single plan, fleshing out of that plan (along with

implementation costs and management consideration) and gaining approval of Inyo County and LADWP. Work tasks will include:

- Vetting the three alternative plans with the community using meetings, discussions, and online tools (month 1-4 in Bishop, Big Pine, Independence and Lone Pine)
- Further analysis of the operations, maintenance, and use levels associated with each alternative to aide in making an informed decision about a preferred option (month 3-4 with Management Team in Bishop and Independence)
- Selecting one alternative and developing it further with respect to design features and cost estimates (month 4 with the Management Team in Independence and Bishop)
- Developing financial strategies for implantation, operations & management (month 4 with the Management Team in Independence and Bishop)
- Presenting the final alternative and cultivating additional public input (month 5-6 in Bishop, Big Pine, Independence and Lone Pine)
- Gaining approval of the Project Management Team, County Board of Supervisors, and the Board of LADWP (month 6 in Independence and Los Angeles)

Once final approval is in hand, the County can begin seeking funds for a first phase implementation. Depending on the nature of the facilities envisioned, some level of CEQA, analysis and documentation of impacts will likely be required.

Until a source of funding is identified to complete Phase II, community interest in the RUP will be maintained by continuing to solicit comments on the draft RUP through online surveys, one-on-one stakeholder communications. We will look for opportunities to present the draft plan to local community organizations, and agencies.

Please Complete this Section for FINAL Report ONLY

Capacity-Building Results and Collaboration and Cooperation with Stakeholders:

(What partnerships did you initiate or strengthen as a result of this project? How did they affect the project outcome? If applicable, how did this grant increase your organization's capacity? What is your plan to sustain this increase?)

A considerable effort was made to involve a diverse group of stakeholders in the development of the largely popular recreation plan. In the process of gathering information on the recreation plan were able to learn about the interests of local tribes, and area ranchers that related specifically to the recreation plan, but also opened up conversations about other environmental and management issues in the LORP that are of concern. Following-up on these concerns, and continuing a dialog, allowed us to build stronger relationships with these groups.

Almost universally, the public views the plan as a positive action by the County. The open and inviting public process created goodwill for the Inyo County Water Department

and Inyo County in general. The outcome of the public process produced a constructive and progressive plan that truly reflects what the vast majority of the community had conveyed to the County and the consultants.

The Los Angeles contingent of the Inyo County/ Los Angeles Standing Committee, representing the LA Board of Water and Power Commissioners, Los Angeles City Council, and City administrators and legal counsel, were genuinely interested and supportive of a LORP recreation plan.

Description of Project Accomplishments:

1. Most Significant Accomplishment

Describe in one concise, well-written paragraph, the most significant accomplishment that resulted from this grant.

The long anticipated draft version of the Lower Owens River Recreation Use Plan, a product of broad research, agency cooperation, and extensive public outreach, has been presented to the public. The plan protects the recovering ecosystem, respects traditional values and existing uses, and provides attractive recreational opportunities that are consistent with Lower Owens River Project goals*. The public is very supportive of the project and are eager to participate in crafting a final plan.

**The goal of the LORP is the establishment of a healthy, functioning Lower Owens River riverine-riparian ecosystem, and the establishment of healthy, functioning ecosystems in the other physical features of the LORP, for the benefit of biodiversity and Threatened and Endangered Species, while providing for the continuation of sustainable uses including recreation, livestock grazing, agriculture and other activities.*

2. WOW Factor

If applicable, please describe anything that happened as a result of the project or during the project that is particularly impressive.

During the initial public outreach and scoping phase of the project, it was hoped that the project consultants could present their ideas, and solicit comments from the Inyo Los Angeles Standing Committee. We were interested in learning what the Los Angeles City Council members, and Water and Power Commissioners thought of the project. We had scheduled such a presentation, but the Standing Committee meeting was canceled. We were eventually able to present to these decision makers on the occasion of the public release of the draft plan. We were happily surprised by just how much the group enjoyed the presentation, and how excited they were over the possibility of a planned recreation infrastructure for the LORP.

3. Design and Implementation

When considering the design and implementation of this project, what lessons did you learn that might help other grantees implement similar work?

- Know your audience. Do they care personally and deeply about your project? What is important to them?

- Maximize opportunities to talk one-on-one with all stakeholders
- Get the word out about your project and keep it visible
- Hold participatory planning events to publicize the project and attract earned media
- Generate and maintain a complete stakeholder list (include media contacts)

4. Indirect Impact

Please describe any indirect benefits of the project such as information that has been developed as a result of the project is being used by several other organizations to improve decision-making, or a conservation easement funded by this grant that encouraged other landowners in the area to have conservation easements on their property.

Through the process of developing the RUP a contact list of 300 stakeholders and public participants has been developed. This substantial list can potentially be used by the County, as well as the BLM, Forest Service, National Park Service to communicate with those interested in recreation planning.

5. Collaboration and Conflict Resolution

If you worked in collaboration or cooperation with other organizations or institutions, describe those arrangements and their importance to the project. Also, describe if you encountered conflict in the project and how you dealt with it, or if there was conflict avoided as a result of the project.

Los Angeles Department of Water and Power have participated fully in the process to develop the RUP.

The LORP area is largely rangeland; nearly 100% of the project area is working landscape. Although at a minimum 75% of LORP ranchlands are open to the public year-round, ranchers on LADWP leases graze cattle many months per year. Cattlemen are concerned about the effects that increased recreation might have on their operations. These concerns include cattle gates left open, complaints by users about cattle droppings, cattle/human interactions, and increases in their cost for liability insurance. With or without a recreation plan, ranchers understand that they will be affected by an increasing numbers of visitors. The plan recognizes these concerns and by design keeps facilities away from the most active cattle areas.

6. Capacity-Building

SNC is interested in both the capacity of your organization, as well as local and regional capacity. Please describe the overall health of your organization including 5 areas in need of assistance. SNC is interested in the strength and involvement of your board, significant changes to your staff, size and involvement of membership. In addition, describe how your project improved capabilities of partners, or the larger community.

Overall, the County of Inyo is managing the economic downturn better than most counties in California. This is due in part to continued strength in the three industries that drive the local economy: tourism, recreation and government services.

The County has been praised by a diverse group of stakeholders and the public for initiating the development of a recreation plan. The conservation community sees the County as working hard to plan appropriate recreational use and proactively stem

environmental problems that have occurred elsewhere. Recreation groups view the County's planning as taking a lead in opening up new outdoor opportunities. Educational groups feel the County's support for infrastructure that improves access to their outdoor "classroom". Local businesses and those who profit from tourists recognize the potential value of new outlets for recreation and tourism. Federal and state resource managers will benefit from recreational planning which has largely been absent on neighboring LADWP lands. LADWP can take credit for protecting the recovering LORP ecosystem while providing an enhanced LORP recreational experience for local citizens and City of Los Angeles residents.

7. Challenges

Did the project face internal or external challenges? How were they addressed?

Describe each challenge and any actions that you took to address it. Was there something that SNC did or could have done to assist you? Did you have to change any of your key objectives in response to conditions "on the ground"?

Our largest challenge is obtaining the resources necessary to complete the RUP in a timely fashion. We are facing questions by reporters and the public about what's next and when will the plan be completed. Without a continued funding source there is no easy answer. A concern is that we lose momentum and the public loses interest, or worse, the public loses confidence in the County's ability to complete the plan.

8. Photographs

Grantees are strongly encouraged to submit photos, slides or digital images whenever possible. These images will be used for SNC publications such as annual reports or on the website. Please make sure you clearly identify location, activity, and your project with each submitted image. Images will be credited to the submitting organization, unless specified otherwise.

Enclosed disk

9. Post Grant Plans

What are the post-grant plans for the project if it does not conclude with the grant?

Include a description of the following (if applicable): (1) Changes in operations or scope; (2) Replication or use of findings; (3) Names of other organizations you expect to involve; (4) Plans to support the project financially, and; (5) Communication plans?

Sierra Nevada Conservancy's, LORP RUP, Phase I grant funding concluded with the completion of the draft LORP RUP.

The County is seeking the funds necessary to retain a recreational planner and continue the project as proposed in the scope of the Phase II proposal to SNC. The SNC has offered to help find the talent needed to complete many of the individual tasks associated with finalizing and approving the plan. The services of a professional recreation design team are required to produce a credible product that can be approved by both LADWP and the County and serve to solicit implementation funding.

We will continue to keep the draft plan before the public by presenting the plan to various audiences and collecting comments, but the challenge continues to be how to explain where we're going from here and what's next.

10. Post Grant Contact

Who can be contacted a few years from now to follow up on the project? Please provide name and contact information.

Larry Freilich, County of Inyo Mitigation Project Manager, 760-878-0001.

11. SNC-approved Performance Measures: (Please list each Performance Measure for your Project, as identified in your Grant Agreement, and the results/outcomes.)

Number of people contacted (newspaper and radio advertising): 24,370-26,238

Number of stakeholders, workshop participants, and media contacts on the LORP RUP
Stakeholder mail/email list: 304

Number of acres in planning area: 77,657

Number of people driving by entrances to the project area along Hwy 395 (annual)

Year	2008	2015	2025	2035
People (2.3/vehicle)	4,701,200	5,146,135	5,859,710	6,665,630

Total value of resources leveraged: County contribution: > \$30,000 for project management and professional services, > \$2,500 for advertising and meetings, \$849.64 for administration

Number and type of jobs created:

Consultant team--five professional positions (Principle, Project Manager, Facilitator/Planner, Planner/GIS Analysis, Planning Assistant); County management team—four professional positions (County Administrator, Planning Director, Water Department Director, Mitigation Projects Manager) and one administrative position (Administrative Analyst); LADWP management team—three professional positions (Aqueduct Manager, Environmental Affairs Officer, Watershed Resources Specialist), Plan printing and production-two technical positions (Production Assistant)

New or preserved economic activities (jobs potentially related to recreation):

The local economy is largely based on recreation. New recreational activities associated with the LORP Recreation Use Plan is expected to occur during the spring and fall, which is considered a low-season for recreational tourism. Local beneficiaries are likely to include area motels, restaurants, shops, sporting goods stores, grocers, and guide services. Additionally, project construction/maintenance and law enforcement will require that County and LADWP provide additional human resources.