

**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 Plumas

**Project title:** Planning to Plan

**SNC Reference Number:** SNC 70203

**Submittal Date:** February 6, 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.

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

This is the final and comprehensive report for Plumas County's "Planning to Plan" grant, the goal of which was to better integrate water management among local governments in the North Central Sierra Region. Work on this project was initiated in 2008 and, in early 2009, intercepted the Region Acceptance Process of the California Department of Water Resources under the Integrated Regional Water Management (IRWM) Program. The major outcomes of the project have been:

- Creation of the Upper Feather River Regional Water Management Group, with a Memorandum of Understanding entered into by Plumas and Sierra Counties and a total of more than 30 local, state, and federal agencies and non-governmental organizations.
- Recognition of the Upper Feather River Regional Water Management Group as a formal IRWM region by the California Department of Water Resources through the Region Acceptance Process.
- Coordination with Butte County and Tehama County, which have become part of the IRWM program's Northern Sacramento Valley Regional Water Management Group, including allocation of IRWM responsibilities in the area where the Sacramento Valley and Feather River regions overlap.
- Coordination with Lassen County, part of which is included in the Feather River IRWM region and the remainder of which has been included in a new Lahontan Basins IRWM region.

- Coordination of regional stakeholders in the disposition of PG&E's excess watershed lands through the Pacific Forest and Watershed Lands Stewardship Council.
- Review and comment upon regional and statewide policy initiatives which have important linkages to water and watershed management actions and priorities in Sierra watersheds.
- Progress on emerging issues of concern, including the interrelation of water rights and stream/meadow restoration projects, the integration of multiple state initiatives addressing groundwater, and the relationship between forest and watershed conditions and statewide water supplies.
- Preparation of the Feather River IRWM region for the next steps in the statewide IRWM program, which include submittal of an IRWM planning grant application for the Prop. 84 Round 2 planning grant cycle and beginning work to identify priority projects for the Prop. 84 Round 2 implementation grant cycle.

**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.)

Feather River Regional Water Management Group

This project resulted in an MOU creating the Feather River Regional Water Management group and formal recognition of the IRWM region through the Department of Water Resources Region Acceptance Process. The MOU includes the following parties:

- County of Plumas\*
- County of Sierra\*
- City of Portola\*
- Feather River Coordinated Resource Management
- Feather River Land Trust
- Feather River Resource Conservation District\*
- Gold Mountain Community Services District\*
- Greenhorn Creek Community Services District\*
- Greenville Rancheria
- Grizzly Lake Resort Improvement District\*
- Grizzly Ranch Community Services District\*
- Indian Valley Community Services District\*
- Maidu Summit Consortium
- Mountain Meadows Conservancy
- Plumas Corporation
- Plumas County Community Development Commission\*
- Plumas County Fire Safe Council
- Plumas County Flood Control & Water Conservation District\*
- Plumas Eureka Community Services District\*
- Quincy Community Services District\*
- Sierra County Fire Safe and Watershed Council

Sierra Institute for Community and Environment  
Sierra Valley Groundwater Management District\*  
Sierra Valley Mutual Water Company  
Sierra Valley Resource Conservation District\*  
Trout Unlimited – Feather River Chapter  
University of California Cooperative Extension  
Upper Feather River Watershed Group  
USDA Forest Service – Plumas National Forest  
USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service  
Walker Ranch Community Services District\*

Each agency designated with an “\*” held at least one public meeting under the Brown Act in which creation of the Regional Water Management Group was presented as an agenda item by staff working on the Planning to Plan grant. Public meetings for the Regional Water Management Group itself were also organized and facilitated by staff in both Plumas and Sierra Counties. Attached is a list of the major meetings conducted or attended as part of this grant project.

#### Comments on Regional and Statewide Initiatives

As part of this grant project, regional and statewide initiatives were monitored for their relevance to water and watershed management in the Sierra region and for opportunities presented for integration of objectives. Materials and comments were developed on the following:

- IRWM program and importance to the Feather River region (PowerPoint)
- California Water Plan update (comments)
- Sierra Nevada Climate Action Plan (comments)
- California Climate Adaptation Strategy (comments)
- AB32 Scoping Plan (comments)
- Lake Oroville - forest management impacts on water supply (comments)
- Delta methylmercury TMDL and upper watershed remediation (comments)
- Central Valley Basin Plan amendment for Delta mercury control (comments)
- Strategic Plan for Mercury in the Sacramento River watershed (comments)
- Dept. of Conservation Statewide Watershed Coordinator Program (comments)
- Natural Resources Agency Total Resource Management initiative (PowerPoint)
- California Biodiversity Council Feather River case study (PowerPoint)
- Water rights and stream/meadow restoration projects (PowerPoint)

**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.)

#### Regional Scale

This grant project was originally conceptualized for the Sierra Nevada Conservancy on the basis of the Conservancy's geographic subregions, particularly the North Central region encompassing Sierra, Plumas, Butte, and Tehama Counties. However, while the grant was being implemented, the Department of Water Resources initiated its Region

Acceptance Process to develop and formally recognize IRWM regions, with strong preference for developing boundaries reflecting natural watersheds and the hydrologic regions that form the structure for both the California Water Plan regional reports and the Regional Water Quality Control Board boundaries. As a result of the Region Acceptance Process, Plumas County initiated organization of an IRWM region based on the boundaries of the Upper Feather River watershed, including 98% of Plumas County, significant portions of Sierra, Butte, and Lassen Counties, and fragments of Shasta, Tehama, and Yuba Counties.

The Butte County and Tehama County boards of supervisors ultimately joined the Northern Sacramento Valley Regional Water Management Group, along with Glenn, Colusa, and Shasta Counties, organized largely along county boundaries. Since the Feather River region is based upon a watershed boundary and the Northern Sacramento Valley region follows county lines, there is an overlap between the two regions in the portion of Butte County above Lake Oroville. This regional overlap was required to be addressed by the counties in the course of the Region Acceptance Process. Plumas County staff developed a matrix to assign lead responsibilities to each IRWM region, with the Feather River region leading on watershed and resource issues and the Northern Sacramento Valley region leading on municipal water and wastewater issues tied to the population centers in Butte County. This matrix was submitted by both regions to the Department of Water Resources.

#### Feather River Regional Water Management Group

The Feather River Regional Water Management Group was first conceived as a joint powers authority (JPA) and a number of local public agencies adopted resolutions authorizing participation in the JPA. However, the JPA encountered resistance from some public agencies and stakeholders who were concerned about the creation of a new public agency that might attempt to exercise authority over water rights, water quality, or land use. The IRWM Planning Act allows for a regional water management group to be established through either a JPA or a memorandum of understanding, and the latter approach was more acceptable to the largest range of stakeholders.

One public water agency, the East Quincy Services District, was the only public agency whose board of directors considered participating in the Regional Water Management Group but ultimately declined to join. The district's attorney advised the board that participation could undermine the district's negotiation of tax exchanges with the county government. There has been no basis for such a concern in the seven-year history of the Feather River IRWM program, and there continues to be an open invitation to the district to join the Regional Water Management Group.

#### Water Rights and Watershed Restoration Projects

Over the past decade, concerns have been expressed from time to time in the Feather River region regarding the possible impact that stream and meadow restoration projects may have on downstream water rights and water supplies. In response to a 2005 inquiry to the State Water Resources Control Board, the only advice received was to consult a water rights attorney for guidance. In 2006, the Department of Water Resources'

watermaster for the Sierra Valley and Indian Creek service areas embarked on a project to address questions related to watershed restoration projects, but ultimately abandoned the task after realizing its complexity and controversy.

A fundamental purpose of the statewide IRWM program is to address water use conflicts, and one of the main objectives of the Feather River Regional Water Management Group was to increase the diversity of interests represented in planning and prioritizing actions for watershed management beyond traditional public agencies and watershed groups. This objective was accomplished by expanding the IRWM governance structure to include additional counties, agricultural interests, Native American organizations, and other interested parties.

Concern over water rights and restoration projects came to a head in the summer of 2010 as the result of two separate projects in Sierra and Plumas Counties. The Forest Service constructed a pond-and-plug meadow restoration project on the Little Truckee River at Perazzo Meadows at a location just above a century-old agricultural water diversion. Due to the “recovery effects” of refilling the groundwater in the meadow, water to the diversion was cut off earlier in the irrigation season than normal. Also in 2010, a pond-and-plug project constructed in 2009 on Red Clover Creek in Plumas County suffered erosion damage due to a design/construction error, engendering questions and criticism about water rights and use of taxpayer funds. In response to these two projects and public reaction, the boards of supervisors in both Plumas and Sierra Counties adopted resolutions related to restoration projects and water rights. The Sierra County resolution emphasized the importance of protecting water rights and coordinating projects with the county government. The Plumas County resolution recognized the county’s frequent role as CEQA lead agency in approving projects and established new procedures for analyzing water supply and water rights effects and providing mitigation plans for a range of foreseeable impacts.

The first two restoration projects to undergo CEQA review under the new Plumas County process are currently progressing. Continuing to find ways to reconcile watershed restoration objectives with water rights questions and concerns will be a key issue in the forthcoming update of the Feather River IRWM Plan.

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

This grant project was initiated before the IRWM program’s Region Acceptance Process was established. We were fortunate that the grant project and the RAP were able to converge, and the result was a level of engagement and agreement between a far larger assemblage of local agencies and other stakeholders than we had ever contemplated.

Going forward, the Feather River IRWM program is being viewed as a forum to advance a range of regional issues and programs well beyond mere eligibility for IRWM implementation funding. The Feather River Regional Management Group is poised to coordinate and consolidate a number of regional and statewide programs related to

groundwater, including the California Statewide Groundwater Elevation Monitoring Program (CASGEM), new A.B. 885 regulations related to local government responsibility for monitoring water quality related to septic tanks, and the groundwater water quality component of the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board's Long-Term Irrigated Lands Regulatory Program. Current conditions on National Forest lands have also been identified as a priority issue, with a growing library of data showing that the evapotranspiration losses from unnaturally overgrown forests is having measurable and substantial impacts to California's water supply, including critical inflow demands for the Sacramento-San Joaquin-San Francisco Bay-Delta.

Stakeholder outreach through the Planning to Plan grant also coincided with the processes of the Pacific Forest and Watershed Lands Stewardship Council to dispose of PG&E excess watershed lands. Through the relationships that were strengthened during the Planning to Plan process, Plumas County worked closely with recognized tribes and the Maidu Summit Consortium, the Feather River Land Trust, the Plumas and Lassen National Forests, and other stakeholders to develop a collaborative planning approach to the future ownership and management of PG&E's watershed lands. With the support of Plumas County and other regional stakeholders, the Maidu Summit Consortium has been tentatively designated to receive substantial lands (particularly an area called Humbug Valley in the North Fork Feather River watershed) that were historically inhabited by the Maidu and have very important cultural significance. The Feather River Land Trust has also been identified as the organization that will hold conservation easements over most of the PG&E lands in the Feather River watershed.

**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.)

<b>PROJECT BUDGET CATEGORIES</b>	<b>Budgeted SNC Dollars</b>	<b>Actual Dollars</b>
Administration, coordination, drafting	\$13,045	\$13,399
Government-to-government consultation	\$6,590	\$6,237
State and federal agency consultation	\$12,461	\$8,506
Stakeholder consultation	\$7,370	\$6,686
Elected official consultation	\$8,980	\$665
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>\$48,446</b>	<b>\$35,496</b>

**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.)

*Note: This project was initiated before project-specific Performance Measures were established by the Sierra Nevada Conservancy.*

**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.)

The Region Acceptance Process application is included in the materials provided. These documents traces the history of water and watershed management activities in the Feather River region

**H. Next Steps:** (Work anticipated in the next 6 months, including location and timing of any scheduled events related to the project.)

The grant project is complete. Plumas County and the Feather River Regional Water Management Group recently retained Kennedy/Jenks Consultants and are working on an application for a Prop. 84 IRWM planning grant. The IRWM planning grant will be used to update the 2005 Feather River IRWM Plan to meet new statutory requirements and to address evolving and emerging regional issues, including those identified during the Planning to Plan project.

## **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?)

The 2005 MOU for the original Feather River Regional Water Management Group was entered into by four agencies with responsibility for land and water management: Plumas County; the Plumas County Flood Control and Water Conservation District; the Plumas National Forest; and the Sierra Valley Groundwater Management District. Participation by other agencies and NGOs occurred on an informal and ad hoc basis. Through the Planning to Plan grant, Plumas County reorganized and expanded the Regional Water Management Group to include more than 30 local, state, and federal agencies and non-governmental organizations and established a governance structure that formally recognized a wide range of interests, including:

- County governments
- Native American tribes and interests
- Municipal water and wastewater agencies
- Agricultural interests
- Watershed groups
- Non-profit organizations
- Resource conservation districts
- Economically disadvantaged communities
- State and federal agency liaisons

The organization and formal state recognition of the Regional Water Management Group establishes eligibility for future IRWM planning and implementation funds with a potential value to the region in the millions of dollars. Plumas County is currently preparing an IRWM planning grant application to secure funds to continue the Feather River water and watershed management program.

### **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 most significant accomplishment resulting from the Planning to Plan grant is the organization of a diverse group of stakeholders into the Feather River Regional Water Management Group and the region's formal recognition by the State of California's Integrated Regional Water Management Program. Regional recognition establishes eligibility for future IRWM grants worth potentially millions of dollars to carry out water and watershed planning and implementation projects. In the process of organizing the regional group, new relationships have developed and issues and

opportunities have been identified as priorities for collaborative solutions, such as addressing the connections between watershed restoration projects and water rights and the impact of current forest management policies on water supplies, water quality, habitat, air quality, and rural economies.

## **2. 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?

Particularly for a planning project, there is a lesson to be more open to a range of outcomes that might not be anticipated when the project is initiated. It is impossible to anticipate the opportunities that may arise in the course of a project or the complete spectrum of issues that may be identified, so a certain amount of flexibility should be incorporated from the beginning to respond and adjust the workplan.

## **3. 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.

In establishing the Feather River Regional Water Management Group, the project has created a forum for engagement and collaboration on local issues that go well beyond the prescriptions of the IRWM program. As one example, the Upper Feather River Watershed Group, which is a coalition of ranchers addressing the Irrigated Lands Regulatory Program, has turned to the Regional Water Management Group to help coordinate and operate their program. The relationships established through the IRWM process have also led to inter-county collaboration of water quality issues and the identification of impaired water bodies.

Other IRWM programs, such as the Inyo-Mono IRWM and Lahontan Basins IRWM have consulted with Plumas County staff in the development of their own governance structures and IRWM plans.

## **4. 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.

The reorganization of the Feather River Regional Water Management Group is the embodiment of collaboration and cooperation between other organizations and institutions. The Regional Water Management Group establishes a forum for consensus-based decisions to adopt watershed management plans and prioritize watershed management actions. The group also creates a steering committee

comprised of diverse interests with the authority (with super-majority voting requirements) to resolve disputes and make final decisions on the IRWM program. To date, there have not been any issues that were not decided on a consensus basis and there has not been a need to follow the dispute resolution procedures.

Conflict in the project itself was minimal, such as the discussions described above about whether to organize under a JPA or MOU. Primary objectives of the statewide IRWM program are to minimize or resolve conflicts between water users, and the forum we have established provides the framework for doing so in the Feather River region.

## **5. 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 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.

Developing funding for water and watershed planning and management is an ongoing challenge. Plumas County has reduced the size of its workforce from more than 450 employees in 2005 to less than 350 employees today and continues to grapple with budget issues. The work under the Planning to Plan grant has helped establish eligibility for future IRWM grant funds, which are a critical source of support for proactive watershed work by county government.

A number of Feather River region public agencies and non-profit organizations are currently working on \$7 million worth of IRWM implementation projects under the Prop. 50 phase of the IRWM program. Establishing eligibility for future IRWM grant funding will allow these other entities to pursue new projects and help sustain their organizations and advance their missions.

## **6. 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”?

As described above, the largest change was in the geographic scope of organizational efforts, which came in response to developments in the statewide IRWM program and Region Acceptance Process.

The greatest external challenge faced by the project was educating a diverse array of stakeholders and developing consensus about processes for working together in the future. This challenge was addressed with information sharing and the development of personal relationships through extensive face-to-face consultation with local

agencies and non-governmental organizations over the course of many public and private meetings.

## 7. 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.



Jim Wilcox (r), Program Manager for the Feather River Coordinated Resource Management Group, explains the Red Clover Valley meadow restoration project to officials from the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California and others. (October 2010)

## 8. 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?

The next step for the Feather River Regional Water Management Group is submittal of an IRWM planning grant application to secure funding to update the 2005 Feather River

IRWM Plan. Stakeholders will also continue to use the forum we have created to work on issues of regional concern, such as coordinating various groundwater programs and reforming forest management policies to improve water supply and water quality.

The following agencies and organizations are now members of the Feather River Regional Water Management Group and will participate in the update of the IRWM plan, the prioritization of future IRWM implementation projects, and other regional water and watershed collaboration activities:

- County of Plumas
- County of Sierra
- City of Portola
- Feather River Coordinated Resource Management
- Feather River Land Trust
- Feather River Resource Conservation District
- Gold Mountain Community Services District
- Greenhorn Creek Community Services District
- Greenville Rancheria
- Grizzly Lake Resort Improvement District
- Grizzly Ranch Community Services District
- Indian Valley Community Services District
- Maidu Summit Consortium
- Mountain Meadows Conservancy
- Plumas Corporation
- Plumas County Community Development Commission
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- Sierra County Fire Safe and Watershed Council
- Sierra Institute for Community and Environment
- Sierra Valley Groundwater Management District
- Sierra Valley Mutual Water Company
- Sierra Valley Resource Conservation District
- Trout Unlimited – Feather River Chapter
- University of California Cooperative Extension
- Upper Feather River Watershed Group
- USDA Forest Service – Plumas National Forest
- USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
- Walker Ranch Community Services District

**9. Post Grant Contact**

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

As a general point of contact, please call the Plumas County Administration Office at (530) 283-6315.

The current contact at the time of this report is Randy Wilson, Plumas County Planning Director, who may be contacted at (530) 283-7011 or [randywilson@countyofplumas.com](mailto:randywilson@countyofplumas.com).

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

*Note: This project was initiated before project-specific Performance Measures were established by the Sierra Nevada Conservancy.*