

Tulare Basin Working Group
May 2 tour and meeting
Meeting notes

1. Welcome, Introductions

- **Agency and Organizational Updates:**
 - *Carole Combs* – This meeting represents the 10th anniversary of the Tulare Basin Working Group. The group was formed to help coordinate the activities of agencies and organizations working in the Basin. There were originally two large meetings and everyone shared stories, but there was little coordination. Carole brought in Wil Murray and together they helped organize the TBWG and eventually formed the TBWP. The group has helped the agencies understand each others' roles and capabilities. The first project discussed was Toledo Pit, which needed a permanent water supply. This began a common theme for finding permanent water sources for habitat managers (including water for pre-existing WRPs.)
 - *Ernie Taylor* – Has been with DWR for 29 years and is currently the regional coordinator out of the Fresno Regional Office. Ernie brought along a report including highlights of the current flood future plan, looking at statewide flood management and analyzing risks in terms of life and property. The Tulare Basin's ag economy is at a high risk of a large impact from flooding.
 - *Laurie Schwaller* –Tulare County Treasures (TCT) is unveiling its website, <http://www.tularecountytreasures.org>. The mission of TCT is to celebrate, educate and inspire by telling stories of the history of conservation in Tulare County, highlighting the diversity of places conserved, and the people who steward them. The TCT website currently has 12 articles and 6 videos, but they're hoping to highlight some sites in South Tulare County. To qualify, the site can be a cultural, natural or archaeological treasure; it has to be permanently protected or on a historic or natural registry; it has to be open to the public at least occasionally. TCT videos will be on the local PBS station. TCT is working with the TC Historical Society and TC office of education. They are open to ideas and working with people. TCT can be contacted through their website.
 - *Bea Olsen*: The Sierra Foothill Conservancy has just reached its 25,000 acre goal!
 - *David Hosley*: UC Merced now has 6,000 students and 4 buildings are under construction. David and the UC Reserve team have requested an evaluation of an application for a reserve immediately adjacent to campus. If approved, it will be the largest reserve in the UC system (possibly eventually encompassing 10,000 acres). The Sierra Nevada Research Institute (SNRI) is the largest research institute on campus and growing quickly. UCM/SNRI has been in discussions with BLM

about possibly creating a reserve at Atwell Island; they have made several site visits and had many conversations with BLM and local ranchers. They are now at the point of looking at out-of-the-ordinary approaches for sustainable funding and determining if this project is viable. They need money to operate in perpetuity (a 2 million dollar endowment). There are currently no reserves in the southern San Joaquin Valley. If the reserve happens, it would be multifaceted, examining sociological dynamics, natural systems, ag systems, ag history, groundwater issues, etc.

- *Steve Larson*: BLM is very pleased to have Jihadda on board. They have a vacancy in Tim Smith's former position (field manager) but anticipate having a replacement by June
- *Hilary Dustin*: SRT got a grant to acquire a 22-acre inholding in Kaweah Oaks Preserve. SRT has a letter of intent with the owner and are waiting to see if the owner accepts the purchase price. SRT should know in 2-3 months.

- **NRCS: Discussion of NRCS habitat programs; review/brainstorm on supplying water to 'dry' WRP easements and expanding the WRP program**

- *Elizabeth Palmer*: NRCS easement lands are privately owned and managed by the landowners. NRCS is a tool in the conservation toolbox - an additional partner at the table. The need for water hasn't changed; the only new factor is alternative energy - how are smaller solar programs compatible with NRCS programs? How can NRCS (easements) tie in to areas needing floodwater relief? Where are there connections to provide a relief valve for those floodwaters? Matt Hurley said that the County of Tulare has a "plumbing map" for Tulare County - down to the canal level (it's the FEMA map without FEMA notations). Post-2008 WRPs have stronger eligibility criteria - you have to have a water agreement tied to it; water is obligated to be used for that easement (for systems that need supplemental water.) Projects that have natural hydrology will rank higher than ones that need supplemental water. The WRP program is meeting acreage goals/ running out of funding, but the bulk is going to the north valley. Almost all of the obstacles to expanding the program in the Tulare Basin are related to water. Most of the projects now are smaller riparian systems and vernal pool programs. There would be some value in bringing together representatives from various agencies/water districts and looking at maps to see how to move floodwaters.
- *Matt Hurley*: The current owners of Liberty Ranch (located on the former lake bottom) have committed to talking about a process in which the ranch would be a destination for floodwater (potentially a 100k AF facility). The Wilbur ditch crosses the property and is also at the terminus of the south fork of the Kings river; this may provide a

way to take the pressure off the north fork and bring it down the south fork without damaging ag interests; there may also be an opportunity to bring this water on to WRP easement properties. This location is also at the point where a lateral comes off the state aqueduct; there's no reason that the cross valley canal that got connected in Kern County couldn't be connected in Kings/Tulare counties to serve habitat and water interests. Matt, Carole and Kathy are working with Ernie Taylor and others to move the Liberty Ranch idea forward. The TBWG will be valuable in helping move past the inevitable bumps in the road. There was some discussion about arranging a field tour of Liberty Ranch with the TBWG next fall.

Action items: Sarah will contact Mark Clark w/ Tulare County GIS about acquiring the Tulare County "plumbing" map; Sarah will follow up with Matt Hurley about a TBWG site visit to Liberty Ranch. TBWG members will be available to help with Liberty Ranch obstacles.

- **Central Valley Joint Venture (2:20-3:00)**

- **CVJV's 25th Anniversary Plan Update/TBWG feedback**

Bob Shaffer: The CVJV celebrates its 25th anniversary this year; it was one of the original 6 Joint Ventures. They put out quarterly newsletter highlighting important people and partnerships – and they want to highlight this group (Niki will help.) The CVJV is also updating 2006 implementation plan (which is working off of information from 2003.) They have goals for wetland protection and enhancement and ag protection and are going to include a grassland component. They are currently in the scoping process but hope to have the plan complete by the end of 2014. Securing water for wetlands is the #1 priority. 1992 legislation said that all refuges should have a water supply: the Bureau of Reclamation is responsible, but so far BoR hasn't been able to accomplish that – they buy water on the spot market and don't have money to lock up long term water contracts. CVJV is also concerned about getting people interested in wetlands and waterfowl and is planning to put a human component into their plan. There was a discussion on how to get people (esp. youth and elected officials) interested in nature. Suggestions: open a duck club to the public 1-2 weekends/year; bring people out on field tours/site visits; host an agency brainstorming session on developing programs to engage kids/families.

- **TBWG discussion about potential effects of sequestration on Tulare Basin resource management**

Sequestration limits travel and limits budgets; there's nothing to do but wait. All of the federal agencies dealing with out-of-doors are looking at 5-8% cuts, but could be as much as 30% in two years. We need to re-up our advocacy and outreach efforts and make elected officials understand that resource management issues need to be funded. CVJV has a lobby week; this year 6 partners went on their own dime to visit elected officials to talk about WRPs, water supply, JVs, etc. *Suggestions:* take advantage of electronic petitions etc. to send to legislators; have a tour specifically for elected officials – work around their schedules; highlight successes and shoot it up the line so they know who we are.

- **Southwestern Tulare County focus area: Summary of spring Roundtable events and a discussion of current plans, projects and next**

- *Niki Woodard*: Over the past year, three round tables were held in SW Tulare County (co-coordinated by TBWP, Self Help, Tulare County, and United Way) to pull together stakeholders to discuss projects/quality of life issues, vet problems and determine common solutions with community leaders. On Earth Day, TBWP, BLM, State Parks and roundtable leaders coordinated an event including trash clean up, kid activities, native plant sale, etc. The roundtable participants are now determining next steps and specific projects – especially ones that involve community members and youth. A high priority project is to connect Allensworth and Alpaugh with Atwell Island via a recreational trail. They are open to ideas about how to proceed and possible funding for a planning grant.
- *Denise Kadara*: last year Supervisor Van der Poel provided funding to do summer nights activities for kids and families. There is funding for several activities this summer. There is also funding through United Way to do leadership activities w/ 7th and 8th graders – going to the Museum of Tolerance, visiting colleges, etc. Denise wants to host workshops to bring in people to talk about climate change, other issues. They are also trying to bring in parents to help kids with education, nurturing. This all ties together and they are seeing more community involvement/participation. United Way is also working with Allensworth on a community building initiative; they want to focus on water, youth activities, housing and building repairs. They are also working with Jesse Bahm and NRCS on an organic farming project and Habitat for Humanity to fix up homes. All of these things will make the communities more inviting.
- *Kayode Kadara*: The SW Tulare County region has an issue with arsenic in the drinking water. We have two grants: 1) from the Strategic Growth Council to look at regional problems/solutions for Allensworth and Alpaugh; 2) from the California Dept. of Health to look at improving existing water infrastructure. Matt Hurley has identified two wells within the Angiola Water District that have good quality water; they are working together to figure out how to deliver water from these wells into homes in exchange for the arsenic-polluted water for crops. This grant should pay for the engineering to make this happen. Matt pointed out that there will need to be easements to cover area of the pipeline connecting Alpaugh, Allensworth and Angiola – why not take advantage of these easements to create a recreational trail? Kayode also talked about how to tap in to a natural gas pipeline running west of town and distribute that fuel to homes as a low-emission source of heat, thereby minimizing impact of PM 2.5. Kayode is currently in a discussion with the air district to

get a planning grant to look at extending the natural gas pipeline into Allensworth.

- *Matt Hurley*: There is now an Alpaugh CSD – in its fifth month of operation. The CSD means that the community now has the governance to manage the delivery of water out to its constituents and deal with sewage treatment. Matt/Angiola WD will take tertiary treated water. Matt will be presenting to ACWA about the Alpaugh, Allensworth, Angiola dynamic. Matt has a personal plan to connect all the disadvantaged communities and deliver clean water.
- *Ernie Taylor*: IRWM started in 2003 and didn't include disadvantaged community needs until 2004. DAC involvement is an issue that doesn't have as many solutions as we'd like it to have. The Tulare Lake hydrological region DAC study is trying to address some of them as is a similar study in Kings.
- *Larry Saslaw*: We are trying to recruit professionals to volunteer to do ESA surveys, etc. for good causes/good projects.

Action Items: Send DAC funding opportunities to Denise and Kayode. Niki, Denise, and Kayode are also looking for models of trail programs (suggestions: Rails to Trails, Kern River Parkway, CA Dept. of Parks and Rec grant program, California Conservation Corp, Student Conservation Association.)

- **Tulare Basin Watershed Initiative/Tulare Basin Wildlife Partners:**
 - **Tulare Basin Watershed Initiative (TBWI) Summary Reports: Year 2 May 2012 – May 2013 accomplishments, and Year 3 (May 2013 – May 2014) plans**

Kathy Wood McLaughlin: DACs/General Year 2 activities, Year 3 plans -- Kathy handed out and reviewed the year 3 General Work Plan (*attached: General Work plan year 2 synopsis accomplishment 050513; General Work plan year 3 synopsis for TB IRWMP 050113*) Recent year 2 activities included:

- IRWMs: The TBWI team has been very involved with the IRWM groups. Kathy reviewed projects for Kings Basin and Southern Sierra IRWM groups.
- DACs: Kathy is participating in meetings addressing DAC issues; there is a lot of interest in DACs – including possible funding via Stormwater grants. They are looking to take the roundtable model to Fresno County.
- White River: Kathy met with representatives from the Dept. of Fish and Wildlife (DFW, formerly DFG) on the White River to discuss ways to capture flood waters (and maybe re-direct to WRPs), reducing flooding on upland habitat and Earlimart. A \$50,000 grant has been submitted for conceptual planning, including identifying the plumbing and figuring out where the key connections are.
- Kathy, working with Kern NWR, got a grant from CVCP for \$800,000 to acquire upland habitat owned by Lower Tule Irrigation District – this money will go into the pocket of water districts to do groundwater recharge, restoration, etc. This is an example of win-win solutions.

- Kathy worked with Tasha Newman (w/ funding from CVJV) and others to get \$600,000 planning grant for SSIRWM.
- Outreach and communication – the TBWI website was launched in September 2012, and more recently, an e-newsletter that distributes information relevant to Tulare Basin resource managers. We are open to suggestions on how to make it more relevant to project planners/resource managers. The goal of the TBWI, website and newsletter is to provide resources and a point of connection. Niki recently finished the 2012 annual report (*attached: TBWP 2012 Annual Report*)
- Kathy and Carole met with Matt Hurley to discuss the Liberty Ranch project. Kathy developed an outline addressing logistics, benefits (*attached: TBWP&TBWI.LibertyRanchOutline.draft41013*)

2014-2016 Strategic Plan

- *Niki Woodard*: – Reviewed the draft of the TBWP/TBWI Strategic Plan. (*attached: TBWP Strategic Plan_DRAFT_050113*) **Action Item:** Members of the TBWG to review and provide feedback to Niki (Niki@tularebasinwatershed.org); Sarah (sarah@tularebasinwatershed.org); or Kathy (Kathy@tularebasinwatershed.org). The goal of the strategic plan is to serve as a compass guiding our collaborative efforts in the Tulare Basin for the next three years.
- **Evolution of TBWG – feedback, suggestions, meeting frequency and locations:**

Sarah Campe: A common theme in this meeting and in general is that the TBWP/TBWI team is here to serve the interests of the IRWMs, TBWG and other resource managers in the Tulare Basin. The TBWG has been meeting for 10 years, so obviously something is working, but how can we improve – how can we be even more effective? What do people like? What would they like to change? We have moved meeting dates from Friday to Thursday (to generally positive feedback) and we're working to make sure there's an action plan/next steps tied to each agenda item. *Suggestions/Feedback*: The site visits are good, perhaps more tours and/or visiting potential project sites; the meeting format is good; expand the working group to bring in more elected officials and funders; possibly create specific working committees to address nature and youth, water supplies, etc. Possible meeting places: Farm Bureaus, Maricopa Farms offices, Tulare County rooms, Self Help, LTRID, Edison Center. **Action Item:** Sarah will follow up with Matt Hurley about October visit to Liberty Ranch, call about alternative meeting sites, and look into separate meeting/site visit for elected officials. **Members of the TBWG – Please fill out survey (<http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/ZY9FVCW>). If members would prefer to provide feedback over the phone (or in a more general manner), please email or call Sarah: sgcampe@gmail.com or (559) 640-7050**

- **TBWP/TBWI brochure distribution/appeal**

Carole asked everyone to consider donating to the TBWP. Your contributions build a critical reserve of unrestricted funds that we can apply to other grants as match funding. Thank you.

- **Larry Saslaw: Action Items/Wrap up, including next meeting date and location.**
 - **Next meeting date: Thursday, October 24, 2013. Location TBD.**

Action items;

- 1. Get access to Tulare county river/canal maps – integrate FEMA maps – add to the website natural streams and water management (TCAG – Mark Clark)***
- 2. Add field tours for projects in addition to TBWG meetings; host a tour for congressional officials – congressional outreach; host a tour of a private duck club, integrate value of private lands.***
- 3. Focus on youth for next meeting or subcommittee meeting?***
- 4. Offer feedback to Strategic plan***
- 5. Next meeting will be next-to-last or last Thursday of October – duck clubs will be flooded.***
- 6. Donate to the TBWP***
- 7. Possibility of Liberty ranch for tour – ask Matt Hurley.***
- 8. Fill out TBWG survey! (<http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/ZY9FVCW>) or contact Sarah to provide thoughts/feedback about the TBWG***
- 9. Talk to duck clubs about possibly opening up to the public for special event weekend.***