

**BUTTE COUNTY
DEPARTMENT OF WATER & RESOURCE CONSERVATION
OPERATIONAL PLAN
2009-2010**

MISSION

To manage and conserve water and other resources for the citizens of Butte County.

VISION

To work cooperatively with water agencies, conservation groups, and others to enhance the County's water supply and environment through creative water management; to gain funding for the use of the County's SWP Table A water allocation for recreation, the environment, and groundwater conservation; and to share the County's precious water resources during drought conditions for the benefit of other Californians after all local water needs are met.

VALUES

- *To consider careful input from a wide-range of Butte County's Citizens;*
- *To treat the concerns of all citizens in a courteous and respectful manner;*
- *To respect the policies of the Board of Supervisors and carry them out faithfully and with integrity;*
- *To gain the respect of local, state, and federal water authorities for Butte County's creative water programs;*
- *To secure funding for programs that help all of Butte County's citizens;*
and
- *To implement the elements of the Integrated Water Resources Plan approved by the Board of Supervisors.*

INTRODUCTION

This plan outlines the actions to be taken by the Department of Water & Resource Conservation (Department) in the 2009-10 fiscal year. The programmatic underpinnings for the Department are based on the First Tier Policies identified in the Butte County Integrated Water Resources Plan (IWRP), which were approved by the Water Commission (Commission) and the Board of Supervisors (Board) in 2005. The First Tier Projects identified in the IWRP include:

- Continuing ongoing water resources efforts;
- Improving water management of the State Water Project Table A allocation;
- Protecting recharge areas through zoning;
- Increasing agricultural and urban water use efficiency;

- Developing Basin Management Objectives that support native vegetation;
- Informing and educating the public about water as a vital resource;
- Working cooperatively with the Butte County Resource Conservation District;
- Supporting solutions to potential water shortages in the Ridge Community;
- Implementing a coordinated management program;
- Coordinating regional watershed management
- Taking steps to understand and improve Butte County's water quality;
- Serving as an advocate to improve the understanding of conditions for special status species in creeks and rivers.
- Enhancing a Multi-County Cooperative Outreach Effort
- Further develop cross-departmental relationships
- Continued involvement with the General Plan Update process

As an operational plan, this document represents the tasks that the Department will devote its time and resources toward over the next twelve months. Some of the actions are continuous functions (e.g., Groundwater Status Report), while others are projects that will last for a finite duration or are a one-time occurrence. The Operational Plan includes some potential actions that may occur as an emergency (e.g., response to BMO noncompliance). The actions were organized into headings of Water Resource Management, Interagency and Regional Coordination, Education and Outreach, and Fiscal Summary.

Due to limited availability of County General Fund and the uncertainty of state funded projects, the Department had to reprioritize activities during 2008-09 in response to reduced resources. These fiscal considerations will continue in the 2009-10 fiscal year. The Department will revisit program priorities and take steps to streamline current activities that are dependant upon County General Fund. The Department will continue to seek outside revenue in support of IWRP First Tier Projects. As projects are secured with outside revenue, the Department will shift staff resources from County General Fund activities to projects funded with outside revenue.

The first priority would be to have the two Proposition 50 projects that are under contract but subjected to a stop work order be restarted. Other opportunities are being explored to enhance the sustainability of county water resources. Without the restoration of Proposition 50 grant projects and/or the initiation of new projects by September 30th, current funding can only support 2.5 positions and the Board of Supervisors will reevaluate the Department's budget and consider consolidating the remaining program into another county Department.

WATER RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Groundwater Management

Butte County's groundwater is one of its most precious resources and is the backbone of the County's economy, communities and ecosystem. In 2005, the county adopted a

Groundwater Management Plan that established the goals and actions to sustain our groundwater resources. As referenced in the Groundwater Management Plan, important measures have been enacted to protect groundwater and those who rely on it. Fundamental pieces of our groundwater protection efforts come from the Groundwater Conservation and Well Head Protection Ordinances. These Ordinances provide protection for people who rely on groundwater by regulating groundwater transfers or substitution of groundwater for surface water as part of a water transfer outside the county and by setting standards for wells. The Department requires that any project submitted under Chapter 33 of the Butte County Code (Groundwater Conservation) receive the appropriate environmental analysis, have a mitigation component and assess impacts to neighboring groundwater users. Any project submitted under Chapter 33 will not be approved if it causes unmitigated impacts to existing groundwater users. The Basin Management Objective process, Chapter 33A of the Butte County Code, builds on the Groundwater Conservation Ordinance by establishing a process for determining alert levels at the local level. The Basin Management Objectives (BMOs) are set annually by each sub-inventory unit working through the Water Advisory Committee (WAC) and the Water Commission.

The Department, in cooperation with the Department of Water Resources, assesses groundwater resources through monitoring of groundwater elevation, land subsidence and water quality parameters. These data help to assess measures of changes to our groundwater resources. The network of wells throughout the county are monitored during the months of March, July, August and October. Prior to fiscal year 2008/09 efforts to determine land subsidence throughout the county were concentrated on five extensometers. However, this past fiscal year the Department was involved with other neighboring counties in the establishment of a regional subsidence network which will be a key monitoring tool used by the Department to identify inelastic land subsidence. Assessing groundwater quality can also play an integral role in managing water. The Department will continue to acquire groundwater temperature, ph and electrical conductivity for a sub-set of wells annually. These data are the cornerstone to support our groundwater protection efforts. Without such data the County is destined for inadequate planning and policy decisions. We will continue to support the data documentation process through development of the Butte Basin Water Users Association Annual Groundwater Status Report.

Groundwater Management Actions

- **Support the Groundwater Conservation Ordinance**
There was an increased interest in the Groundwater Conservation Ordinance over the past year. Due to the severity of the statewide drought, the Department of Water Resources developed the 2009 Drought Water Bank (DWB). The Department and the Four County Group (Butte, Colusa, Tehama, Sutter and Glenn) worked with DWR to ensure that the DWB would address local impacts and honor local ordinances that regulate groundwater substitution programs.

- **Implement the Basin Management Objective Process**

The fourth year of the BMO process was a success. The Department prepared and distributed materials to BMO sub-inventory unit representatives and provided assistance as needed. The BMO document for 16 sub-inventory units was completed. The BMO Information Center is fully operational and utilization is increasing. The Department worked with BMO sub-inventory representatives, the Water Advisory Committee and the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) to respond to non-compliance events. The Department held two community meetings in Durham to provide information and to solicit ideas on actions to assist the community.

In prior years, the BMO program was supported in part by outside revenue. However, that is no longer the case. The implementation of the BMO program is solely dependant upon County General Fund support. Working with a subcommittee of the Technical Advisory Committee and the Water Advisory Committee, the Department will initiate a review and streamlining of the Basin Management Objective program (Chapter 33A). The review will include assessing technical, administrative and policy aspects of the BMO program to improve its effectiveness and efficiency. Over the next year, the Department will implement TAC recommendations for streamlining the 2010 BMO document that will allow for the administration of the BMO program with limited resources, incorporate improved methodologies for determining alert levels and identify long term improvements to the BMO program. On-going BMO implementation actions include:

- Prepare and distribute materials to BMO sub-inventory unit representatives;
- Provide assistance to the BMO sub-inventory units representatives;
- Complete the annual Basin Management Objectives (BMO) document for 16 sub-inventory units by March of each year;
- Support the groundwater database;
- Support the BMO Information Center web portal;
- Immediate response to noncompliance events;
 - Coordinate with the TAC investigations of noncompliances;
 - Issued press releases in response to noncompliances.

- **Drought Task Force**

Drought related actions will continue in the 2009-10 fiscal year. Actions will include 1) improving education 2) promoting conservation 3) administering the permit process for any groundwater substitution transfer program (Chapter 33) ; 4) assessing the economic impact of the drought. The goal of the Department will be to insure that the County can anticipate drought related impacts, improve public awareness and secure drought relief funds if available.

- **Groundwater Monitoring and Reports**
 - Monitor groundwater elevation, subsidence and water quality (temperature, ph and electrical conductivity);
 - Assist in the preparation of the annual report for Butte Basin Water Users Association (BBWUA) and submit the report to the Water Commission and the Board;
 - Continuously improve groundwater monitoring through discussions with the Technical Advisory Committee about limitations and improvements to the monitoring network;

- **Assess Groundwater Resources**
 - Initiate the Tuscan Aquifer Monitoring, Recharge and Data Management Study contingent upon bond funding for the project.

Surface Water Management

Surface water is an important piece of Butte County’s integrated water network. Surface water is integral to our economy, communities and ecosystem. The delivery of surface water in the county accounts for nearly two thirds of our water demand, contributes to the overall health of our ecosystem and is integral to the health of our groundwater basins. Many communities, particularly in the Ridge area, rely on surface water, or a combination of groundwater and surface water to meet their needs.

Management of Butte County’s State Water Project Allocation (27,500 acre feet) is a priority for the County. Since Butte County became a State Water Project (SWP) contractor in the 1960s, the County has sought to find in-county uses for the entire allocation. Due to its cost and the current inability to get the water to locations where it is needed, securing in-county uses for the entire 27,500 acre feet has not been achieved.

The Department has been working to secure full in-county utilization of Butte County’s SWP Table A Allocation. Through negotiations with the California Water Company-Oroville and the Del Oro Water Company, the in-county utilization **doubled** in 2008-09 over previous years of requested deliveries. The Department worked with California Water Company – Oroville to amend a memorandum of understanding that will allow them to increase their capacity to draw water from Lake Oroville. The Department has continued work with the California Water Company-Chico to seek funding opportunities to conduct a feasibility study that would investigate options to allow for the utilization of the Table A Allocation in the Chico area. Until full in-county utilization can be achieved (within the next 7-10 years), the Department will continue to pursue opportunities that allow for the management of surplus Table A Allocation. This year the Department administered the second year of an unprecedented 2-year sale of surplus Table A Allocation to another SWP Contractor – Palmdale Water District. Butte County’s ability to sell surplus Table A water provided sufficient revenue to cover the State Table A charges for at least three years.

The Department, in cooperation with Butte County Administration, worked with a subcommittee of the Water Commission to develop recommendations for the disbursement of the Lime Saddle Trust Fund. A recommendation was supported by the Water Commission on September 2, 2008. A resolution was brought to the Board at the end of 2008 to continue the trust fund and set up a framework to bring the program to a successful conclusion.

Surface Water Actions

- Manage the State Water Project Table A Allocation
 - Continue to evaluate alternatives for full utilization of the County's SWP Table-A allocation;
 - Administer contracts with SWP Contractors;
 - Administer the two-year agreement with Palmdale Water District to sell surplus Table A.
 - Continue negotiations with in-county water purveyors on ways to increase in-county uses.

- Lime Saddle Trust Fund – Oversee the disbursement of the Lime Saddle Trust Fund for the construction of the Lime Saddle pipeline upsizing

Environmental and Watershed Protection

The Department is committed to maintaining and enhancing the environment. There are many elements of the IWRP that are related to the environment, water quality and watershed coordination.

The Department has secured funding to contract with the University of California, Davis to produce a watershed model. The concept is to use the model as a tool to manage the resource, and to provide inflow data to the groundwater model. However, due to the State's fiscal crisis, the project was stopped in January 2009.

Understanding threats to water quality and improving water quality in Butte County are important aspects of resource stewardship. Known constituents affecting the County's water quality include nitrates, organic chemicals, sediment, and heavy metals. In 2001 the County adopted an Environmental Monitoring Program that became a cornerstone of the IWRP. The Board also approved further work on environmental monitoring when it approved the IWRP in May 2005. The department in cooperation with CSU Chico will submit an Environmental Monitoring Program proposal to the CALFED Science Program.

Environmental and Watershed Protection Actions

- Conduct the WEHY watershed model study through the University of California, Davis.
- Continue to partner with the Butte County RCD and watershed groups on environmental and watershed projects.

- Resume the education and outreach program with five watershed groups once state monies are released and a resume work order is issued.
- Seek funding for the Environmental Monitoring Program.

INTERAGENCY AND REGIONAL COORDINATION

Managing our groundwater resources involves not only oversight of activities within the County but also requires coordination across our region. Since water resources transect county boundaries, the County is actively working towards sound management of water resources. Butte County entered into an agreement with Colusa, Glenn and Tehama counties in 2006 through the Four County Memorandum of Understanding (Four County Group). The Four County MOU established a foundation for improved water management coordination among the counties that share common aquifers and interests. The Four County Group was expanded in 2009 to include Sutter County. This larger group have all signed an addendum to the MOU committing to the development of a five county integrated regional water management plan.

Interagency and regional coordination is essential for water resource management. Within Butte County, the Department collaborates with other agencies and organizations to fulfill our mission. The interconnectedness of flood management, water quality and land use planning (e.g., General Plans) can play a significant role in water resource management.

Interagency and Regional Actions

Four County Group

The Department continued to coordinate regional water resource issues through the Four County Group (Butte, Glenn, Tehama, Colusa and Sutter). Earlier in 2008, the Four County Group and the Regional Water Partners undertook a stakeholder assessment of the Four County Group through support from DWR. The assessment, prepared by the Center for Collaborative Policy, was based on interviews with approximately 45 regional stakeholders. A final report was issued at the end of 2008. Preparations for a water forum to improve the regional dialogue on water resources had to be put on hold due to the State's fiscal crisis. Interest in the Four County Group from other counties in the region has increased. Sutter and Shasta counties routinely participated with the Four County Group. Over the past month actions have been brought forward to amend the Four County MOU to add Sutter County. Additionally, the Four County Group has completed a Regional Acceptance Process (RAP) application to pursue funding through Proposition 84 to develop an integrated regional water management planning process for the five-county area. The goal will be to secure Proposition 84 funding to develop an integrated regional water management plan for the region with the participation and support of regional stakeholders. The first step in 2009-10 will be to go through the DWR Regional Acceptance Process. Other Four County Group priorities include:

- Administer the BMOIC in cooperation with the Four County group

- Continue to develop the Four County Group Integrated Regional Water Management Plan.
- Share information regarding grant applications, water transfers, monitoring and other program elements.

Butte County General Plan Update

The Department worked closely with the Department of Development Services in providing technical support and policy alternatives for the General Plan Update. The Department assisted the Sierra Nevada Alliance and the League of Women Voters in conducting a workshop on watersheds and the General Plan. A subcommittee of the Water Commission was instrumental in preparing the recommendations for the Water Element component of the General Plan. The Department will continue to work with the Department of Development Services and the Water Commission to prepare water related recommendations for consideration by the Board of Supervisors for the final General Plan.

Delta Vision Process

To remedy the problems with the Delta, the Governor initiated the Delta Vision process. The proposals included a reduction in surface water diversions, change to water rights and a new governance structure for managing water on a statewide basis. Reducing surface water diversions in our region could have serious impacts to our water resources, environment and economy. In August, Butte County in cooperation with the Four County Group submitted comments to the Delta Vision Blue Ribbon Panel. The Bay Delta Conservation Plan (BDCP) process complements the Delta Vision initiative by seeking a solution to the habitat concerns in the Delta. The centerpiece of the BDCP process is the creation of a dual conveyance facility. The Department has prepared comments on various aspects of the Delta Vision process in coordination with the Four County Group and the Regional Council of Rural Counties. The Department is participating on legislative workgroups related implementation of the Delta Vision process.

EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

Fostering public knowledge and understanding of water resources will create a heightened culture of resource stewardship. The County will continue its efforts to educate the public about local water resources and issues.

The Department gained major momentum for outreach with the grant effort that included five local watershed groups. Through this project, two key successes were achieved during the year. First, the Department completed an initial survey to understand the public's knowledge of water resources. Second, a workshop entitled, "Be Water Smart and Fire Safe in a Rural Environment" was held. On January 21, 2009 a stop work order as issued by the state due to their fiscal crisis resulting in the termination or suspension of funding for these valuable programs.

The department participated in numerous settings to provide education and outreach on water resources. The venues include professional organizations (Chamber of Commerce, Rotary Club, Association of Civil Engineers), academic settings (CSU Chico, high schools), and other public agencies and Butte County Departments.

The Department coordinated a workshop on the Delta Vision Process for the Northern Sacramento Valley Water Forum and in cooperation with the UC Cooperative Extension organized a bi-annual Water Awareness Workshop focused on the drought.

Education and Outreach Actions

- Conduct public education and outreach through partnership with five watershed groups contingent upon the funding being restored.
- Continue to compose and circulate the newsletter, *WaterSolutions*, on a monthly basis
- Develop the outreach components of the Tuscan Aquifer Monitoring, Recharge and Data Management Project contingent upon the funding being restored.
- Continue to provide leadership for the Northern Sacramento Valley Water Forum.
- Continue to provide outreach to BMO sub-inventory unit stakeholders through community forum meetings.

2009-10 FISCAL SUMMARY

❖	Estimated Department Operating Costs	\$570,512
	○ Revenue	
	▪ Miscellaneous	\$110,000
	▪ Projects	\$133,767**
	▪ Net County Costs	\$326,745
❖	County General Fund Contribution Comparison	
	○ 2008/09	\$478,530
	○ 2009/10	\$326,745

** Estimated revenue from two projects that are currently subject to a stop work order.