Water System Needs Assessments in Small, Rural, Disadvantaged Communities

Holly Alpert, Ph.D.
IRWMP Coordinator
California Rural Water Association
Overview

- Two hats: CRWA staff and IRWMP practitioner
- Rural/DAC/desert/headwaters perspective

- Needs assessments through CRWA
- Inyo-Mono IRWMP needs assessments
- Indicators of unsustainability
- Recommendations
Mission: To provide training, technical assistance, resources and information to assist water and wastewater utilities in achieving high standards of service.

- Programs that include formal needs assessments:
  - State Revolving Fund through SWRCB
  - Prop. 1 Technical Assistance to DACs through SWRCB
  - Integrated Regional Water Management Program
  - Tribal program
Mojave IRWMP: Small Water Systems Program

- Partner with Mojave Water Agencies
- Work with 40 small, DAC water systems in region
- Menu of services
  - Needs Assessment
  - Rate Analysis
  - Corporate Compliance Reviews
  - Drought /Water Conservation Planning
  - Energy Efficiency
  - Preliminary Engineer Pre-App and Application Funding Support
- ACWA Clair Hill Award for Excellence in 2016
- [http://www.smallwatersystems.org/](http://www.smallwatersystems.org/)
IRWM Disadvantaged Communities Involvement Program

- A primary objective: conduct DAC needs assessments throughout CA to develop statewide snapshot of need
  - Initial step in larger process of helping DACs
- CRWA working in several areas: Lahontan Funding Area, Santa Ana Watershed Project Authority Funding Area, Sacramento River Funding Area
- Similar outcomes to other programs but requirements differ slightly
  - Attempt to standardize or at least share information among regions
Inyo-Mono IRWM Region

- Representative of IRWM experience but with regional differences
- Assessing needs since Day 1 as part of IRWM process
- Formal and informal needs assessments:
  - Formal: Meeting between CRWA & water system to complete NA form
    - 32 NAs funded through Prop. 84 planning and DAC grants, now Prop. 1 DACI
  - Informal: Learn through outreach: public meetings, one-on-one meetings, daily correspondence
Inyo-Mono: what we learn - specifics

- Infrastructure
- Technical, managerial, financial (TMF)
- Projects

- Sample findings
  - Lundy Mutual Water Company
  - Big Pine Paiute Tribe & Big Pine CSD
  - Keeler CSD
Inyo-Mono: what we learn regionally

- Regional trends
  - Technical: contamination issues, aging infrastructure
  - Managerial: staff & board turnover, lack of records, lacking written operator instructions & job responsibilities, water conservation plans, emergency prevention
  - Financial: lacking 5-year budgets, capital improvement plans, project needs
- Challenges: long travel distances, skeptical community members, difficulty communicating & scheduling, busy staff & board members
Inyo-Mono: what we learn – big picture

- Needs change over time
- Regular & repeated contact important
- On-site visits
- Listening
Five indicators of unsustainability

1. Lack of attention to rates
2. Lack of attention to system maintenance, repairs, replacement
3. Lack of support and understanding in community
4. Turnover of staff and board members
5. Lack of expertise, know-how among board and staff
Recommendations to State

- Utilize what IRWM process & practitioners already know
- Utilize IRWM practitioners and networks for future assessments
- Utilize service providers (CRWA, RCAC, others) who have experience doing assessments
Thank you!

Holly Alpert, Ph.D.  
IRWMP Coordinator  
California Rural Water Association  

1234 North Market Blvd.  
Sacramento, CA 95834  
www.calruralwater.org  
halpert@calruralwater.org  

P: 760-709-2212  
F: 916-553-4904