



FY 2024 WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Program Phase I

New Watershed Groups

Arizona

Arizona Association of Conservation Districts, *Empowering Water Sustainability in the Sulphur Springs Valley*

Reclamation Funding: \$299,765

The Sulphur Springs Water Alliance, in collaboration with the Willcox-San Simon Natural Resource Conservation District, will develop a watershed restoration plan that will lead to future water recharge and conservation projects in 12 sub-basins across the San Pedro-Wilcox and Rio De Bavispe watersheds in southeast Arizona. This watershed area overlays the Douglas and Willcox groundwater basins, which are decreasing in elevation due to unsustainable groundwater withdrawals. This groundwater depletion has resulted in significant conflict between water users within the region and land subsidence, resulting in worsening erosion, earthen fissures, and damage to property and infrastructure. Conflicts over groundwater in the region will likely increase with climate change, as temperatures are predicted to increase and precipitation to decrease. The Alliance will initiate a collaborative process between stakeholders representing local businesses, school boards, agricultural interests, local government, and utility companies to address these concerns through community outreach the development of a comprehensive watershed restoration plan.

Tucson Audubon Society, *Development of Sonoita Creek Watershed Working Group and Creation of Watershed Restoration Plan*

Reclamation Funding: \$297,1812

The Tucson Audubon Society will develop a watershed group and create a watershed restoration plan for the Sonoita Creek Watershed in Southern Arizona. The Watershed is a hotspot of regional biodiversity, but increases in activities such as mining, agricultural irrigation, ranching, and municipal development have put pressure on the unique habitats and species of the area. In 2020, the Society, in partnership with the Town of Patagonia, began developing a watershed conservation plan that identified gaps in data and in stakeholder engagement. The newly developed watershed group will use the 2020 plan to inform the watershed restoration plan developed through this grant. The group will create a steering committee, solicit public input, organize stakeholder workshops, and write a new watershed plan that will identify gaps in data and future projects for habitat restoration. The watershed group will represent local government agencies, non-profits, and academic institutions.

California

Cache Creek Conservancy, *Forming a Stewardship Group for the Lower Cache Creek Watershed*

Reclamation Funding: \$299,667

The Cache Creek Conservancy, located on the western slopes of the Sacramento Valley in Yolo County, California, will create a new watershed group to support the Lower Cache Creek. Over the last several years, severe storms, wildfires, and periods of drought have become more frequent due to climate change, putting pressure on a watershed that sustains vital agricultural, tribal, and environmental interests. The new group will develop a knowledge base incorporating current trends in water supply and demand, environmental flows, and management of ecological communities in the watershed; engage landowners and other stakeholders in an

agreed governance structure that can build consensus on a watershed sustainability plan. Key stakeholders include the Yolo Flood Control and Water Conservation District, the Yocha Dehe Wintun Nation, a water user association, community service districts within the watershed, and several nongovernmental organizations addressing social and environmental concerns. The watershed plan will address the overlapping concerns of water supply, water quality, and ecological health, and resilience to fire, drought, and floods.

Napa County Resource Conservation District, *Developing a New Watershed Group in the Napa River Watershed of California*

Reclamation Funding: \$300,000

The Napa County Resource Conservation District, in collaboration with the nonprofit Abuelitos Foundation, will establish a new watershed group for California's Napa River Watershed. Currently, unsustainable levels of groundwater extraction, sedimentation, and climate change have exacerbated issues of water quantity and quality. This new group will bring together a diverse set of stakeholders including agricultural users, residents, environmental organizations, and governmental water managers to improve sustainable water management practices in the Napa Valley. Additionally, a watershed coordinator will be hired that will focus on developing collaborative relationships between stakeholders, organizing outreach, and facilitating events focused on constructive dialog about sustainable practices in the watershed. The new group will also develop an outline of a Napa River Watershed Restoration and Management Plan that will help prioritize future planning and projects.

TreePeople, *Santa Clara River Watershed Regional Climate Collaborative*

Reclamation Funding: \$300,000

TreePeople will develop the Santa Clara River Watershed Regional Climate Collaborative, a new watershed group focused on the Santa Clara River in southern California. This group will create a strategic watershed restoration plan to focused on addressing issues of invasive riparian plants, drought, flooding, and repeat wildfires, all of which have been exacerbated by climate change. Currently, numerous restoration projects from individual groups are spread throughout the river, however the scale of current issues will require unified coordination. The Collaborative will bring together diverse stakeholders including academic institutions, recreational organizations, private businesses, landowners, and NGOs to establish a formal multi-partner, multidisciplinary watershed group that efficiently serves the whole watershed. The newly formed watershed group will host monthly meetings, conduct quarterly field surveys, perform community outreach, and ultimately create a comprehensive Watershed Restoration Plan to identify cross-jurisdictional solutions that address drought, wildfire risks, habitat restoration, and improved river access for nearby communities.

Texas

Caddo Lake Institute, Inc., *Caddo Lake Watershed Collective: Improving Water Quality and Quantity*

Reclamation Funding: \$100,000

The Caddo Lake Institute will establish a new watershed group focused on protecting and restoring water quality and quantity in Caddo Lake, a state park near the eastern border of Texas. The lake and park are currently facing poor water quality due to high levels of nutrients. This nutrient loading from herbicides and pesticides in the watershed has contributed to the establishment of invasive vegetation. Caddo Lake is a priority wetland in the region, and as such planning will include local and national environmental groups, environmental scientists, citizen organizations, agricultural and recreational industries, nearby research institutes, local, federal, and county government. This watershed group focus on a plan to protect, improve, and restore these wetlands by hiring a watershed coordinator, gathering up-to-date water quantity and quality data in the region, investigating the drivers of pollution, and coming up with action items to inform a future watershed plan focusing on restoring and protecting the Lake.

Great Springs Project, Inc., *Lower Colorado River Watershed Restoration and Access Plan: Aligning Multiple Uses in the Urban Watershed*

Reclamation Funding: \$300,000

The Great Springs Project, in collaboration with The Trail Conservancy and the Travis County Parks Foundation, will assemble a diverse partnership of stakeholders to develop a Watershed Restoration and Access Plan. The plan will focus on a highly urbanized section of the lower Colorado River around Austin,

Texas. The partnership is a collaborative of entities with interest in water quality and supply, riparian habitat, public access, and other priorities in the project area; stakeholders include two counties, state governmental entities, utility providers, major employers in the area, and social and environmental justice organizations. Located in one of the fastest growing urban areas in the state and nation, this segment of the Colorado River is adjacent to downtown Austin, in an area with current and future impacts from intensive land use development. The plan will guide the implementation of a range of strategic projects, including those that center on restoration, public access, land development, resource extraction, and infrastructure needs, for balancing multiple needs along the river in the context of Austin's rapidly changing demographic and climatic conditions.

Existing Watershed Groups

Alaska

Kenai Watershed Forum, *Kenai River Water Quality Action Framework - Part II*

Reclamation Funding: \$161,058

The Kenai Watershed Forum, located in southcentral Alaska, will work with stakeholders to develop cooperative management strategies to maintain the Kenai River's water quality. The Kenai River is a stronghold for wild Pacific salmon, but development, climate change, and intensive recreational use threaten water quality and freshwater habitat. The Forum consists of an established group of local, state, federal, and tribal governmental entities. They will ensure that water quality data is accessible in an online interactive interface, engage stakeholders to guide planning efforts, and produce a Kenai River Water Quality Action Framework to serve as a foundation for water quality management in the Kenai River watershed.

California

Contra Costa Resource Conservation District, *Walnut Creek Watershed Restoration Plan*

Reclamation Funding: \$298,000

The Walnut Creek Watershed Council will complete a community-supported Watershed Restoration Plan for the Walnut Creek Watershed in the San Francisco Bay Area. Due to the heavily urbanized nature of the watershed, issues of uncoordinated and sometimes conflicting priorities, floodplain blockages, water quality, flooding, wildfires, aging infrastructure, and habitat degradation will be considered in the planning process. The Council will work to develop a data-based plan to coordinate actions at the watershed level, prioritize projects, and develop design plans to improve watershed health and function. These designs will implement nature-based and multi-benefit creek restoration projects that enhance fish and wildlife habitat, water quality, and climate resilience while maintaining and improving the sustainability of flood protection.

Orange County California, *North and Central Orange County Watershed Management Areas Community Engagement*

Reclamation Funding: \$300,000

The North and Central Orange County Watershed Management Area spans a heavily urbanized and populated region along the southern California coast, south of Las Angeles. The Management Group within the area, in collaboration with Orange County, has identified meaningfully engage with Tribal, disadvantaged, and other underrepresented communities as a key need within the watershed to ensure diverse representation within the group. The Management Group will develop and implement developing and a comprehensive and targeted outreach and engagement strategy. The partners involved with this effort will include local cities, water districts, non-profits and environmental organizations, the local groundwater basin authority, regulatory agencies, real estate development groups, homeowners' associations, and residents. By improving engagement of and communication with underrepresented communities in the area, the Management Group will be able to better address water supply reliability and water quality concerns in the future. Currently, the two most critical needs in the management area.

Orange County California, *South Orange County Watershed Management Area Community Engagement*

Reclamation Funding: \$280,000

The South Orange County Watershed Management Area encompasses the San Juan Hydrologic Unit in the southernmost portion of the County of Orange, south of Newport Beach and north of San Diego County, California. The Management Group within the area, in collaboration with Orange County, has identified meaningfully engage with Tribal, disadvantaged, and other underrepresented communities as a key need within the watershed to ensure diverse representation within the group. The Management Group will develop and implement developing and a comprehensive and targeted outreach and engagement strategy. The partners involved with this effort will include local cities, water districts, non-profits and environmental organizations, the local groundwater basin authority, regulatory agencies, real estate development groups, homeowners' associations, and residents. By improving engagement of and communication with underrepresented communities in the area, the Management Group will be able to better address water supply reliability and water quality concerns in the future. Currently, the two most critical needs in the management area.

North Coast Resource Conservation & Development Council, *Developing A Collaborative Watershed Group–Russian River Confluence*

Reclamation Funding: \$300,000

The North Coast Resource Conservation and Development Council, in partnership with the non-profit Conservation Works, will further develop the Russian River Confluence collaborative. The collaborative represents a diverse group of stakeholders which includes public agencies, nonprofits, industry representatives, tribal partners, and individual community members. The collaborative's area of focus, the Russian River Watershed, is an area starting north of the San Francisco Bay and extending into the Pacific Ocean in northern California. Pressures from development and climate change are exacerbating competing needs for water, including providing drinking water, supporting agriculture, and providing habitat for endangered species. The collaborative will focus on initiating collaboration between stakeholders to develop projects and action plans. The Council will develop a program charter, creating a 5-year strategic plan, conducting outreach, hosting a state of the watershed conference, and collecting watershed data.

Sierra Institute for Community and Environment, *Feather River Stewardship Coalition Revitalization*

Reclamation Funding: \$194,448

The Sierra Institute for Community and Environment will further develop the Feather River Stewardship Coalition, a watershed group based around the Feather River Watershed located along the Sierra Nevada in northeastern California. Following a series of severe wildfires, local stakeholders identified a lack of a collaborative response between the various established groups in the region. Increasing wildfire severity and the limited operational capacity of individual groups have highlighted the need for a long-term strategy for the Watershed. The Institute plans to reengage stakeholders including several nearby counties, the U.S. Forest Service, local fire departments, community environmental organizations, tribes, and private landowners. These planning efforts will include forming a steering committee, conducting work with partners to produce a watershed restoration plan, and developing a 20-year implementation strategy for the prioritized actions.

Solano County Water Agency, *Lower Putah Creek Watershed Management Plan Update: Inter-Dam Reach and Tributaries*

Reclamation Funding: \$297,712

The Lower Putah Creek Coordinating Committee and Putah Creek Council will coordinate their existing efforts, in collaboration with Solano County Water Agency, in the Putah Creek Watershed located between San Francisco and Sacramento in Solano County, California. These groups represent a diverse group of stakeholders including agricultural, municipal, and industrial water users, environmental organizations, water agencies, a university, and disadvantaged communities. Solano Creek faces issues of erosion, disruptions of drinking water supplies, increasing risk of wildfire, and subsequent negative effects on salmonid spawning. The groups will update the Lower Putah Creek Watershed Management Plan. In response to fires, rock vanes have been constructed to trap expected mud and ash flows to protect the water supply. This plan will look at creating new rock vanes and augment existing rock vanes on all tributaries, while also determining additional restorative actions.

Tulare Basin Watershed Partnership, *Sequoia to the Sloughs Working Group*

Reclamation Funding: \$299,675

The Tulare Basin Watershed Partnership, located along the Sequoia National Forest near Fresno, California, will continue to develop stakeholder relationships and develop a watershed plan in the Tulare Basin. For several decades, drought, bark beetle infestation, and high-intensity fires in the forested upper watersheds have negatively impacted the overall watershed. In addition, unprecedented widespread flooding in 2023 had lasting impacts on frontline communities and their agriculture-based economies. The Partnership will develop and facilitate a diverse watershed working group including community nonprofits, university researchers, agricultural groups, and specialists in natural resource management, focused on the Sequoias to the Sloughs Initiative for the Deer Creek and Tule River Watersheds. The Partnership will also develop a Watershed Improvement and Protection Implementation Plan which will be an integrated approach to watershed and water resources management for multi-beneficial uses aimed at mitigating the impacts of extreme climatic events in the region.

Tuolumne County Resource Conservation District, *TStan Watershed Resilience Plan*

Reclamation Funding: \$155,363

The Tuolumne-Stanislus Integrated Regional Water Management Collaborative, in partnership with the Tuolumne County Resource Conservation District, will update their existing water management plan with the goals of increasing water supply sustainability through investment in local infrastructure. The Plan encompasses multiple watersheds across 2,700 square miles on the western slope of the Sierra Nevada near Modesto, California. Surface water resources are the primary source of potable water for residents. However, 98% of these water supplies are provided to users outside the region. Additionally, the surface water conveyance systems are aging; many were built in the second half of the 19th century. The updated Regional Plan will outline high-priority actions to collaboratively address the many major water-related challenges and needs within the basin. The Collaborative includes local special districts, tribes, federal agencies, and non-governmental organizations that collectively work on issues of water quality and supply, integration of water and land use management, resource stewardship and ecosystem protection.

Colorado

Ducks Unlimited, Inc., *Lower Saguache Creek Flood Irrigation Infrastructure Restoration Planning and Design Project*

Reclamation Funding: \$300,000

The Rio Grande Headwaters Restoration Project, in collaboration with Ducks Unlimited, will work with private landowners and other partners to design agricultural infrastructure upgrades and associated river and wetland restoration projects identified in the Saguache Creek Stream Management Plan. The Plan focuses on a portion of the lower Saguache Creek and its floodplain in south-central Colorado. The Saguache Creek watershed is vulnerable to several critical threats and issues including declining ecological resiliency, water supply shortages, endangered species concerns, drought impacts, aquatic and riparian ecosystem degradation, and conflicts over water supply. The watershed group design updates to headgate diversions, ditch systems, streambank stabilization, habitat enhancement and wetland restoration to deliver water more effectively and efficiently for agricultural purposes, while protecting important resources for wildlife and endangered species. The watershed group includes landowners, agricultural irrigators, community organizations, recreational, industrial, and environmental interests.

Learning By Doing Inc., *Coordinated Watershed Management in the Colorado River Headwaters*

Reclamation Funding: \$126,013

Grand County Learning By Doing is a collaborative, locally led group of agricultural, industrial, state, federal, and nonprofit stakeholders working to improve the aquatic environment at the headwaters of the Colorado River in northern Colorado. The challenges of transmountain diversions, drought, and climate change require coordinated restoration and maintenance of the headwater streams that deliver vital water supplies to Colorado's Front Range. Learning By Doing will support public awareness and critical engagement; organized

and informed, consensus-based decision-making; implementation of habitat and stream restoration projects; water quality monitoring; and coordinated water operations while finalizing the updated Grand County Stream Management Plan.

South Platte Coalition for Urban River Evaluation, *South Platte Denver - Urban Watershed Needs Assessment*

Reclamation Funding: \$294,027

The South Platte Coalition for Urban River Evaluation will conduct a Watershed Needs Assessment of the aquatic resources and water conditions in the upper section of the South Platte River Basin located in the Denver metro area of Colorado. The South Platte River is an integral resource which provides supply for drinking water and agricultural irrigation, serves as a center for recreation, and provides habitat for diverse fish and macroinvertebrate communities. However, the heavily urbanized river reach is highly channelized and impacted by urban runoff, warming waters, and point and non-point source pollution. The Coalition will conduct biological monitoring to assess the health of the fish and macroinvertebrate communities, identify current and planned segment-specific projects, and use collected data to facilitate a collaborative process, by which stakeholders can identify a desired outcome for the watershed. The Coalition represents a diverse set of interests, including agricultural, municipal, environmental, industrial, energy, disadvantaged communities, state, and local governmental entities.

Idaho

Trout Unlimited Inc., *Priest River Watershed Group Restoration Planning: Advancing Collaboration, Communication, and Planning for Water Quality Solutions in Northwestern Idaho*

Reclamation Funding: \$299,668

The Priest River Watershed Group, in partnership with Trout Unlimited, will support the native cold-water fishery and water quality of the Lower Priest River Watershed in northern Idaho through education, outreach, and by completing a watershed restoration plan. The group will complete outreach and a watershed restoration plan for the East River focused on preservation of critical habitat for the endangered bull trout. Climate change driven drought conditions and reduced river flows have led to an overall decrease in the bull trout population within the basin. Currently, group membership consists of landowners, federal and state agencies, the Kalispel Tribe of Indians, local government, business and industry interests, outfitters, environmental groups, and other representatives from the Priest River and Priest Lake communities, all of whom are committed to collaboratively finding solutions to support the watershed. The group will build on coalition building they completed under a previous WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Program Phase I grant.

Wood River Land Trust, *Watershed Restoration & Growth Scenario Planning in the Big Wood River Basin*

Reclamation Funding: \$199,998

The Wood River Water Collaborative, in collaboration with the Wood River Land Trust, located in south-central Idaho, will update the Big Wood River Atlas to address the health of the nearby Big Wood Watershed's natural floodplain. A growing population combined with diminishing ground and surface water resources have put strain on the Big Wood River corridor and associated aquifer. The Collaborative will convene a working group composed of representatives from the surrounding communities, Trout Unlimited, state and national forest service members, the Nature Conservancy, and recreation groups. This updated watershed plan will consider potential development and risk to riparian habitats and design shovel-ready projects to address these concerns. These efforts will address riparian habitats, mitigate flood risks, and support the function of the surrounding unconfined aquifers.

Montana

Gallatin River Task Force, *Upper Gallatin River Watershed Restoration Planning and Design* Reclamation Funding: \$209,014

The Gallatin River Task Force will develop restoration-focused planning and project designs for the Upper Gallatin River Watershed in southwest Montana, near Bozeman. Because of climatic variability, drought, and impacts from land use, projects are needed that reduce sediment inputs, filter pollutants, slow the flow of water through the system to encourage groundwater infiltration to support late season baseflows, expand wetland and riparian buffers along streams, and support fish passage. The task force will do this through field data collection, drone aerial mapping of existing conditions along prominent streams and their tributaries, identification of restoration projects, development of best management practices, and stakeholder engagement. The Task Force brings together nonprofit, private, local, state, and federal entities with an interest in water management to complete the West Fork Master Restoration Plan and advance 3-5 project designs prioritized through previous planning efforts.

New Mexico

Santa Fe Watershed Association, *Building and Sustaining Resilience in the Santa Fe River Watershed* Reclamation Funding: \$200,000

The Santa Fe Watershed Association will further watershed group development, complete a watershed restoration plan, and identify and prepare site specific designs in the Santa Fe River Watershed located within Santa Fe County, New Mexico. The Association engages with a wide array of stakeholder groups, including neighborhood associations, village councils, acequias, pueblos, non-profit organizations, and many federal, state, and local government agencies. Informed by a previous WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Program Phase I project, the Association sees “low interactional capacity” as perhaps the most significant critical issue, meaning although there are points of agreement among diverse stakeholders, there is little interaction and collaboration. Through prior planning, the Association has identified several priorities for future planning efforts, including climate change, protecting native species, protecting water quality, and fire management. The Association will conduct targeted outreach to underserved communities, prepare educational materials for the community, host an annual water conference, identify priority projects, and prepare three site-specific designs.

Oklahoma

Lake Thunderbird Watershed Alliance, Inc., *Improving Water Quality in the Lake Thunderbird Watershed*

Reclamation Funding: \$300,000

The Lake Thunderbird Watershed Alliance, located in central Oklahoma near Oklahoma City, will address bank erosion and improve water quality on two ponds. Currently, the ponds are designated by the state as impaired due to the large quantities of nutrients and metals entering the waterways. With these designated sites representing the headwaters of the Lake Thunderbird watershed, improvements within the ponds will inform future restoration efforts on the entire watershed. The Alliance will work with water stakeholders such as the property owner’s association, Oklahoma State University, residents, recreators, and several surrounding towns and environmental groups to assess water quality within the two ponds and identify best management practices and locations for future implementation of watershed projects.

Oregon

Trout Unlimited Inc., *Illinois Valley Irrigation Efficiency and Flow Restoration Project* Reclamation Funding: \$300,000

The Illinois Valley Soil and Water Conservation District, in collaboration with Trout Unlimited, have formed the Illinois Valley Irrigation Modernization Partnership to focus on prioritized designs for improving streamflow and water security in the Illinois River Subbasin, located in southwest Oregon. The river and its tributaries currently experience de-watering due to water withdrawals for irrigation, resulting in reduced habitat quality and quantity for coho salmon, chinook salmon, summer and winter steelhead, Pacific Lamprey, and other aquatic species.

The area was identified as having a high ecological need and high opportunity for flow restoration by multiple planning activities. This partnership, which includes stakeholders such as the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, Oregon Department of Water Resources, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Illinois Valley Watershed Council, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Forest Service, and other local partners will work to conserve water, improve streamflow, and provide water security to local irrigators. This effort will include the design of 1- 3 irrigation modernization projects on private land with outreach to local irrigators and ditch operators about the benefits of irrigation modernization and water conservation practices.

Utah

Weber River Partnership, Weber River Basin: Building a Sustainable Future through Engagement, Collaboration, and Prioritization

Reclamation Funding: \$300,000

The Weber River Partnership, working on the Weber River Basin in northern Utah, will continue to develop the Partnership's organizational capacity. The Weber River provides water for recreation, wildlife habitat, hydropower, agriculture, and municipalities, with major storage and distribution facilities managed under Reclamation's Weber and Provo River Projects. It is also one of three major rivers flowing into the Great Salt Lake, and its water is critical to sustaining the lake's health and survival. Over the past twenty years, urban growth, increased water demand, long-term drought, and agricultural practices have resulted in water quality and quantity issues, and habitat degradation. Through this project, the Partnership will increase their outreach and facilitate basin-wide collaboration among diverse stakeholders including local landowners, canal companies, the agricultural community, recreation outfitters, Utah state departments, environmental nonprofits, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, nearby towns, Weber Basin Water Conservancy District, and the Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation. The Partnership will also build an online mapping tool to consolidate data, evaluate watershed priorities, and develop a coordinated monitoring plan to fill data. This increased stakeholder engagement, collaboration, information-sharing, and planning will help to improving water quality, ensure sustainable water supplies, and overcome climate challenges.

Washington

Walla Walla County Conservation District, Touchet and Tucannon Regional Flood Risk Reduction and Habitat Enhancement Partnership Uplift

Reclamation Funding: \$300,000

The Touchet and Tucannon Regional Flood Risk Reduction and Habitat Enhancement Partnership, a grassroots watershed group located in southeastern Washington focused on the Touchet and Tucannon River basins, will develop shovel-ready project designs. The Partnership is comprised of state and federal entities, local government officials and county representatives, environmental interests, local tribes, and the local conservation districts. Currently flood risk, lack of floodplain connectivity, sedimentation, and heightened water temperatures impact the health and safety of the watershed. The Partnership will hire a facilitator to amplify existing efforts, identifying opportunities for projects to mitigate flood risk, increase community flood resilience, and improve aquatic habitat within the watersheds.