**TITLE**

Inyo-Mono Resource Conservation District

Meeting Notes from Facilitated Discussion 2 of 2 with RCD Board and Key Partners

Meeting date: May 21, 2024

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**OVERVIEW & BACKGROUND**

Board members of the Inyo-Mono Resource Conservation District sought technical support to gain additional strategic direction from California’s state-level Resource Conservation District. They requested assistance from the local office of the UC Cooperative Extension and county Wildfire Mitigation Coordinator to provide facilitated discussion for early-phase strategic planning. The IMRCD has a decades-long tenure in the region and relaunched in 2023 with new board members.

The notes below summarize the second of two facilitations. The first in March focused on surfacing project ideas and conducting an inventory. The second meeting occurred in May and reviewed the inventory and did a first round of prioritization. The prioritization consisted of a rapid scoring exercise.

Additional materials include two PowerPoint presentations that summarize findings from research and engagement activities outside the board meetings. The UCCE produced facilitation notes from the first meeting. Kristen Pfeiler produced an inventory matrix of projects that resulted from the first meeting and additional input from the Board and partners. The prioritization exercise reviewed this matrix and the Board made a first round of voting on major project categories that included Forest Alliance, soil health, weed management, equipment lending, etc.

**OUTCOMES, OBSERVATIONS FROM THE TWO MEETINGS**

The notes below offer a summary of input and feedback from the two-meeting process to surface project and partnership ideas. The accompanying PowerPoint materials and summary notes from the first meeting offer additional detail.

In 1-on-1 interviews, case studies, and group discussions, the board and key partners took stock of the historical activities of the IMRCD, broad opportunities, regional gaps in service for agriculture and conservation, partnership opportunities, opportunities in forest management and wildfire mitigation, and Board commitments and needs. A subset of board members and partners reviewed key features of the Yuba County RCD and Butte County RCD in mini-case studies.

The board and key partners surfaced and inventoried projects and activities that represented potential opportunity foci for the IMRCD. These opportunity projects and activities were further detailed in supporting documents and materials found [here](https://docs.google.com/document/d/11mh-J1UCYhlenV1PJzcaUih7wn09BO70RYV4aeSRK3k/edit).

The Board gave special consideration to supporting wildfire mitigation and forest management projects and activities in the region, especially at the behest of the counties’ wildfire mitigation coordinators. The second meeting review of the project inventory suggested that additional engagement, convening, and education would encourage consideration and understanding of certain program areas before specific projects might be considered. The consideration of the project inventory was abbreviated and short.

Asset inventory and mapping could further clarify service gaps and funding opportunities to surface opportunities and avoid duplication of efforts. The Board may consider additional visioning exercises in advance of deeper strategic planning where planning would prepare for project prioritization and development.

**DISCUSSION OF PROJECT INVENTORY**

The second meeting reviewed the major categories of projects and activities the board surfaced in an inventory in the first meeting. Board members made the following points about each project category.

**Soil health**

Comments on being a good fit for the IMRCD. Funding availability. Potential for providing testing services, staffing, and equipment. Erosion control goal. Perception of ease of project adoption. NRCS currently performs many soil health projects. Soil health workshops have been offered by the Owens Valley Indian Water Commission. Perception of other education opportunities in the community. Multiple community partners working on related programs and projects.

**Real estate- land tenure**

The origin of this category was fuzzy, but the understanding is this relates to land tenure issues. The county has few parcels zoned for agriculture. Available land in the county is not well suited for housing, the thinking goes. There are ideas for what ag uses current or future parcels could be used for.

**Weed management**

Mention of relationship to fuels reduction and wildfire prevention. RCD could manage tools and equipment lending. Ag Commissioner’s office does some of these activities, potential source for funding and support. General comment on the RCD serving as a sponsoring fiscal and legal agent for projects that the county can’t or won’t manage.

**Multi-faceted landcape projects**

For example Fish Slough. Unclear how much of a priority this would be for IMRCD. Landscape scale restoration projects may all into this category. Projects in this category seem common to RCDs in general- multi-disciplinary- stabilization, soils, forest treatments.

**Combined: Discussion of several wildfire mitigation and forest health projects**

*(Eastern Sierra Wildfire Alliance, CEQA Lead for Fuels Reduction, Sponsor for LADWP community-based fuel reduction projects, admin support for community, Defensible Space and Home Hardening, Wildland Fire Workforce Internships, Tumbleweed management)*

SNC funded position proposed to support the Wildfire Alliance to bring together stakeholders. RCD well positioned to act as agent across wildfire and forest management projects. Fire safe councils need support organization for capacity. RCD could be a sponsor for weed management and fuels reduction- LADWP needs an agent, convening entity, lead for fiscal, legal, and permitting issues to do work on their behalf. Homeowners and property owners- hard to encourage defensible space, to have the equipment and know-how to do the work. There’s a lack of contractors in the area who can do home hardening retrofits that will be encouraged or required in the future. RCD can be a sponsor for workforce development. CalFire does defensible space inspections if they are not contracted by the agency manager, only perform work for properties that are more than 25 acres and they can’t work on private land. IMRCD could host additional education workshops.

**Bishop Creek 319 EPA Grant**

UCCE Farm advisor and NRCS doing work on Bishop Creek vision plan water quality project working with LADWP. The partners need a fiscal agent. The project is voluntary, an alternative to regulation, 10-year timeline. LADWP would match the grant funding. Funding sources and partnership appear in place, RCD merely serves as fiscal.

**Local agriculture**

The suggestion to engage the ag and ranching community is in keeping with the tradition of the RCD’s historical services and Board activities. The suggestion is to survey the ag community for needs and interests to build a project list. The idea seems to be to do a brief engagement to assess interests for the RCD, to increase awareness of opportunities, and to encourage engagement.

**Habitat Restoration**

The description of this project area is intentionally broad because it might address a range of interventions to address a watershed or landscape. Project areas could include water quality, riparian health, and reestablishing native vegetation. The comment is made here that potentially the role of the RCD is to act as a fiscal agent and project manager to subcontractors and community groups who are addressing different aspects of an overall umbrella project. In addition, the RCD may be able to perform these activities on behalf of one of the federal land managers or LADWP.

**Tool Lending Library**

RCD served this function years ago. All the projects that have been offered could benefit from shared equipment for private landowners, volunteer groups, etc. The audience could be ag and ranchers. There has also been the suggestion of having tool lending for wildfire mitigation activities and home hardening. There is a suggestion to partner with NRCS for this program.

**Native Plant Cultivation**

Some indication that RCDs have provided this service, some have greenhouses. The Forest Service may have interest in partnership. Mention of some plants- native bitterbrush, Pinyon. LADWP has a greenhouse for some restoration projects. Interest in learning if the BLM or Forest Service would want to develop or expand projects. Mention that the Native Plant Society does this already. Mention also that this may relate to post fire reforestation projects, and contract potential with CalFire.

**PRIORITIZATION OF PROJECT CATEGORIES**

The final part of the meeting asked the Board to indicate project priorities. Each board member placed three Xs., which is reflected in the tally shown in the image below. Soil health received the most votes, followed by Administration for community organizations (under wildfire and forest health), and local agricultural projects. The Eastern Sierra Wildfire Alliance, Defensible Space/home hardening (both under wildfire and forest health), weed management, and the tool library each had votes.

A white board with writing on it

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