

El Dorado Water Agency's Spring Plenary focuses on strengthening partnerships, investment

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At its recent Countywide Plenary for Water, El Dorado Water Agency (EDWA) brought together water and utility managers, business and community leaders, non-profit organizations, and staff from local, state, and federal agencies to collaborate on sustainably managing our watershed. Rebecca Guo, General Manager of EDWA, kicked off the Plenary by highlighting the [Programmatic Watershed Plan](#) which identified resource management strategies to address watershed threats as well as a new [report on the valuation of ecosystem goods and services in the upper American River watershed](#). The valuation report found that the working landscapes (including working and natural lands) within the watershed are an incredibly valuable asset worth more than \$1.6 trillion over a 100 year period.

“It was eye-opening to see the immense value of our watershed quantified and understand the multitude of beneficiaries who depend on the ecosystem goods and services that our watershed produces,” said Lori Parlin, El Dorado County Supervisor and EDWA Board Chair. “We have an amazing natural capital asset at our doorstep – a ‘supershed’ – and I’m thrilled that the Plenary is helping to increase collaboration and information sharing so we can protect the watershed now and into the future.”

Highlights from the panel discussion with David Batker, President, Batker Consulting; Michelle Wolfgang, Partnership Coordinator, Eldorado National Forest; Karen Garner, Director of Planning and Building, El Dorado County; Phil Saksa, Co-founder & Chief Scientist, Blue Forest; and Trevor Joseph, Manager of Technical Services, Regional Water Authority, included:

- Watersheds are the lifeblood of our communities: we need to look at watershed restoration and protection more holistically to build community resilience.
- Partnerships are key: knowing what others are working on helps build economies of scale and promotes landscape scale projects where multiple partners collaborate across jurisdictions.
- Investments are needed: the watershed benefits us all and even in times of a state deficit, we need to secure more funding.
- Policies should reflect our new realities: we need to incorporate into policies the impacts from wildfires, population increase, and economic development as well as account for the enormous value the watershed provides to residents and tourists.
- Understanding the value of the watershed will inform investments: having quantitative data is critical to leveraging existing funding, encouraging re-investment, and securing new resources.
- Investment priorities should include rural landscapes: it is important to look beyond population centers and invest in natural capital projects which appreciate over time, help maintain built infrastructure projects, and provide imperative goods and services to downstream urban areas.

“Understanding the immense value of the watershed reinforces the need for a cohesive strategy for actively managing our natural resources and increasing investments to make our watershed resilient for a changing climate and growing population,” said Rebecca. “We’re excited to bring together partners who have a vested interest in watershed health to facilitate the dialogue about ways to maximize our collective efforts.”

Discussions in the breakout groups focused on raising awareness of the watershed’s value especially for downstream beneficiaries. Attendees discussed how green infrastructure is intimately tied into gray infrastructure and how the value of the work being done outlasts the time it takes to complete the project. There was consensus that the scale of the solution needs to meet the scale of the problem and the first step is to break down silos between agencies by recognizing the interconnection of different projects, establishing multi-jurisdictional partnerships, and leveraging interagency agreements to increase efficiencies.

To view the Plenary materials and learn more please visit [EDWA website](#).

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