



## **Healthy Headwaters Watershed Investment Network Field Survey Summary February 2014**

Western water providers and their customers depend on natural watershed processes to filter pollutants, control erosion, regulate temperature, attenuate floods, and buffer human activities from drinking water supply. Communities across the American West are beginning to realize what is at stake if they don't act to protect these essential watersheds.

Carpe Diem West's Healthy Headwaters Program is launching a new initiative, Watershed Investment Network - Assessment to Action. The Watershed Investment Network (WIN) will support western communities as they catalyze restoration and protection investments in at-risk watersheds.

The WIN will focus primarily on watershed valuation tools and stakeholder engagement processes to make the economic case and build support for such investments. These resources will be primarily tailored for utilities, municipal water providers, water managers and community leaders, as a means for them to involve downstream stakeholders from assessment to action.

To better understand what the WIN initiative might look like on the ground, we started by asking potential partners – water managers and local decision makers – what their communities really need. We surveyed 18 water resource managers (see list of participating organizations, p. 4) about their emerging needs and interest in watershed valuation, protection, and restoration. The survey, conducted in November 2013, asked for information on:

- ▶ Community size, status of watershed protection initiatives, threats to water supply;
- ▶ Key components of a watershed investment program;
- ▶ Effective ways of sharing information; and,
- ▶ What watershed protection success looks like.



The South Platte watershed in Colorado is being restored, after the Hayman Fire roared through the Rocky Mountains in 2002.

*Photo: National Forest Foundation*



## Key Components of a Watershed Investment Program

The Healthy Headwaters Leadership Team has identified eight key components for a successful watershed investment program. To test these assumptions, we asked survey respondents to tell us about their need for information with regard to these key components:

1. Engaging stakeholders through an inclusive and transparent process
2. Selecting and implementing the appropriate valuation methodology
3. Identifying and communicating restoration/protection priorities
4. Identifying appropriate financing and funding tools
5. Identifying and removing policy and administrative barriers
6. Establishing decision-making structures needed to receive and disburse pooled funds
7. Communicating findings and next steps to decision makers and rate payers
8. Developing an evaluation process to track key benchmarks to determine progress

While most respondents agreed that all of the above components are important, they prioritized: engaging stakeholders, securing long term financing, and communicating with ratepayers.

Notably, many respondents were unfamiliar with how useful a tool watershed valuation can be for protection and restoration efforts. Some managers said their organizations could not justify spending money on a valuation study when they have basic water quality issues to address.

Many managers also noted that though transactional valuation (dollar amounts) can be helpful for informing certain types of decisions, what's more important is community values – clean water, healthy ecosystems, open space, parks, and wildlife. When ratepayers can identify with the value of their headwaters on a personal level, they will be more willing to fund protection of those values.

## Spreading the WIN

To bring the WIN to scale across the West, we need to find the most helpful and effective way of supporting innovative water managers. Our interviewees said that the following would be most useful to them:

- ▶ A compendium of best management practices, case studies, and lessons learned from other organizations;
- ▶ A network of peers and resource providers working on watershed valuation and restoration/protection; and,
- ▶ Training and direct assistance to individual watershed restoration/protection efforts.

*“Greater discussion with the community, is not our strong suit... we’re not going to be able to get funding and make policy shifts without buy-in from community. The community needs to understand what we do first.”*

**Survey Respondent**

*“We haven’t at this point considered valuation, but it might be helpful with respect to local politics! We’re mostly rural land owners with very conservative views – when it comes to doing any kind of rate action, special fees or districts, they are voted down – maybe a valuation would help us engage with stakeholders.”*

**Survey Respondent**



Healthy Headwaters network members exchange ideas at the October 2011 Leadership Convening.

Some respondents thought that case studies, particularly success stories, would be good selling points to help overcome skepticism from local politicians. However, as one respondent asked, “What would people be willing to write versus say?” noting that people may speak with more candor and insight than they would write in a formal case study.

There was an overwhelmingly positive reaction to connecting people through focused, productive in-person meetings, as well as an emphasis on an organized network that incorporates a diversity of perspectives.

Respondents were more mixed about the idea of trainings and workshops. Some respondents were unsure of how trainings would be beneficial to their work. Others, particularly those from smaller organizations with fewer resources, were enthusiastic about participating in trainings and even went as far as to suggest online workshops so as to eliminate the need for travel.

## Envisioning Success

When we asked interviewees what watershed protection or restoration success would look like for their communities, the answers ranged from very broad – such as an improvement in water quality – to very specific – such as a rebounding of large shade trees in urban riparian corridors.

However, all respondents shared a common goal: the education of their communities on water sources, and an investment in headwaters protection that could be leveraged from that understanding. Helping communities accomplish that goal will be a key marker of success for the WIN.

*“It’s not just about including stakeholders, but engaging them in a way that furthers what they want to accomplish, which may be separate from what you need – it’s about what the community needs.”*

**Survey Respondent**

## Survey Participants

Albuquerque Bernalillo County Water Utility Authority, NM | Calaveras County Water District, CA  
City of Bozeman, MT | City of Flagstaff, AZ | City of Fort Collins, CO | City of Hillsboro, OR  
City of Santa Fe, NM | City of Tacoma, WA | City of Walla Walla, WA | Clackamas River Water Providers, OR | Clean Water Services, OR | Colorado Springs Utilities, CO | East Bay Municipal Utility District, CA | Inyo-Mono IRWMP, CA | Los Angeles Department of Water & Power, CA  
Medford Water Commission, OR | Pueblo Board of Water Works, CO | Tucson Water, AZ