

Value of Conserved Water Research Input

As part of a larger contract with DWR, the Council has agreed to “Conduct a comprehensive qualitative and quantitative study of direct and indirect benefits of urban water conservation programs, including separate regional case studies for Northern and Southern California.” The entire budget for Task 5 is \$23,650.

The study’s premise is the lack of any:

Over-arching summary document articulating the value of urban water conservation in California. The Council has developed several very specific and technical models for assisting utilities in performing their own analyses to determine the value of conserved water in their own service areas. These models, however, focus primarily on avoiding direct costs and ignore other values such as: embedded energy costs, greenhouse gas emissions, waste water treatment costs, irrigation runoff, and ecosystem benefits.

The Council work develop a study that helps identify other values not generally captured in water savings equations. The Council’s study will produce two regional case studies, one each for Southern and Northern California. The goal of the Council’s study is to help urban water service providers meet their 20x2020 goals by presenting to their constituents a comprehensive and holistic story of the values associated with investments in water conservation and efficiency.

At its May 4, 2016 meeting, the Governance Committee discussed the potential directions that this project might take. On the one hand, the potential breadth of the topic, combined with the relatively small amount of funds, argued strongly that the Council should take a much more specific set of conserved water values, e.g., those associated with sustainable landscaping. On the other hand, the funds could be used as seed money for a more ambitious project, e.g., updating the Council’s Environmental Benefits tool.

After discussion, Committee members directed the Executive Director to ask the Research and Evaluation Committee to help define a workable scope for this particular task. In particular, members wanted the R & E Committee to discuss:

- What kind of project makes sense if the only funding that is available is the \$23,650 from DWR?
- Are there more ambitious projects that Committee members would like to see the Council pursue? If so, what are they, and what would they likely cost?