

Stakeholders Urged to Engage Quickly As Water Bond Fund Competition Heats Up

Water stakeholders in California must step up quickly and stay actively involved as competition heats up for grants funded by Proposition 1, the \$7.5 billion state water bond approved by voters last November.

“The challenge is that there is just not enough money in the bond act to meet all the water needs identified by the Legislature in 2009,” said Elaine Berghausen, former Deputy Assistant Secretary for Bonds and Grants with the California Resources Agency. “That means the competition for funding under the bond will be even more intense.”

Now a partner at Clean Tech Advocates, Berghausen works with a Sacramento-based team of experts to help companies, agencies and organizations navigate California’s complex environmental and regulatory policy arena, including developing strategies related to water projects eligible for water bond grant funding.

“Originally, the Legislature set the bond at \$11.2 billion to move toward a comprehensive water plan for the state,” she said. “That was closer to the real need but it was pared down by the time it reached the ballot because it was thought voters would be more likely to support a smaller number.”

Berghausen said that the smartest and most successful water stakeholders always commit the resources and expertise to stay fully engaged over the long haul because they know the landscape shifts as rapidly as floodwater after a major storm. In addition, they know that Mother Nature ultimately can trump even the best plans with boom and bust weather cycles, like the drought of the past few years.

“There is some urgency for water agencies and other interests to act quickly to develop smart, creative, competitive grant applications that zero in on the projects and programs that make the best and most effective use of the more limited voter-approved funds within several priority areas cited in the bond,” Berghausen said. “Clean Tech Advocates can help with that.”

Each priority area in the bond offers a range of possible engagement by stakeholders in gearing up ideas and proposals that improve and enhance the state’s water resources.

The competitive grant process overseen by state agencies like the Department of Water Resources, the State Water Resources Control Board and the California Water Commission drives distribution of funds. The agencies will solicit proposals for grants, review the applications and award the funding in the following areas:

Regional Water Reliability

A total of \$810 million is available for water conservation, storm water capture and other programs that increase regional and local water supplies and provide other related benefits as part of the Integrated Regional Water Management program.

Water Recycling

A total of \$725 million is set aside for a variety of potential competitive projects, including reclamation, new treatment technology or desalination.

Groundwater Sustainability

Programs designed to protect and clean up groundwater can compete for some of the \$900 million in funding available in this category. Local agencies also can seek funding to develop and implement groundwater sustainability plans now required by state law.

Safe Drinking Water and Wastewater Treatment for Disadvantaged Communities

A major objective of the bond targets \$520 million toward safe drinking water and wastewater programs, particularly in disadvantaged communities. These funds help leverage federal funding and pay for community wastewater programs and drinking water infrastructure, as well as funding planning and feasibility studies and some operational costs.

Watersheds and Flood Management

The bond sets aside \$1.898 billion for habitat and watershed programs, river and creek enhancement, watersheds in designated areas, and state commitment to restoration and statewide flood management.

In addition to the priority funding areas, the bond measure provides \$812 million for regional projects throughout the state included in specific plans developed by local communities.

Water stakeholders can present competitive proposals in one or more of the key bond priority areas. Clean Tech Advocates can help find the right opportunities. For more information, contact Patrick Leathers, Elaine Berghausen, Linda Adams or James Boyd at 916-503-1600, or go to www.cleantechadvocates.com.