

Meeting Summary

Drought Resilience Interagency & Partners (DRIP) Collaborative

Reducing Ecosystem Impacts of Drought Workgroup Meeting III

California Natural Resources Agency, 715 P St, Sacramento, Room 06-212

September 9th, 2025 | 11:00AM to 12:30PM

The meeting recording is available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gC8to-cf3S0>.

Meeting materials, including the presentation, are available at:

<http://www.water.ca.gov/drip>

Meeting Objective: Shape a best practices approach for landowner cooperative solutions to support instream flows. Discuss how to return to streamlining grant and contract processes and O&M considerations in future meetings.

Workgroup members in attendance:

- Redgie Collins, CalTrout (workgroup lead)
- Anna Schiller, Environmental Defense Fund
- Sierra Ryan, Santa Cruz County
- Laura Ramos, California Water Institute at Fresno State
- Alvar Escriva-Bou, University of California, Davis

Absent:

- Brent Hastey, Plumas Lake Self Storage

Also in attendance:

- Andrew Altevogt, State Water Resources Control Board
- Marc Commandatore, Department of Water Resources

Eco2 & Eco3: Proposed Pathways

Eco2. Streamlining Grant & Contracts for Habitat Restoration

Members supported revisiting this idea through a Subject Matter Expert presentation on *Cutting the Green Tape* and other efficiency practices, with a focus on drought-specific case studies. This presentation is anticipated for a future full Collaborative meeting (likely April 2026). Members were asked to share examples of habitat restoration projects where the contracting process has been efficient – whether tied to *Cutting the Green Tape* or other streamlining practices – and to send those examples to the workgroup point of contact.

Eco3. Long-term O&M Considerations for Habitat Restoration

Members acknowledged that long-term operations and maintenance requirements are often set during the grant stage, making this issue closely linked to Eco2. The group agreed to revisit this idea in a future workgroup meeting in 2026, drawing on strategies and actions identified in the California Water Commission's white paper [*Potential State Strategies for Protecting Communities and Fish and Wildlife in the Event of Drought*](#).

Eco1. Instream Flows: Best Practices for Landowner Cooperative Solutions

The bulk of the meeting focused on Eco1. Members agreed to shift emphasis from piloting new projects to developing a best practices guidance document. **However, concerns were raised that producing another guidebook could miss the opportunity to call for broader system reforms.** While providing resources is valuable, the group noted that the DRIP Collaborative should also consider recommending changes to simplify the process.

Members raised the recurring issue of the **lack of consistent instream flow targets**. Curtailments are imposed during drought emergencies, yet landowners often do not know what the underlying flow requirements are. Multiple entities (SWB, CDFW, NGOs, academics) have developed instream flow models, but no statewide clarity exists. Members suggested the DRIP Collaborative could encourage agencies to **set flow targets**, enabling landowners to prepare and better apply best practices.

The discussion also underscored that instream flow needs are **highly watershed-specific**. In some regions, very small streams naturally fall below ecological targets, making rigid mandates impractical. Voluntary, cooperative approaches were viewed as a more effective path, with the potential to incentivize participation by linking efficiency or conservation benchmarks to relief from stricter curtailments.

Participants agreed that the process is inherently **complex**, spanning ecological, legal, cultural, and water rights considerations. They emphasized the value of **mapping out the current process** in a visual flow chart, highlighting barriers and pain points, paired with an aspirational, streamlined version showing how cooperative agreements could work if incentives, permitting, and agency roles were better aligned. Ultimately, there was broad agreement that a **state agency must take ownership** of providing clarity and leadership on instream flow guidance, since without this leadership local efforts remain fragmented.

Building on this framing, the group reaffirmed the importance of developing best practices guidance, with a broad intended audience that could include farmers, counties, environmental organizations, agencies, landowners, and water suppliers. Members also suggested strategies for raising awareness of the new guidance and existing resources (such as the 2016 [*Practitioner's Guide to Instream Flow Transactions in California*](#)) through NGO networks, regular webinar series (e.g., CNRA's *Cutting the Green Tape* and DWR's *California County Café*), and local partners who can share resources directly with landowners.

The 2016 *Practitioner's Guide* was identified as a useful foundation. The new guidance would expand on it by covering a wider suite of **adaptive water rights tools** (e.g., instream leases, forbearance agreements, storage flexibility) but framing them in terms of voluntary participation, incentives, and flexibility on private property. In addition, members noted that restoration projects that slow water movement (e.g., beaver

reintroduction) can also provide drought resilience benefits. The document could also reference incentive tools used in the Healthy Rivers and Landscapes program, including **Safe Harbor Agreements**, which provide regulatory assurances to landowners who dedicate flows for species recovery.

Beyond tools, the document would describe the **practical requirements** needed to make cooperative approaches work on the ground, including funding, monitoring, permitting, technical support, enforcement, agency ownership, Tribal and community engagement, and building trust.

The group also identified **illustrative case studies** to ground the guidance in real-world examples. Suggested case studies included Scott and Shasta Rivers, Sonoma County, Santa Rosa, adjudicated basins, the San Mateo Resource Conservation District, and Soquel Creek. Natural infrastructure approaches such as beaver reintroduction were again noted as relevant examples.

Members emphasized the importance of tying to **funding opportunities**. The Stream Flow Enhancement Program at the Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB), which received Proposition 4 funding, was highlighted as a potential nexus. There was strong interest in inviting WCB to present at a future meeting and exploring other Proposition 4 opportunities to support instream flow projects.

Finally, the group stressed the importance of **credibility and trust**. Drafting should be a multi-party effort involving NGOs, academia, and local governments to balance expertise and perspectives. Review by SWB and CDFW would ensure accuracy and alignment, while a public comment period and additional review by local entities would confirm practical feasibility. Members noted that trust varies by audience – farmers, counties, environmental groups, and agencies may each respond best to different messengers.