

**Tribal Infrastructure Task Force (ITF) Meeting Summary  
December 12, 2013 2:00 PM – 3:30 PM (Eastern)**

**INTRODUCTIONS**

Dana Baer	Indian Health Service (IHS) Sanitation Facilities Construction (SFC) Program
Marie Barry	Washoe Tribe
Marta Berg	U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Region 9 Tribal Caucus
Sonia Brubaker	EPA Office of Ground Water and Drinking Water (OGWDW)
Dave Clark	Rural Community Assistance Partnership (RCAP)
Ron Ferguson	IHS
Sheila Frace	EPA Office of Water (OW), Office of Wastewater Management (OWM)
Jim Horne	EPA OWM
Heather Kie	Pueblo Nuevo Utility Authority
Gemma Kite	Horsley Witten Group, Inc.
Kellie Kubena	EPA OW, OWM
Jacqueline M. Ponti-Lazaruk	U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development (RD)
Allison Martin	EPA OWM
Ken Norton	National Tribal Water Council
Deborah Patton	Rural Community Assistance Corporation (RCAC)
Charles Reddoor	EPA Office of Resource Conservation and Recovery
Matt Richardson	EPA OWM
Nicole Schindler	EPA OW
Luke Schulte	IHS (California)
Michelle Schutz	EPA OGWDW
Kelly Titensor	Department of the Interior, Bureau of Reclamation
Dennis Wagner	EPA, Region 10
John Wheaton	Nez Perce Tribe, Idaho
Michaelle Wilson	EPA Office of Resource Conservation and Recovery, Office of Solid Waste

**A. WELCOME & AGENDA REVIEW (SHEILA FRACE, EPA)**

Matt Richardson and Sheila Frace welcomed everyone to the call, and Sheila presented the agenda for the December ITF meeting. During this meeting, Matt Richardson will present information on the ITF member survey results and 2014 ITF planned activities. Jim Horne will provide information on the EPA/USDA Sustainable Rural and Small Systems Training materials. Luke Schulte will provide an update on the Asset Management activities in California tribal communities. Afterwards, Sonia Brubaker will give a presentation of the Check Up Program for Small Systems (CUPSS) program. Time will be available at the end for and open discussion and steps forward.

## **B. ITF MEMBER SURVEY RESULTS AND ITF 2014 PLANNED ACTIVITIES (MATTHEW RICHARDSON, EPA)**

Matt provided an introduction on the ITF Member Survey organization and the results. The survey was an informal survey, conducted between summer and fall of 2013, of all the tribal representatives of the ITF. Twenty two (22) people representing different tribes were contacted to participate in the survey, of which nineteen (19) responded with completed surveys.

One survey question was designed to determine why participants did not participate in any phone calls, and to identify possible constraints (e.g., technical difficulties, schedule conflicts, or topic interest). Three common responses were provided:

1. Scheduling conflicts;
2. Their role with the ITF was unclear; and
3. They had another job that did not allow them to be a part of the ITF.

A quarter of the participants responded that they did not have enough time or resources to participate in the ITF calls.

A second question on the survey identified topics that participants would like to see discussed at future ITF calls. Sustainability of tribal system operations was a major re-occurring theme in the survey responses. Other identified topics include operation maintenance, national tribal wastewater operator certification program, and additional inclusion of solid waste programs. Matt mentioned that all these topics resonate with the ITF goals.

Survey results seem to indicate that a standard quarterly phone call may not be necessary. Instead, the ITF principals are seeking to change the ITF direction in 2014 by focusing on ITF outreach at conferences available throughout the year in various locations. A number of standing conferences could offer an appropriate platform for presenting the ITF, sharing resources available to tribes, and inviting interested organizations to participate in the ITF. Examples of appropriate conferences include those sponsored/organized by the following entities:

- National Congress of American Indians;
- United South and Eastern Tribes (USET);
- National American Indian Housing Council;
- Native American Water Association; and
- The Water and Sanitation Health Summit in Alaska.

Sheila added that the main reason for attending conferences is to give more exposure to the ITF. Additionally, she commented that it is important for the ITF to be aware of issues tribal communities face, and that these issues may be discussed and identified during conferences though increased personal contact with tribes. These issues could be potentially handled by a partnership between the ITF and the tribal communities. Matt and Sheila asked for any other comments on this proposal.

Marta Berg, on behalf of the Region 9 Tribal Caucus, which represents approximately 150 tribes, invited ITF principal members to attend the Region 9 tribal meeting or the annual conference next October or November to present about the ITF in a special meeting. Region 9 tribes are very interested in pursuing national level work related to solid waste issues and would be interested in helping develop those components.

Jacki Ponti commented that she would like to personally hear input from the other tribal representative members present on the call regarding the proposed 2014 change in the ITF approach. While ITF principals represent the majority of participation on the ITF calls, the calls were organized to be attended by tribal representatives to enable them to share their perspectives. She added that one-on-one interactions at a conference may enable more meaningful discussions than a quarterly call.

Michaëlle Wilson commented that the ITF should not discontinue meetings and noted that the value of the ITF interactions could be lost if the ITF decides to meet bi-annually.

John Wheaton, Water Resources Division with the Nez Perce Tribe, has found that the quarterly meetings are very helpful. He would like to attend one-on-one meetings at conferences but it is probably beyond his resources. The quarterly meetings are the best way for him to forward information to other tribal members and organizations.

Heather Kie, Pueblo Nuevo Utility Authority, is participating in her first call with the ITF. She commented that the quarterly meetings are helpful to keep her updated. It is difficult for tribal members to attend conferences because of limited time and resources. During call meetings, information and ideas can be exchanged rapidly every three months instead of at annual conferences. She is very interested in learning from other tribes about past projects, especially in the solid waste area. She is looking to get ideas to approach recycling, hazardous waste, and illegal dumping issues specific to her Tribe.

Jacki Ponti responded that one of the reasons behind the survey was the lack of participation at the ITF meetings. She asked about ways to increase tribal participation on the quarterly calls.

Marie Barry, who participates on the National Tribal Operators Committee, proposed to reach out to the different regional contacts. Tribal members are very interested in seeing solid waste topics included in the ITF discussions. In general, people need to be well informed about the ITF call meetings long ahead of the meeting date.

Ken Norton agreed with both Marie and Marta that ITF needs to conduct additional outreach to a large number of tribes and tribal organizations through the web pages and networking outlets in order to generate more tribal participation.

Marta ended the discussion by commenting that more focused work would generate tribal participation. The Access Subgroup's effort to assess the barriers to achieving the access goal generated more tribal participation than the recent calls. Since the subgroups completed work, the ITF work focus has shifted to next-steps. Less participation has occurred because the work is

less focused. Marta proposed that the ITF work on more focused issues to increase tribal participation.

Jacki commented that the presentation from Jim Horne will bring about more focused work.

### **C. NEW EPA / USDA SUSTAINABLE RURAL AND SMALL SYSTEM TRAINING MATERIALS (JIM HORNE & ALLISON MARTIN, EPA)**

Jim Horne and Allison Martin work for the EPA OWM. OWM has worked with all different sizes of water and wastewater systems and has found that in many cases, utility management staff need a basic tool to conduct an assessment of the overall effectiveness of their operations. This assessment enables system management and key staff to make decisions about where and how to devote limited resources to address operational issues. Using an approach that has been successfully used by larger systems for the past several years, EPA/USDA built an assessment model geared to small systems but wanted to first test the concept in pilot workshops. Over the last 18 months, in partnership with USDA, USET and RCAP, EPA launched a series of four pilot workshops to test the assessment tool and the assessment approach. The workshops led small systems managers through an introductory version of the assessment and identified some of the tools available from EPA/USDA and other organizations that could help managers improve operations. The managers offered feedback on the tool, which was overwhelmingly positive, commenting on the simplicity of the tool, and ease to share with other operations staff.

After testing the pilot, the next step was to develop a more detailed guide to lead utilities through the assessment. The managers also conveyed that they wanted to be able to present the assessment tool on their own. EPA and USDA developed two products to help managers conduct a workshop effectively:

- A Rural and Small Systems Guidebook to Sustainable Utility Management; and
- “Workshop-in-a-Box.”

The management guidebook describes the key steps for conducting an assessment of system operations covering all components of operations, including operation, financial and infrastructure management, community outreach, asset management, etc. and can be applied to any type of system. It was developed for drinking water and wastewater, but could be adapted to solid waste systems. Also included in the guidebook are a set of best practices that a manager may want to adopt, and a resource directory to online materials. In addition to covering the assessment, the guidebook provides guidelines for developing an action plan to move forward after the assessment.

Tribal members participated in the pilot workshops, and in the development of the guidebook. Jim commented that the guidebook is easy to follow and the language is simple. He recommended that local decision makers (e.g., board members, council members) be invited to participate in the assessment for valuable feedback.

Allison Martin provided an overview of the “workshop-in-a-box” developed by EPA/USDA. It is a comprehensive package that provides the necessary materials for someone to conduct the workshop in a similar way to that of the pilot workshop. The package includes advertising materials, registration forms, all participant handouts, PowerPoint presentations for the facilitator, and facilitator notes. It is developed for technical assistance providers for multiple systems or to be shown to a number of people that work within a single system.

Jim mentioned that his office is working with USDA to implement an aggressive promotional campaign to share the materials with tribal groups, including posting materials on various websites. The program is putting together a group of trained facilitators so that training can continue when EPA or USDA professionals are not available. The facilitators could be consultants, work for a service provider, or work for the state or EPA. A train-the-trainer webinar is being hosted on January 14 that will lead the participants through the two developed tools. Comments and feedback will be solicited. At the end of the webinar, questions will be asked to the group. People from all over the country are expected to participate in this webinar. Following the initial webinar, four to eight additional workshops sponsored by the EPA/USDA will be facilitated by those trained through the webinar. Jim commented that this program is a great partnership between USDA and EPA. It will definitely be useful for tribal systems, and Jim requested any contacts with tribes to help advertise the tools.

Jacki Ponti added that it would be great to conduct tribal-specific workshops. As funding permits, agency staff can travel to tribal conferences for ITF presentation, but could also conduct a workshop or train-the-trainer at the same time. EPA/USDA are looking for opportunities to train as many people as possible to be able to facilitate these workshops.

Jim requested that if the workshops are used by tribal groups, participation be tracked to identify who attends and where the workshops are held, and estimate the number of people exposed to this resource.

#### **D. ONGOING ASSET MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES IN 24 CALIFORNIA TRIBAL UTILITIES (LUKE SCHULTE, IHS)**

Luke Schulte works for IHS in California. He introduced his topic by commenting on the potential incorporation of Jim Horne’s resource tools. IHS California was seeking to identify an operation and maintenance (O&M) program to recommend to tribes, but generating a program is difficult. IHS realized that there is not enough information to make a good decision about the inputs into such a program. IHS conducted surveys to evaluate O&M needs for the tribes in California in order to develop a program that responds to these needs.

IHS sent out an interest letter to all California tribes to gauge interest in a new O&M program. A presentation was then conducted to enable tribal participants to understand the program goals and the extent of tribal participation. Surveys were sent to 100 different tribes; and IHS was pleased that 26 responses came back from interested tribes. IHS developed templates for asset inventories with an assessment of 100 questions to evaluate the utility’s current financial, administrative, and managerial operations situation. IHS drafted template reports that would summarize the findings of the assessments. IHS hired RCAC to help conduct the assessment and

complete the reports in each interested tribal community. RCAC has completed 18 final reports so far.

Currently, IHS is reviewing the reports and identifying common deficiencies among tribes. IHS will develop trainings focused on common issues (e.g., regulations, compliance) to help tribes better manage their programs. Luke mentioned that the previous presentation by Jim Horne will be helpful to copy the workshop format and apply it to this project. He is hoping that IHS staff will become certified trainers so that they can train and certify operators, and that the workshops can count towards Continuing Education Units (CEUs).

These reports identified issues regarding small asset replacement. IHS will start conducting technical assistance projects to replace small assets next month in southern California.

Jacki Ponti commented that it would be great for IHS to use the sustainability tools presented by Jim Horne. She requested that Luke provide feedback to EPA/USDA if he finds that some tool components are useful for tribes during the asset management project. Luke replied that he is anxious to see how useful those tools are, and he will inform EPA/USDA about how the sustainability tools can be useful in the future.

Ron Ferguson commented that he just visited with RCAC, who was conducting the asset inventories with the tribal communities. Although he was skeptical about providing money to tribes for asset replacement, he recognized that getting small assets up to a working status is an important first step before moving forward in O&M procedures.

Luke responded that there are three different funding levels:

1. 100% paid by tribe (preventative maintenance, salaries, tools, chemicals, etc.);
2. Small asset replacements; and
3. Major system rehabilitation or upgrade improvements.

Individual components of systems may only have a five to ten-year lifetime when the whole system is designed to last 25 years. Mr. Schulte believes that it can be unfair to hand over the system to tribal communities saying it is designed for 25 years when some parts inside the plant will not last the full 25 years. IHS often fills this funding gap. Ron commented that this is a way to incentivize proper O&M so that those small assets do last their lifetime. Luke responded that this program is directed to more financially restricted tribes. Ultimately, IHS wants to reduce the time for public health risks (a chlorine pump failure leads to a boil water notice). With the completion of these asset inventories, IHS will have comprehensive information on the tribal systems. They can estimate when parts will fail, and obtain funding prior to part failure so that money will be available to purchase new parts when they fail. Money can be sent immediately and the part can be replaced, reducing any public health risk as soon as possible.

#### **E. EPA'S ASSET MANAGEMENT TOOL: CUPSS (SONIA BRUBAKER, EPA)**

Sonia Brubaker works for EPA OGWDW. The Check-Up Program for Small Systems (CUPSS) is an asset management tool designed for small and medium size water and wastewater systems.

She directed meeting participants to follow the slide presentation. She defined comprehensive asset management as containing key elements:

1. Building an inventory of assets;
2. Organizing an O&M task tracking schedule; and
3. Recording the annual expenses and revenues in one system.

Slide 2: Outlines the breakdown of what asset management can do for a utility. It gives utilities a documented understanding of all the assets they have, how long those assets last, and how much it will cost to replace or repair assets. It provides utilities a solid foundation to make good decisions regarding asset management. Additionally, documented information can be passed on to the next management person. It also helps provide financial projections to see if current revenue and mechanisms for generating revenue are sufficient to afford future utility asset repair or replacement.

Slide 3: CUPSS is a computer desktop based program developed in 2008 that does not operate over the internet, and is free to download. Utilities requested that no sensitive information be made available over the web or in a database. EPA does not have access to any of the information submitted into the CUPSS program. There have been three updates to the software, including to add the option of downloading a user-friendly excel template for batch uploads of many assets at one time. Another update is planned to enable users to upload pictures of assets into CUPSS to provide another way for utilities to track assets.

Sonia outlined that many resources are available to support CUPSS, including an email box available for questions from users. Webinar series, held twice a year, lead users through a series of modules on the CUPSS program. In order to train people to educate others about CUPSS, a self-paced training series was created and made available for use at anytime. In addition, regular “CUPSS Community Calls” allow interested users to discuss and share experiences on CUPSS or ways forward. Listservs are available for CUPSS users and CUPSS trainers to share program information and alert listserv subscribers of training opportunities or new tools available. The CUPSS program also uses the train-the-trainer approach in order to reach as many people as possible.

Slide 4: Website hits and program download numbers used to be tracked on a quarterly basis. However, only website hits can be tracked at this time now. Spikes in website hits usually occur after training programs. Last quarter, software registration data showed 9,000 downloads of the CUPSS software, with 5,000 unique email addresses. Requirements to re-register for the program are the cause of multiple inputs of the same email address

Slide 5: Sonia described the CUPSS user interface including the icons and different tabs, and the program features. The last tab, “My CUPSS plan” takes users through a wizard which outputs an asset plan.

Sonia encouraged people to visit [www.epa.gov/cupss](http://www.epa.gov/cupss) for additional information.

**F. DISCUSSION (ALL)**

Matt Richardson reviewed the agenda and mentioned that today's call focused on asset management. He solicited any comments or discussion points from meeting participants.

David Clark (RCAP) mentioned that his organization developed materials that could assist or be a part of the resources listed in the Sustainable Rural Small System Training Resources. Jacki Ponti noted that the RCAP documents are already listed as part of the resources. David asked Deb Patton to describe the results of the Tribal Utility Governance (TUG) project funded by the EPA.

Deb outlined the results of the recent TUG project that wrapped up November 30, 2013. A total of 126 tribal members completed all trainings, passed the pre- and post-exam, and received the Principals of Utility Management for Tribes certificate of participation and achievement. The TUG project actually trained over 205 tribal members through the workshops. The program reached 260 people through additional training and onsite work with the asset management training and technical and managerial training. Over 127 tribes were represented in the program. A total of 122 technical assistance projects were completed for 37 tribes. The only part of the project that did not exceed expectations was the loan program. Deb commented that it was a very successful program overall. The funding and support was appreciated, and she hopes to continue this project in the future.

Matt Richardson mentioned that he would like to see the final report when it is available. He opened the floor to other discussion topics or new discussion topics for future meetings.

Heather Kie wants to make sure that her email information is passed on to Jim's train-the-trainer program.

Marta Berg thanked all who are involved in the programs outlined today and for the good work that organizations are doing to help tribes maintain their systems.

**G. THANK YOU, REVIEW OF DECISIONS AND ACTION ITEMS (SHEILA FRACE / MATT RICHARDSON, EPA)**

Matt thanked participants for attending the meeting and wished everyone Happy Holidays.

Action items:

- Matt Richardson will send Heather Kie's email to Jim Horne.
- Matt Richardson and the ITF principals will discuss how to modify the quarterly call plan in the future.