

## Communications and Engagement Plan for the Mission Creek Subbasin Alternative Plan Update

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### 1) Introduction

On behalf of the Coachella Valley Water District (CVWD), Desert Water Agency (DWA), and Mission Springs Water District (MSWD) (collectively the Management Committee), Kennedy Jenks Consultants (Kennedy Jenks), has prepared this Communications and Engagement Plan to provide information and seek feedback from stakeholder groups that use and benefit from the groundwater resources in and around the Mission Creek Subbasin. Stakeholder communication and engagement is a required element of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) and this outreach is conducted as part of the SGMA-required five-year update of the Mission Creek Subbasin Alternative Plan (Alternative Plan Update).

In the case of the Mission Creek Subbasin, the groundwater sustainability planning requirements of SGMA were met through an Alternative Plan, consisting of the 2013 Mission Creek-Garnet Hill Water

Management Plan (2013 MC-GH WMP)<sup>1</sup> and the 2016 Bridge Document.<sup>2</sup> The 2013 MC-GH WMP was an existing water management plan that was implemented to manage water resources, including groundwater, in the Mission Creek Subbasin (MCSB) and Garnet Hill Subarea. The 2016 Bridge Document showed how the 2013 MC-GH WMP is the functional equivalent of a Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) under SGMA. These documents form the basis of the Mission Creek Subbasin Alternative Plan, which was approved in July 2019 by the California Department of Water Resources (DWR). As part of the SGMA-required 5-year updates to Alternative Plans, a five-year update to the MCSB Alternative Plan (Alternative Plan Update) is due for submittal to DWR by January 1, 2022. The Alternative Plan Update will include a summary of the communications and engagement efforts with stakeholders.

This Communications and Engagement Plan was prepared in general conformance with the DWR Guidance Document<sup>3</sup> for stakeholder communication and engagement. The subsections that follow provide the background and objectives of the Communications and Engagement Plan, stakeholder identification, key messages and discussion topics, venues for engaging, implementation timeline, and approach for evaluation and assessment of communications activities.

## 2) Background and Objectives

### 2.1) Background

The Alternative Plan Update Planning Area is shown in Figure 1. The Planning Area is located in the northwestern portion of the Coachella Valley Groundwater Basin that extends from the San Bernardino Mountains to the Salton Sea. The Planning Area is focused on the Mission Creek Subbasin, but also includes the Desert Hot Springs Subbasin that relies on the Mission Creek Subbasin for all of its potable water supply. The Desert Hot Springs Subbasin has higher salinity groundwater that is generally not suitable for potable water supply but is known as a tourist destination with its small spa hotels supplied by hot mineral water from the Desert Hot Springs Subbasin. The Desert Hot Springs Subbasin has been designated a low priority basin by DWR and does not require a GSP. The Planning Area also includes the Garnet Hill Subarea of the Indio Subbasin because this subarea has historically been included with the Mission Creek Subbasin for water management planning purposes and some groundwater is exported from this subarea to the Mission Creek Subbasin. The Indio Subbasin will also require submittal of an Alternative Plan Update specific to the Indio Subbasin on the same schedule as the Mission Creek Subbasin. The Garnet Hill Subarea will be included in the Indio Subbasin Alternative Plan Update for SGMA compliance.

The Planning Area is located within the northwestern portion of the hot, arid Colorado Desert sub-region of the Sonoran Desert. Continued pumping of groundwater from the Mission Creek Subbasin in excess of

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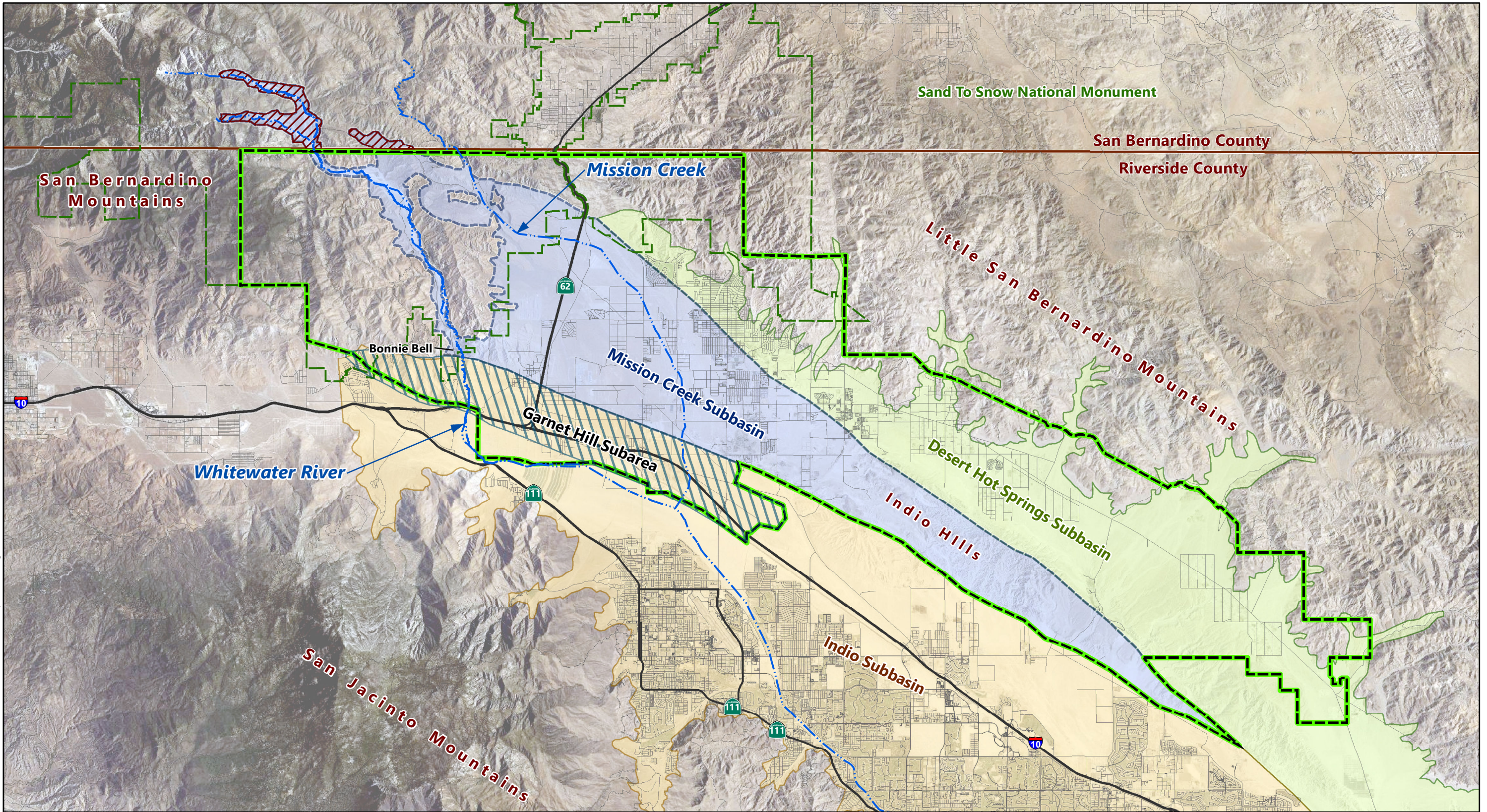
<sup>1</sup>MWH, 2013, Mission Creek/Garnet Hill Water Management Plan Final Report, prepared for Coachella Valley Water District, Desert Water Agency, Mission Springs Water District, prepared by MWH, January.

<sup>2</sup>Stantec, 2016, SGMA Alternative Groundwater Sustainability Plan Bridge Document for the Mission Creek Subbasin, prepared for Coachella Valley Water District, Desert Water Agency, and Mission Springs Water District, December.

<sup>3</sup>DWR, 2018, Guidance Document for Groundwater Sustainability Plan Stakeholder Communication and Engagement, California Department of Water Resources, January.



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#### Explanation

- |  |   |  |                                       |
|--|---|--|---------------------------------------|
|  | Planning Area   |  | Mission Creek Subbasin                |
|  | Sand to Snow National Monument<br>(Bureau of Land Management) |  | Indio Subbasin                        |
|  | Highway/road  |  | Desert Hot Springs Subbasin           |
|  |   |  | Garnet Hill Subarea of Indio Subbasin |
|  |   |  | Mission Creek Subbasin fringe area    |

0 7,500 15,000  
Approximate Scale in Feet

Basemap modified from aerial  
photograph provided by National  
Agriculture Imagery Program (NAIP),  
dated 2018. GSA areas from SGMA.

#### ALTERNATIVE UPDATE PLANNING AREA Mission Creek Subbasin Alternative Update Coachella Valley, California

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**wood.**

Figure **1**



natural recharge resulted in steadily declining groundwater levels since the 1950s until about 2004. To control the groundwater level declines, DWA and CVWD implemented a groundwater replenishment program in 2002 using imported water. DWA and CVWD entered into separate agreements with the State of California to purchase water from the State Water Project (SWP) in 1962 and 1963, respectively. However, there is currently no infrastructure to physically deliver SWP water to DWA or CVWD. As a result, DWA and CVWD signed a water exchange agreement with the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California (MWD) to deliver an equivalent amount of Colorado River Water in exchange for DWA's and CVWD's SWP water. DWA completed construction of spreading basins in the Mission Creek Subbasin and imported water deliveries began in 2002.

The Agencies have submitted annual reports in accordance with the SGMA reporting requirements. Based on the most recent annual report,<sup>4</sup> since 2004, the Mission Creek Subbasin has gained more than 40,000 acre feet of groundwater in storage. Since 2009, the 10-year running average of groundwater storage in the Mission Creek Subbasin has shown a net positive change in groundwater storage.

## 2.2) Management Committee

In 2004, CVWD, DWA, and MSWD signed a Settlement Agreement to create the Mission Creek Subbasin Management Committee, consisting of the general managers of each agency. The Settlement Agreement required the Management Committee to prepare a water management plan for the Mission Creek Subbasin and Garnet Hill Subarea.

## 2.3) Water Management Plan/Alternative Plan Update

A memorandum of understanding among CVWD, DWA, and MSWD, was executed on July 27, 2009, to prepare a water management plan and develop a groundwater model for the Mission Creek Subbasin and Garnet Hill Subarea. As described in the introduction, the 2013 MC-GH WMP was subsequently completed. Following the passage of the SGMA in 2014, the 2016 Bridge Document was prepared showing that the 2013 MC-GH WMP was in compliance with SGMA. This current effort, initiated in late 2019, is to prepare the Alternative Plan Update which is required to be submitted to DWR by January 1, 2022.

The Management Committee intends to prepare the Alternative Plan Update to:

- address DWR's comments on the Alternative Plan,
- complete updates to the groundwater model to reflect current information regarding demands and supplies,
- demonstrate that the Alternative Plan can continue to "manage the water resources to meet demands reliably and protect water quality in a sustainable and cost effective manner" as described in the mission statement of the 2013 MC-GH WMP, and
- meet SGMA sustainability goals.

As part of the Alternative Plan Update, public comment will be accepted throughout the update process via public meetings or e-mails. The Draft Alternative Plan Update public comment period will take place in the fall of 2021 and will be at least 45 days long. After incorporating all comments received during the

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<sup>4</sup>Wood Environment & Infrastructure Solutions, Inc., 2020, Mission Creek Subbasin Annual Report for Water Year 2018-2019, prepared for Coachella Valley Water District, Desert Water Agency, and Mission Springs Water District, February.

Draft Alternative Plan Update public comment period, the final Alternative Plan Update will be submitted to DWR by January 1, 2022. DWR will then post a 60-day public comment period for the Final Alternative Plan Update.

## 2.4) Communication Objective

The communication objective to support the Alternative Plan Update is to engage in public outreach that includes water users and stakeholders within the subbasin, including coordination with neighboring Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSAs) and state and federal agencies. The goals of public engagement are to understand the needs of stakeholders and communities within the Planning Area, increase awareness and understanding of the Alternative Plan Update, and encourage active participation in the update process. Stakeholder and general public engagement will be promoted throughout the entire planning process.

## 3) Stakeholder Identification

The term “stakeholder” refers to representatives of agencies, tribes, nonprofit groups, nongovernmental organizations (NGO), government organizations, private citizens, and adjacent GSAs who are interested in or could be affected by the development and implementation of the Alternative Plan Update. DWR has several categories of stakeholders that may be included in stakeholder engagement outlined in its SGMA Stakeholder Communication and Engagement Digital Toolkit. A separate Disadvantaged Community (DAC) outreach process, using existing avenues such as the NGO community, is also underway and discussed further below.

A stakeholder list, building on the Coachella Valley Integrated Regional Water Management stakeholder list, was assembled in consultation with the Public Information Officers from the Agencies and will be updated throughout the preparation of the Alternative Plan Update. The organizations that are currently a part of the stakeholder list are found in Appendix A.

Engagement with stakeholders so far has included an introductory letter targeted at the entities engaged in land use and water planning, private groundwater pumpers, and the Regional Water Quality Control Board. E-mail invitations for all public meetings are sent to all stakeholders including land use agencies, public and private water users, the environmental community, tribes in the region, and others.

## 4) Stakeholder Input

Public meetings will include an opportunity for stakeholders to provide input regarding issues, interests, and challenges in verbal and written form. Following initial outreach, follow-up actions could include additional small group meetings and/or telephone calls on an as-needed basis. In addition, stakeholders will have a variety of opportunities to discover and establish mutually beneficial partnerships through participation in public meetings during the Alternative Plan Update process.

### 4.1) DAC Outreach

DAC outreach is also being conducted in order to obtain input from groups that may be otherwise limited from participating in the Alternative Plan Update process and implementation due to barriers such as financial or language constraints. DACs are defined as areas having a mean household income (MHI) 80 percent or less than the statewide MHI. Targeted outreach to DACs is conducted to ensure that the

Alternative Plan Update approach and concepts are understood and input about water-related issues is received. Outreach will be focused on non-governmental organizations and others that work in the communities and have insight into DAC interests and challenges. Outreach methods include e-mail and phone call communications inviting these groups to attend all public workshops, as well as a Spanish-language version of the website described below and other outreach materials.

#### 4.2) Tribal Outreach

Although there are no federally recognized tribes or Tribal lands in the Mission Creek Subbasin Planning Area, the Planning Area may include tribal ancestral lands and may also potentially impact neighboring subbasins that support overlying Tribal lands. Therefore, tribal representatives in the Coachella Valley region are included in the contact list to maintain an open line of communication regarding the public meetings and the Alternative Plan Update. The contact list includes representatives from the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians, Augustine Band of Cahuilla Indians, Cabazon Band of Mission Indians, 29 Palms Band of Mission Indians, Morongo Band of Mission Indians, and Torres-Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians.

### 5) Key Messages and Discussion Topics

The prior public meetings during the preparation of the 2013 MC-GH WMP identified that

“Questions and comments from the public focused on water levels, water quality changes, water conservation, costs of sewer construction and water rates.”

Messages and discussion topics during Public Outreach meetings will center on the Alternative Plan, SGMA and the Alternative Plan Update content and process, and will be refined as questions arise during the outreach process. A Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document, which will be updated as appropriate, has been prepared and displayed on the Alternative Plan website: [www.MissionCreekSubbasinSGMA.org](http://www.MissionCreekSubbasinSGMA.org).

### 6) Venues for Engaging

The initial engagement consisted of an e-mail and/or outreach letter to stakeholder contacts. Agency representatives will continue to extend open invitations to the SGMA public meetings at other organization meetings. In addition, telephone contact will continue to be made with the DAC target organizations to encourage participation. Some stakeholders are familiar with the Alternative Plan Update effort as similar efforts are ongoing in neighboring subbasins.

A website to share information about the Mission Creek Subbasin and the Alternative Plan Update, Public Workshop materials, contact information, and answers to FAQs has been developed. The website URL is: [www.MissionCreekSubbasinSGMA.org](http://www.MissionCreekSubbasinSGMA.org). The website has also been translated into Spanish and can be accessed at the same URL. Spanish translation for meeting materials and other documents can be provided upon request. The website will continue to be updated throughout the Alternative Plan Update process as new information becomes available.

Due to Covid-19 restrictions, a virtual initial public meeting open to all interested parties was held on July 15, 2020 to provide background and a roadmap to the Plan Update process. If a face-to-face meeting is feasible during the Alternative Plan Update period, based on consultation with the Public Information

Officers for the Agencies, a single location in the Desert Hot Springs area with an early evening meeting time will be suggested for the public meetings to maximize likelihood of participation. After receiving feedback from the initial public meeting, follow-up public meetings with the stakeholders, DACs and other representatives will be planned at key times, approximately quarterly, during the Alternative Plan Update process.

## 7) Implementation Timeline

The following is a timeline for the activities to date related to Communications and Engagement:

January 31, 2020: Letter to planning agencies and to Regional Water Quality Control Board provided via e-mail by Michael Nusser, Water Resources Associate, CVWD

March 10, 2020: Draft website content for Management Committee Review

May 6, 2020 – Spanish translation of website content received

May 26, 2020, Disadvantaged Community Outreach by direct telephone call initiated

June 22, 2020 – Initial e-mail to over 150 contacts issued

June 2020 – Website launch: [www.MissionCreekSubbasinSGMA.org](http://www.MissionCreekSubbasinSGMA.org)

July 8, 2020 – Letter to RAC producers provided via e-mail by Michael Nusser, Water Resources Associate, CVWD and Ryan Molhoek, Senior Engineer, DWA

July 14, 2020 – Reminder e-mail for public meeting

July 15, 2020 – Virtual Initial Public Meeting with 42 attendees

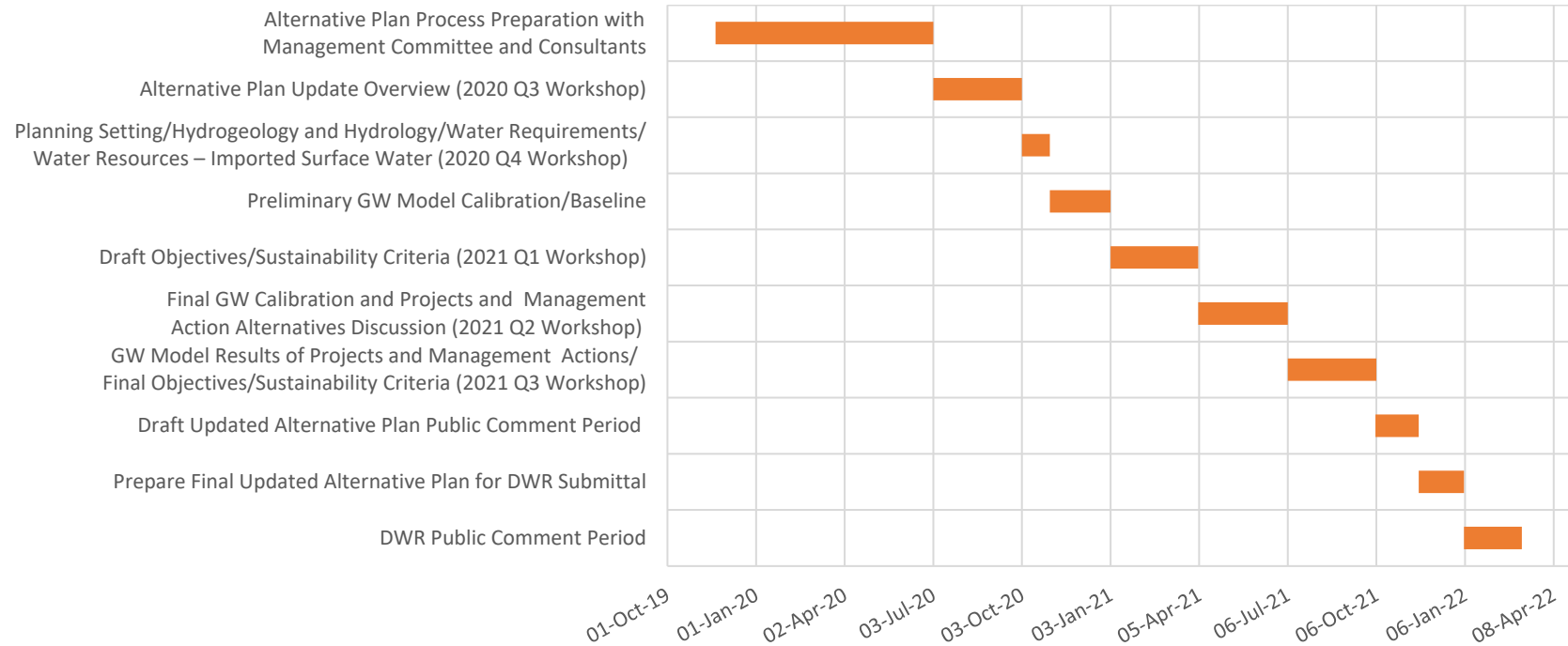
The tentative schedule for future meetings is provided in Table 1

## 8) Evaluation and Assessment

An adaptive management approach will be taken for communication and engagement for the Alternative Plan Update and this Communication and Engagement Plan may be revised as necessary. After discussions with stakeholders during public meetings, feedback on the means of communication, the content of communications and level of engagement will be evaluated, and adjustments will be made accordingly.

## 9) Tables

Table 1: Alternative Plan Update Schedule





## Appendix A: Stakeholder Organization Reference List

Organization Name
29 Palms Band of Mission Indians
Advancing Desert Hot Springs
Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians
Alianza Neighborhoods Action Team
Assemblyman Eduardo Garcia's Office
Augustine Band of Cahuilla Indians
Building Healthy Communities
Building Healthy Communities Neighborhoods Action Team
Bureau of Indian Affairs
CA Department of Housing and Community Development
Cabazon Band of Mission Indians
Cabazon Water District
California Department of Water Resources (DWR)
Catholic Charities
City of Banning
City of Cathedral City
City of Desert Hot Springs
City of Palm Springs
Clean Water Action
Clinicas de Salud
Coachella Rural Legal Assistance
Coachella Valley Association of Governments: Conservation Commission
Coachella Valley Association of Governments
Coachella Valley Association of Governments / Coachella Valley MSHCP
Coachella Valley Cannabis Alliance Network (CVCAN)
Coachella Valley Economic Partnership
Coachella Valley Housing Coalition
Coachella Valley Mosquito and Vector Control District
Coachella Valley Resource Conservation District
Coachella Valley Water District
Coachella Valley Water District - Board
Coachella Water Authority
County of Riverside
County of Riverside Economic Development Agency
Desert Edge Community Council
Desert Healthcare District
Desert Hot Springs Chamber of Commerce
Desert Water Agency
Desert Hot Springs (DHS) Hoteliers
El Sol Neighborhood Education Center
Environmental Justice Coalition for Water
Friends of the Desert Mountains

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**Organization Name**


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Golf Course Superintendents Association of America
Golf Course Task Force (Coachella Valley Golf and Water Task Force)
Indio Water Authority
Jeff Stone - District Director
Leadership Council
Lideres Campesinas
Mission Springs Water District
Morongo Band of Mission Indians
Natural Science Collaborative of the Desert Region
Palm Springs Unified School District
Pueblo Unido Community Development Corporation (CDC)
Rural Community Assistance Corporation (RCAC)
Regional Water Quality Control Board, Colorado River Region
Representative from Supervisor Manuel Perez
Riverside County Department of Environmental Health (DEH)
Riverside County Economic Development Agency (EDA)
Riverside County Flood Control and Water Conservation District
Riverside County Transportation and Land Management Agency
San Geronio Pass Water Agency
South Coast Air Quality Management District Environmental Justice Advisory Committee (SCAQMD EJAC)
Sky Valley Community Council
Thousand Palms Community Council
Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians
United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)
USDA Rural Development
Wildland Conservancy

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