BACKGROUNDER DOCUMENT ON WATER REUSE FOR TRIBAL OUTREACH

DESCRIPTION: Describes WRAP Action 2.15, tribal water reuse challenges, and why EPA is interested in building tribal partnerships

CREATORS: The Environmental Protection Agency, Region 9

WRAP ACTION AND MILESTONE: WRAP Action 2.15: Conduct Outreach and Training with Tribes to Build Water Reuse Capacity, Milestone 1

PUBLICATION DATE: December 2019

Water Reuse and Tribes – Actions To Build Tribal Capacity for Water Recycling

Water reuse can be an effective tool to increase the Nation's supply of freshwater and enhance the sustainability, resilience and security of water resources. The draft National Water Reuse Action Plan (WRAP), released in September, 2019, identifies priority actions and the collaboration necessary between governmental and non-governmental organizations to implement these actions. The plan can be found at: https://www.epa.gov/waterreuse/water-reuse-action-plan. Recognizing the importance of water reuse to many tribes, the WRAP proposes Action 2.2.15: "Work with Tribes to Support Water Reuse Solutions to Drought Challenges."

US EPA worked with a diverse group of federal, state, tribal, local, and stakeholder organizations to develop the draft WRAP. EPA is now soliciting stakeholder and public input through a 90-day public comment period, which ends on December 16th, 2019. **We look forward to working with interested tribes and tribal organizations to identify strategies to help tribes develop capability to implement water recycling projects, as part of a watershed scale integrated water resources planning effort, to help address water supply challenges.**

The next iteration of the National WRAP is scheduled for release on February 27, 2020. We plan to include a specific proposed approach to engaging with tribes to identify recycling opportunities, barriers to progress, and assistance needs for implementation in 2020-21. We would greatly value your ideas and assistance to make that action meaningful to a wide range of interested tribes.

Tribal Water Reuse Challenges

Drought and other factors threaten the water supplies of many tribes throughout the U.S. Pollutants in waters discharged to many streams, lakes, and rivers contribute to water quality impairments and can be expensive to remove. Many tribes are interested in finding ways to recycle treated wastewater and/or capture stormwater for consumptive use (both potable and non-potable) to address supply shortages and water quality challenges. However, tribes and communities have also raised concerns about potential reuse challenges (e.g. ensuring recycled water is safe for its intended uses and developing operator capability to maintain complicated recycling facilities).

To ensure that public health and the environment are protected, it is critical that wastewater recycling and stormwater capture are carried out safely. However, many water system managers are not ready to evaluate the effectiveness of recycling/capture as strategies for addressing water supply challenges, especially in comparison with other alternatives (e.g., conservation, new supply development). Further, many communities may not fully understand what it takes to be successful in developing and implementing wastewater recycling/stormwater capture capacity.

Seeking Tribal Input

As facilitator of the National WRAP, EPA is in a good position to coordinate with other federal agencies to build tribal awareness and capacity to safely recycle available water supplies. EPA is interested in building partnership between EPA, individual tribal representatives, the National Tribal Water Council, National and Regional Tribal Operations Committees, and the National Drought Resilience Partnership to identify and implement strategies to build interest in and capacity to safely implement recycling projects. EPA would like to work with the tribes to understand their interests in water reuse and gauge the specific needs and challenges that tribes are currently facing. **Tribes that are interested in participating in development and implementation of this action should contact David Smith, US EPA Region 9, at (415) 972-3464 or smith.davidw@epa.gov.**