

Sequoias to the Sloughs (S2S) Watershed Assessment and Stewardship Initiative

July 15, 2026 | Kick-off Session (Virtual)

Meeting Summary

The Sequoias to Sloughs (S2S) Initiative, led by Project Lead Steve Haze and supported by Ag Innovations, held its first community-wide kick-off session. This session introduced the initiative's purpose, focus areas, scope, objectives, values, timeline, and opportunities for public engagement. Participants expressed what they value most about the watershed, discussed their hopes for the collaborative effort, and explored potential outcomes for the initiative. Speakers also emphasized related regional efforts and highlighted opportunities for alignment and future collaboration.

For more detailed information, please refer to the meeting slides and video recording found on the Tulare Basin Watershed Partnership webpage [HERE](#).

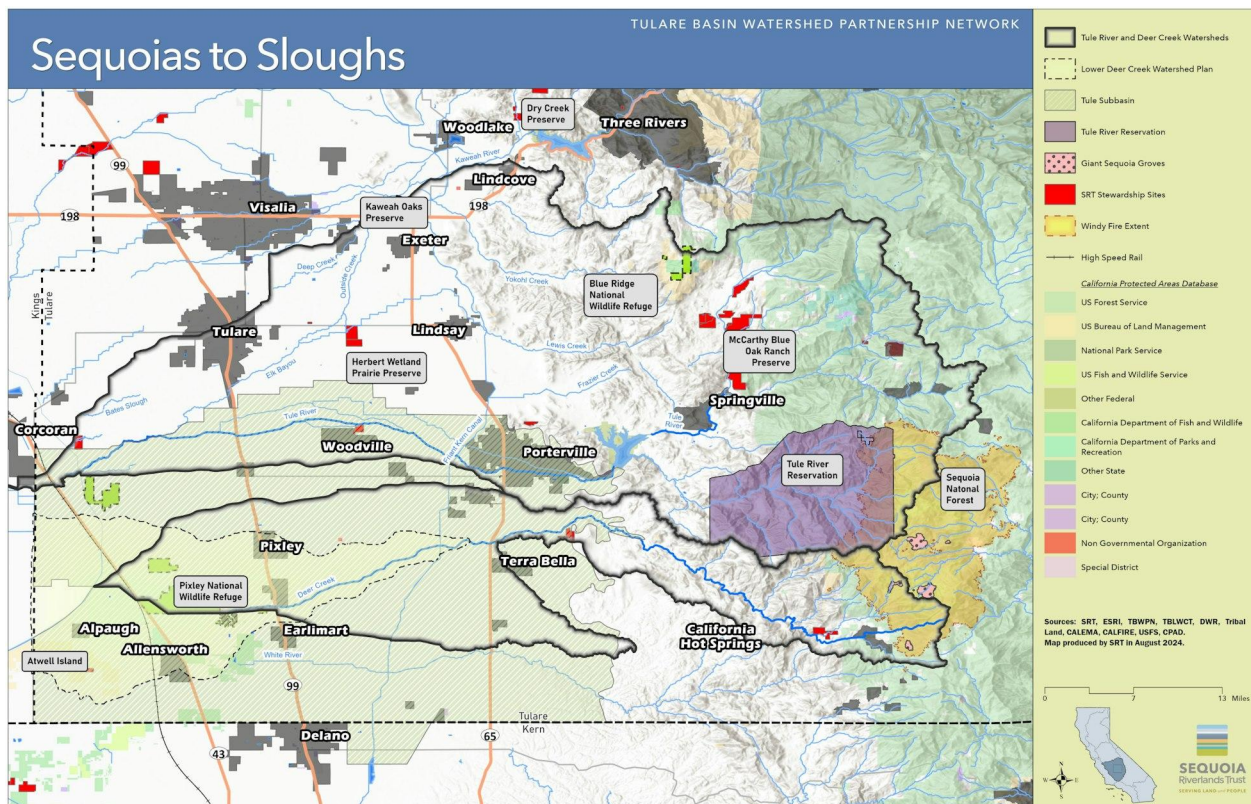
Key Takeaways

- The **Sequoias to the Sloughs (S2S) Watershed Assessment and Stewardship Initiative**, funded by the Bureau of Reclamation's WaterSMART program, is launching a collaborative effort to protect and improve the Tule River and Deer Creek hydrologic regions. This initiative aims to align stakeholders around strategic actions, ensuring collective benefits.
- Meeting participants emphasized that the most valuable outcome from this project is **a clear, actionable, watershed-scale plan grounded in community-identified goals and connecting the High Sierra headwaters – protecting them from future devastating fires – down to the valley floor, addressing flooding, water quality, groundwater recharge, and nature-based restoration.**
- Speakers highlighted alignment with the California Water Plan 2028, DWR's Watershed Resilience Program, NSF-funded AWRCON (adaptive policy) research, Southern Sierra IRWM, the Tule Land Trust's lower-watershed planning, and the Regional Restoration Planning & Partnership (R2P2).

Project Overview

Key goals for this initiative include assessing available information, developing a watershed action plan, and building multi-sector capacity, with all objectives shaped by a locally driven Watershed Stewardship Group. This effort will focus on holistic watershed health, including upper watershed post-fire recovery, drought and flood impacts, water quality and quantity, and Tribal, cultural, and social impacts. The project timeline is 2026 to 2028.

Please visit the [S2S website](#) for more information on the project approach, framework, and core values.

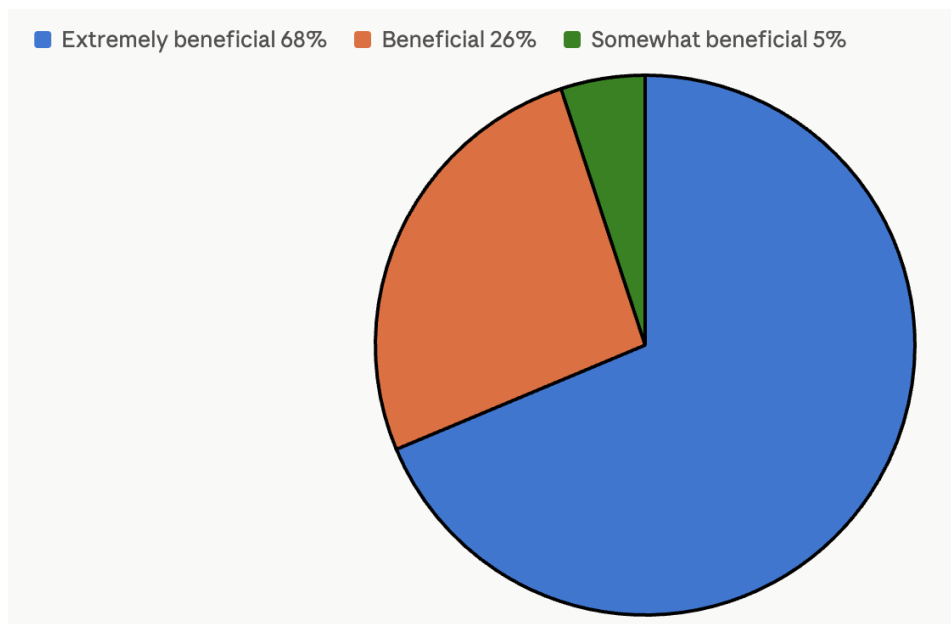


S2S Project Area Map

Participant Input

During the session, participants shared what they think a coordinated effort like this would do for these watersheds, the subbasin, or the larger region. They described potential benefits, including:

- 1. Healthier Watersheds:** Restored river flows and water quality, cleared channel debris, reduced wildfire risk through fuel reduction, and responses to drought, flood, and fire that protect both natural systems and quality of life.
- 2. Coordinated Management:** Unified management across upper, middle, and lower watershed federal agencies, ranch families, and irrigators to reinforce a more holistic approach with stronger regional planning and shared community purpose.
- 3. Respecting Rights While Expanding Access & Conservation:** Collaborative planning that integrates landowner water rights and voluntary conservation with opportunities for tribal landback, habitat connectivity, and expanded public/river access.
- 4. Funding & Regional Competitiveness:** Leveraging collective effort to become more competitive for state, federal, and private funding, and creating long-lasting funding pathways for future land use and restoration projects.
- 5. Shared Knowledge & Broader Benefits:** Exchanging best practices and closing data gaps, while delivering tangible ecological, economic, social, and cultural benefits across the Tulare Basin.



Participants responded to a poll indicating the degree to which they see a whole watershed initiative like S2S as beneficial to a full range of stakeholders. Sentiment was overwhelmingly positive: 68% rated the initiative as "extremely beneficial," 26% as beneficial, and just one response came in at "somewhat beneficial."

Participants also shared what they believe the most valuable outcome or deliverable from this project is: **a clear, actionable, watershed-scale plan grounded in community-identified goals and connecting the High Sierra protecting the headwaters from future devastating fires down to the valley floor that addresses flooding, water quality, groundwater recharge, and nature-based restoration.** Many also wanted practical tools to support that plan: technical analyses, shared best management practices, and case studies/communication resources for private landowners. A recurring theme was using this effort to strengthen state and federal attention and funding through a more collaborative process with broad buy-in.

Perspectives from Partners and Allies

- **Larry Saslaw (Board President, TBWP)** shared that he sees this effort as a way to build capacity and connection across the entire watershed, from valley-floor landowners to national forest land at the top, so that healthy rangelands function as both a productive economic asset and a functioning watershed. He also views Deer Creek and Tule River as a manageable starting point to build political capital and secure support at the local, state, and federal levels, with lessons that could scale to larger systems.
- **Gregory Liebau (Board Director, TBWP)** emphasized that the partnership needs voices from many places, including landowners with deep watershed knowledge and community members and farmworker families who may feel disconnected from the watershed yet depend heavily on its benefits (water quality, flood protection, recreation). He underscored that bringing everyone's perspective into the planning process up front leads to better-designed projects and stronger regional benefits down the line.
- **Bob Kamansky (Project Manager, Southern Sierra IRWMP)** highlighted the unique ecological value of the Deer Creek corridor, making this effort a unique conservation opportunity where integrated, watershed-scale collaboration will be essential to respond to intensifying droughts, floods, and fires.

- **Corrie Monteverde (Program Manager, Adaptive Water Resilience and Climate Operations in the Southwest (AWRCOS))** introduced AWRCOS, a regional resilience innovation incubator that is partnering with TBWP, Sequoia Riverlands Trust, and university collaborators to develop adaptive decision-making capacity in the San Joaquin Valley. AWRCOS research and strategy will be coordinated with S2S.
- **Jordi Vasquez (Senior Environmental Scientist, DWR)** articulated how S2S is well-aligned with the state's direction, including the 2028 CA Water Plan Update, DWR's Watershed Resilience Program, and DWR's recent San Joaquin tributary watershed studies.
- **Nick Reed-Krause (Executive Director, Tule Basin Land & Water Conservation Trust)** shared that he sees strong synergies between this initiative and the efforts already underway through the Multi-benefit Land Repurposing Program, the Hydraulic & Hydrologic (H&H) regional studies, and the work that the Tule Trust is doing on the valley floor under a BOR WaterSMART grant. He views this project as an opportunity to complement and build on these existing efforts.

Next Steps

The Project Team is currently recruiting members for two collaborative groups that will guide this initiative:

- **Watershed Stewardship Group (WSG)** – A collaborative group representing a broad range of watershed interests that will help shape the initiative's vision and priorities.
- **Technical and Regulatory Advisory Committee (TRAC)** – A group of technical and regulatory experts who will provide subject matter expertise and guidance throughout the project.

Participants were encouraged to reach out to Steve Haze and the Ag Innovations team if they're interested in being involved or receiving periodic updates.

Over the next few months, the Project Team will hold the first Watershed Stewardship Group meeting, where members will develop a shared vision for this initiative. Project participants will also be invited to a half-day field tour in the Subbasin during the first week of November to explore watershed challenges and opportunities together.

