

**CalDesal Outreach Communications Committee Meeting Notes**

**Tuesday, January 14, 2020**

**3:00-4:00 p.m.**

**Members present:**

Stacy Taylor (Chair), Mesa Water District

Sonja Morgan (Vice-Chair), South Coast Water District

Jennifer Allen, Contra Costa Water District

Gina Ayala, Orange County Water District

Tiffany Baca, Municipal Water District of Orange County

Lyndsey Bloxom, Water Replenishment District

Maritza Fairfield, Metropolitan Water District

Lorraine Garcia, Coachella Valley Water District

Jessica Jones, Poseidon

Nicole Stanfield, Santa Margarita Water District

**Guests:** Wendy Ridderbusch, Executive Director

The meeting began with new ED Wendy Ridderbusch thanking folks for being generous with their time and talent to be part of the new CalDesal committee which may be the most important committee moving forward into 2020 for the organization. The goals with the Outreach Communications Committee are to proactively communicate and educate on behalf of brackish and marine desalination and salinity management as credible third-party subject matter experts. CalDesal wants to get out proactively as an association with an affirmatively positive tone, stating the case for desalination and salinity management in simple, straightforward language. CalDesal needs to showcase the success of recent projects as well as champion future projects offensively, rather than defensively. Finally, the organization needs to state the facts consistent with the message.

Chair Stacy Taylor asked for a volunteer to serve in the Vice-Chair role to partner together on projects like facilitating the formation of a communications plan as well as in case she has a conflict that surfaces unexpectedly and she is unable to participate on the meeting call. The Vice-Chair could then serve as the Chair for the meeting. South Coast Water District’s Sonja Morgan stepped up and accepted the position of Vice-Chair.

Stacy then discussed several items with the committee:

Monthly calls

She wants to set realistic goals that the Committee will be able to meet. Between now and the February committee meeting she volunteered to work with Vice-Chair Morgan to come up with a draft CalDesal Communications Plan to present to the entire committee at the February meeting. It will consist of a one-pager about what we will accomplish for the upcoming year.

Stacy formed two, key subcommittees with a few people on the Outreach Communications Committee participating on them. The Subcommittees will decide how they want to meet to carry out their charge. For instance, by e-mail or conference call. Both Subcommittee Chairs will report back to the full committee at the March meeting on their assessment and recommendations for improving CalDesal’s social media and the website messages and appeal.

* Social Media – Subcommittee Chair Tiffany Baca (MWDOC). Members of the Subcommittee: Jessica Jones (Poseidon), Jennifer Allen (Contra Costa WD), and Lorraine Garcia (Coachella Valley WD). This social media subcommittee will serve as lead to assess the current social media that CalDesal is currently engaged in, and then come back with some recommendations about what is working, what needs to be continued and what could go away.
* Website – Subcommittee Chair Jessica Jones (Poseidon). Subcommittee members: Maritza Fairfield (Metropolitan WD), Tiffany Baca (MWDOC), and Lorraine Garcia (Coachella Valley WD). Stacy remarked that in her quick look, it doesn’t appear that CalDesal is getting search engine traffic. As Chair, Jessica agreed that the subcommittee would do a website review and then draft a list of questions about the website that they will then send to Wendy for answers.

Recent communication activity

Wendy informed the committee that CalDesal is working with two of its members, Poseidon and SDCWA, on placing an op-ed with CalMatters to refute misinformation regarding Carlsbad. Myths about Carlsbad need to get debunked. She expressed the need for the creation of some fundamental pieces about desalination. For example, how it is a high-quality water supply option and some facts about desal and salinity management in laymen’s (non-scientific and acronym) terms. If CalMatters ends up running the piece, Stacy suggested that CalDesal send a tweet with a link to the op-ed out. Stacy also requested any other ideas about possible op-eds about the benefits of brackish water and ocean desalination and thoughts about a media outlet or a topic that would be good for an op-ed or other communication.

The committee suggested featuring Monterey’s Cal Am or Southcoast’s Doheny desal projects. On the brackish water front, WRD informed the committee that they are currently planning a brackish water reclamation program. They are developing graphics and other helpful material for the project that CalDesal may be able to utilize.

Upcoming communication activity

* Content curation – This will go towards the website, or social media, or both. Stacy affirmed that we would love to get graphics from agencies that they would be able to share with CalDesal. She asked what CalDesal’s look on the website and on social media currently is? The looks that the subcommittees develop should ultimately be consistent on the website and all social media. Testimonials on specific projects from members of water district communities, the environmental community, and elected leaders, regulatory and legislative leaders are what the organization should be looking for. Committee members can collect quotes and testimonials to use in these areas. A one-sheet success story could be crafted with the familiar formula: a challenge, opportunity, and solution. Committee members shouldn’t feel like they have to write this themselves. Just connect the Committee Chair and Vice-Chair and the Subcommittee Chairs to the material. The committee is thinking about short FAQs. For example, “Who is CalDesal? Why use desalination? What is brackish water?” The committee could pull from these short FAQs for social media down the line. A reasonable goal would be to create and start with half a dozen talking points and then hammer those messages in the media. Eventually the committee could create an electronic info kit that could be placed on the website to use in recruiting new members and/or sponsors. Poseidon has some more generic infographics, and facts regarding water quality benefits of desalination that they will share with the committee that are not specific to any project.

* Editorial Master Calendar – This needs to be created and tied to upcoming activities of the organization, events, and project achievements and milestones. The committee will wait to put together this calendar after they get a better sense of what is coming up. This can be utilized this to plan tweets in advance of an event, for instance.
* Media/Clips Service and List – What existing resources do CalDesal members have that they could loan or donate to the organization? OCWD volunteered to monitor and check for relevant clips on CalDesal and some other key words like desalination, brackish water, etc. Gina of OCWD will share the list of “key words” that there are currently tracking as well as the frequency of clipping. OCWD will also volunteer to share the service that they use currently use for a media list. It is called Meltwater and it is used to keep track of media changes. They will monitor this.
* Other Issues? – Chair Taylor asked if there were any questions or additional input for the Committee? Wendy asked each committee members if they had anything else to add to the discussion.

Wendy committed to providing to the committee additional information about the website such as whether or not it is on the Wordpress platform after consulting with CalAdvocate Management (CAMS) which is CalDesal’s administrative contract. Stacy also asked if the website is search engine optimized? She emphasized that the website metatags need to be reviewed and possibly updated, along with the content. Lastly, are contact lists part of the backend of the website (for use with an eblast program like constant contact or mail chimp)?

Wendy will also produce a list of desal projects that are in the works and share it with the group. Sonja offered that she has a lot of background information about other projects and she will plan to add to Wendy’s list to produce a more complete list of projects. Additionally, Wendy committed to producing a list of member agencies who belong to CalDesal. The last request was for Wendy to provide the organization’s master calendar.

Wendy shared with the committee that CalDesal is paying CAMS IT staff to build a members’ only section on the CalDesal website with a Members-only login.

Jessica asked about who currently manages the website, and whether or not it will be easy to update? She indicated that the subcommittee will plan to look at the current content to see how updated it is and what the subcommittee will need to update.

Jessica also requested a list of all the committee members of CalDesal be circulated that includes names, association, and contact information. Wendy agreed to share this with the committee.

Next Outreach Communications Committee Meeting: **Tuesday, February 4, 2020 at 3:00 p.m.**

**Adjourned by Chair Taylor at 3:58 p.m.**