



## **BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

### *Information Summary*

May 21, 2009

#### **Subject**

Proposed Agreement with Cooperative Extension for Smartscape Implementation

#### **Policy Question**

Should AWMUA enter into an agreement with the University of Arizona Cooperative Extension, Maricopa County, for the implementation and expansion of AMWUA's Smartscape and Advanced Smartscape programs?

#### **Summary**

The AMWUA Regional Conservation Program Five-Year Plan includes the following elements pertaining to landscape professional training and certification efforts:

- Implementation of the Smartscape Program to be increased to twice a year.
- A collaborative review of the Smartscape Program with the partnering organizations to ensure that the curriculum is current and relevant and that the program is consistent throughout the state.
- Continued development and implementation of Advanced Smartscape workshops.
- Coordination and promotion of Irrigation Association (IA) training and certification in the Phoenix area.
- Promotion of training and certification to the industry and promotion of the benefits of hiring trained landscape professionals to the public.

In order to accomplish these elements, the AMWUA Conservation Committee and AMWUA staff propose that AMWUA contract with the University of Arizona Cooperative Extension, Maricopa County, for a period of two years, at a cost of \$30,000 per year, to be funded through the Regional Conservation Program budget. At the end of the term, the deliverables will be evaluated and a subsequent agreement considered.

## **Key Issues and Considerations**

Smartscape, Advanced Smartscape, Irrigation Association training and certification, and the promotion of these programs support AMWUA member municipalities in their efforts to increase water use efficiency and assist the members in complying with the requirements of the Management Plan. Smartscape will be accepted as a BMP under the new Modified Non-Per Capita Conservation Program.

Smartscape is a comprehensive, twenty-hour training program that instructs landscape professionals in the fundamentals of design, installation, irrigation, and maintenance of low-water-use landscapes. The need for efficient water use, the regulatory environment, methods of water conservation in the landscape, and the principles of Xeriscape are key components of the program. Developed collaboratively by Tucson Water, AMWUA, the University of Arizona Cooperative Extension, the Arizona Nursery Association, the Arizona Landscape Contractors Association, and industry representatives, Smartscape was launched in both the Tucson and Phoenix area in 1994. Since that time, more than 800 landscape professionals have successfully completed the program in the Phoenix area, influencing both commercial and residential outdoor water use through their practices and the information and practices they transmit to their colleagues and customers. Smartscape has become a recognized professional training program within the state and is valued by the landscape industry and increasingly by the public.

Administration of Smartscape is time-intensive. Finite AMWUA staff time limits implementation of the program. In February 2000, facilitated planning sessions for the Regional Conservation Program resulted in a report that identified AMWUA staff time as a “significant issue” and recommended that the Smartscape program be administered through the Cooperative Extension. That did not occur, and implementation of Smartscape was reduced from twice a year to once a year, where it has remained.

One Smartscape series per year does not meet existing demand; each year, the single series is filled to capacity and more people are added to the wait list. This isn't surprising, considering that Arizona's green industry provided direct employment to 30,300 hired workers in 2007. Future demand for the training program is expected to grow as population increases and drought continues to be a concern to both the industry and the public. In 2006, the AMWUA Conservation Committee reaffirmed the importance of Smartscape in the Five-Year Plan and proposed finding a way to reinstate a second Smartscape series each year.

Advanced Smartscape was developed in the Phoenix area as 30 hours of intermediate-level training intended to fill the gap between the introductory Smartscape series and national Irrigation Association certification courses. Two modules addressed irrigation design, installation, maintenance, troubleshooting, auditing, budgeting and scheduling, and “smart” technologies. These classes addressed irrigation issues in more depth, encouraging better irrigation management and the use of new technologies to reduce water consumption in the landscape.

The development and implementation of these classes were made possible by a substantial investment of staff time by SRP, AMWUA, AMWUA members, and others; however, the necessary level of staffing could not be maintained, and classes that were scheduled for annual implementation are on hold. The Advanced Smartscape classes were extremely well received by the industry, and demand for them continues, despite their extended suspension.

In order to maximize the effectiveness of limited AMWUA and member city resources, particularly staff time, the AMWUA Conservation Committee proposes to contract with the University of Arizona Cooperative Extension, Maricopa County, to implement Smartscape and Advanced Smartscape classes, improving the use of resources and partnerships, advancing the regional program, and increasing support of individual member conservation efforts. Contracting with the Cooperative Extension will significantly increase current efforts, expanding the reach, visibility, efficiency, and impact of these program elements.

Extension staff will:

- double the current Smartscape training offered in the Phoenix area, including offering one of the two series each year in alternating locations in the Valley.
- complete development of Advanced Smartscape.
- implement Advanced Smartscape a minimum of once annually, once established.
- ensure consistency in implementation and program relevancy of both Smartscape and Advanced Smartscape.
- serve as the primary contact for the landscape industry and the public regarding these education programs.

AMWUA and member staffs, partnering with Cooperative Extension and others, will then be able to address additional planned program elements:

- ensure affordable IA training and IA certification exams are routinely offered in the Phoenix area.
- develop a marketing and outreach effort that will encourage landscape professionals to pursue training and certification.
- create consumer demand for trained and certified landscape professionals.
- identify and implement new regional conservation efforts.

Cooperative Extension is well-positioned to deliver Smartscape training and related programs. It is the Cooperative Extension's mission to bring research-based information into communities to educate and solve local problems. In the past few years, the University of Arizona Cooperative Extension, Maricopa County, has placed increasing emphasis on urban landscapes and water management. In 2008, a Water Resources Extension Agent was hired to address urban water management issues in Maricopa County. As University of Arizona faculty, this Extension Agent will oversee the Extension staff implementing the Smartscape program. The Extension Agent will also be responsible for working with AMWUA to develop an advisory committee that will guide the program in coordination with Cooperative Extension faculty and staff.

Since 1994, the Cooperative Extension in Pima County has administered a successful Smartscape program in the Tucson area through an agreement with Tucson Water. The Maricopa County office will coordinate with the Pima County office to ensure continuity in the program between the two Extension offices. Maintaining consistency of the program as it expands within Maricopa County and across the state will be more efficiently achieved through a well defined partnership with Cooperative Extension.

Alternatives to contracting with the Cooperative Extension in order to meet the landscape professional training and certification related goals of the Five-Year Plan were considered:

- hiring temporary staff,
- eliminating other work elements, and
- maintaining current in-house implementation (one Smartscape series per year).

Contracting with Extension, however, allows the greatest and most efficient expansion of Smartscape and related landscape professional training and certification efforts without sacrificing other program components.

### **Prior Committee Action**

Funding for year one of this project is provided in the Regional Conservation Program budget for fiscal year 2009, approved in May 2008 by the AMWUA Board of Directors. Funding for year two is provided in the proposed Regional Conservation Program budget for fiscal year 2010.

At the May 2009 meeting, the AMWUA Management Board recommended that the AMWUA Board of Directors approve the two-year agreement with the University of Arizona Cooperative Extension, Maricopa County, in the estimated amount of \$30,000.00 per year, for the implementation and expansion of AMWUA's Smartscape and Advanced Smartscape programs and to assist with promotion and coordination of related landscape professional training and certification efforts, per the AMWUA Regional Conservation Program Five-Year Plan, and authorize AMWUA's Executive Director to execute the agreement.

### **Recommendation**

AMWUA staff recommends that the AMWUA Board of Directors approve the two-year agreement with the University of Arizona Cooperative Extension, Maricopa County, in the estimated amount of \$30,000.00 per year, for the implementation and expansion of AMWUA's Smartscape and Advanced Smartscape programs and to assist with promotion and coordination of related landscape professional training and certification efforts, per the AMWUA Regional Conservation Program Five-Year Plan, and authorize AMWUA's Executive Director to execute the agreement.

## **Attachments**

*Attachment A* – Background Information

*Attachment B* – Agreement between the Arizona Board of Regents for the University of Arizona (Cooperative Extension) and AMWUA

*Attachment C* - Letter of Support from the Arizona Nursery Association

*Attachment D* - Letter of Support from the Arizona Landscape Contractors' Association

*Attachment E* - Letter of Support from the City of Tucson

*Attachment F* - Letter of Support from the Salt River Project (SRP)