

**Greater Monterey County Integrated Regional Water Management Plan
Regional Water Management Group Meeting
May 15, 2013
1:30 - 3:30 PM
Moss Landing Marine Labs, Moss Landing, CA**

RWMG Attendees:

Sierra Ryan – Central Coast Wetlands Group
Paul Robins – Resource Conservation District of Monterey County
Monique Fountain – Elkhorn Slough National Estuarine Research Reserve
Christina McGinnis – Monterey County Agricultural Commissioner’s Office
Julianne Rhodes – Watershed Institute, CSUMB
Colin Bailey – Environmental Justice Coalition for Water
Brian True – Marina Coast Water District
Horacio Amezcuita – San Jerardo Cooperative, Inc.

Non-RWMG Attendees:

Susan Robinson – IRWM Plan Coordinator
Chris Coburn – representing Santa Cruz IRWM Regional Water Management Group
Karen Nilsen – Nilsen & Associates
Jeanette Pantoja – California Rural Legal Assistance (CRLA)
Kenia Acevedo – California Rural Legal Assistance (CRLA)
Gita Kapahi – State Water Resources Control Board
Katie McNeill – Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board

Meeting Minutes:

1. Brief Introductions.

2. Santa Cruz IRWM Planning: Chris Coburn joined us from Santa Cruz to talk about the Santa Cruz IRWM planning effort. The Santa Cruz IRWM region is defined roughly by the county boundaries, but includes portions of San Mateo County up to, but not including, Gazos Creek. They share a geographic area with the Pajaro Watershed IRWM region, namely the lower Pajaro and Watsonville Sloughs area. The two IRWM regions have divvied up IRWM coverage: Pajaro covers water supply and flood management issues, while Santa Cruz covers water quality and habitat issues in the overlapping region.

The first IRWM Plan for the “Northern Santa Cruz County IRWM Region” (now just “Santa Cruz County”) was completed in 2005 under Proposition 50. There were six agencies in the Regional Water Management Group (RWMG). They received \$12.5 million in Prop 50 IRWM funds to implement 15 projects, which are now nearly completed. They also received IRWM Planning Grant funds to update their IRWM Plan to Prop 84 standards, which they are in the process of doing now. They have developed a “conceptual framework” and are working to scope projects. The Project List currently contains 78 projects; it is unclear how those existing projects, plus any new projects developed with the next project solicitation, will get incorporated into the new IRWM Plan. They aim to have the IRWM Plan updated by beginning of next year and approved by March 2014.

The Santa Cruz County RWMG currently consists of a Steering Committee of three entities (County of Santa Cruz, Santa Cruz RCD, and City of Santa Cruz), plus nine Partner Agencies. The Steering Committee meets every month while they are working on the plan, but typically they meet much less frequently. They also hold occasional public workshops to drum up public interest in the IRWM planning process.

The Santa Cruz County IRWM region has two disadvantaged communities (DACs): the City of Davenport and the City of Watsonville. They are working on a potential grant with DWR to do additional outreach and mapping of DACs in the region, and will hopefully get started on that within the next few weeks. Paul asked about the IWRP – Integrated Watershed Restoration Program for Santa Cruz County – and how it dovetails with IRWM. Chris explained that the two programs were developed around the same time, and that IWRP was considered a “project” of the IRWM Plan under Prop 50. For the IWRP, the RCD, Coastal Conservancy, and other partner organizations reviewed watershed plans in the region and created a master list of projects, which were reviewed by a TAC. The TAC identified the “highest priority” projects, which relieved competition amongst the watershed groups. Coastal Conservancy funds then enabled design and permitting for those high priority projects. Chris said IWRP worked well under Prop 50 but he’s not sure how it will work under Prop 84. Paul commented that the RCD in Monterey County started an IWRP process a few years ago based on the Santa Cruz model, and are also trying to figure out how to make it fit with the Prop 84 IRWM process – finding it a challenge.

Horacio asked Chris how many projects have been funded under Prop 84 thus far. Chris replied none: they chose not to apply in Round 1 or Round 2, but they will be applying in Round 3.

3. Greater Monterey County IRWM DAC and Tribal Needs Assessment: Jeanette presented a report which she recently completed for the RWMG under IRWM Planning Grant funds on DAC and Tribal Needs in the Greater Monterey County IRWM region. Susan had emailed the report to RWMG members prior to the meeting. Jeanette passed out a spreadsheet (also included in the report) outlining DAC areas, their water supply and/or water quality needs, and the funding status. She noted that this spreadsheet was largely drinking water focused. Data was used from Monterey County Health Department and the Regional Water Board. They found that the rate of drinking water contamination is quite high for smaller systems (less than 15 connections): more than 10% of these systems were found to be contaminated with nitrates, and many with arsenic. These smaller systems are more of a problem than larger systems due to economies of scale as well as language barriers. Horacio commented that it is challenging to get people to work together (issues of property rights and other barriers); it is difficult for privately owned systems to get grant money, and difficult to bring people together to implement a system that is efficient and environmentally friendly.

Jeanette also noted the problem of a lack of technical capacity and understanding of concepts such as “IRWM.” Affordability is another problem; O&M is really high. For example, Horacio noted that an audit cost for the San Jerardo system is \$10-15K, while their entire annual budget is \$98K; it doesn’t matter how large or small a system is, the audit cost is the same. Jeanette said they found technical capacity to be a major problem for DACs during this past application process for Round 2. It was really difficult for both San Lucas and the Pajaro Sunny Mesa CSD (for the Springfield water system) to engage in the process; the application process is both complex and expensive. She noted another barrier being lack of good data. She said we need to better manage and collect data; our current data is both outdated and incomplete.

Jeanette had asked Louise Ramirez, the Tribal Chairperson for the Ohlone Costanoan Esselen Tribe, what issues she would like to have highlighted for this report. Louise said that one of their biggest issues is that they are not federally recognized, which can be a real problem when it comes to CEQA. Jeanette discussed some problems with the current system, namely that Tribal Monitors used to monitor projects in potentially sensitive areas may not even be from the relevant tribe. She noted that the Tribal Monitors should be used more as a “last resort”: the time for dialogue should be during the *pre-planning* stage.

Jeanette concluded that these communities are very small, there are problems of economies of scale, there is a huge need for technical assistance, and groups such as CRLA need more and better data in order to provide more outreach and more precision. She recommends that the RWMG invite Tribal representation on the RWMG, and as a recommendation to DWR, that technical assistance and financing for IRWM grant applications be made available for DACs. Finally, Jeanette and Sierra talked briefly about how the Action Tracker might serve as a basis for tracking some of this data.

4. Update on Water Resource Project Coordination: Sierra announced that there will be a stakeholder meeting for the WRPC process held on June 4 from 2:00 to 4:00PM at the Water Resources Agency office in Salinas, to discuss the “Blueprint” for pilot Gabilan watershed. She urged RWMG members to attend, noting that it is really important that we get as many people there as possible. Save the date!

5. What’s Next for the Regional Water Management Group: Now that the IRWM Plan is completed and adopted, Susan asked the Group how they would like to focus these RWMG meetings. What would they like to get out of this ongoing planning effort? Susan asked whether they would prefer to meet every other month rather than every month, now that the Plan is completed. All responded that they would. Paul said he thinks we’ll all learn a lot as the WRPC process continues to unfold (and that the RWMG should continue to stay involved). Jeanette brought up Round 3, and noted that the DAC effort is already a bit late in getting started on this; there is a lot of dialogue that needs to occur beforehand. Horacio emphasized that DACs need more technical assistance, there is simply not enough funding support. Sierra asked who is leading the charge for DACs for Round 3 (CRLA?), and Jeanette responded that she did not know; it needs to be discussed.

Getting back to the question of what RWMG members would like to get out of the ongoing RWMG meetings, Sierra suggested dedicating each RWMG meeting to a water resource-related theme – water supply, water quality, environment, flood management – and opening up a roundtable discussion led by agencies/organizations in those resource areas to learn more about the issues and what is currently being done. Related to that, Paul suggested that some of the meetings could be dialogue/discussion in the manner of what Katie Burdick has been doing with the WRPC process – an “issue” discussion, including the open sharing of project ideas.

6. Roundtable: Featuring Monterey County RCD: Paul gave an overview of the Resource Conservation District of Monterey County’s latest goings-on. He explained that the RCD is a special district, a unit of local government not affiliated with the County but whose boundary coincides with that of the County. The RCD has no tax base so they must rely on grants to fund their work.

Among the RCD’s current activities: The RCD’s Livestock and Land program has been very successful the past 5-6 years, though funding for this program is sunsetting soon; Paul will be seeking additional grant funds to continue this program. The program assists owners of livestock – particularly small operations that don’t have access to USDA funds – with water quality management. The RCD is also currently involved in watershed restoration in Santa Rita Creek watershed with the Central Coast Wetlands Group, and are involved in an improvement project in Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park to resolve a fish passage barrier in the Big Sur River (Paul is seeking funds for this project). The RCD is also providing support for the Big Sur River Watershed Management Plan, and is coordinating watershed improvement projects in Carmel Valley. The RCD is working in partnership with Monterey County on an erosion control and weed management program, focusing especially on sloped lands. Another RCD program, this one in partnership with the Monterey Bay Sanctuary Foundation, UC Cooperative Extension, and Central Coast Wetlands Group, is an Irrigation and Nutrient Management program for growers; funding for this program comes from the Regional Water Board, plus the RCD has submitted a proposal for Round 2 IRWM Implementation Grant funds to fund this effort. Another proposed project for Round 2 IRWM Implementation Grant funds is invasive weed management in the Salinas River watershed, particularly for arundo. Paul explained that about 2,000 acres of this watershed is infested with arundo, causing a major flooding concern. The RCD is proposing a 10-20 year eradication program which will offer flood prevention, environmental restoration, and water supply benefits.

Horacio asked Paul how they go about teaching growers about irrigation/nutrient management. Paul explained that it’s up to the growers to ask for assistance. The RCD offers water use evaluation and water efficiency and nutrient management assessments. Incentive to growers for these services may come from the Ag Waiver, or because the grower wants to save money – but ultimately it is up to the grower to ask for assistance. Part of the challenge is in getting the word out in Spanish (and other non-English languages). The RCD no longer has

Spanish-speaking staff, though they have been receiving some assistance from Santa Cruz County RCD Spanish-speaking staff.

7. Other News: Christina suggested that everyone take the time to review the Salinas River Stream Maintenance Program EIR (Comments due by March 31st), paying particular attention to the mitigation measures in the Executive Summary versus the "BMPs" outlined in Table 2.5-1, in Chapter 2.0, Program Description.

Next month's RWMG meeting is scheduled for July 17th from 1:30 – 3:30 PM, location TBD.