

**Greater Monterey County Integrated Regional Water Management Plan  
Regional Water Management Group Meeting  
June 18, 2014  
1:30 - 3:30 PM  
Moss Landing Marine Labs, Moss Landing, CA**

**RWMG Attendees:**

Sierra Ryan – Central Coast Wetlands Group, Moss Landing Marine Labs  
Ross Clark – Central Coast Wetlands Group, Moss Landing Marine Labs  
Bridget Hoover – Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary  
Horacio Amezcuita – San Jerardo Cooperative, Inc.  
Julianne Rhodes – Watershed Institute, CSUMB  
Vicente Lara – Environmental Justice Coalition for Water  
Rob Johnson – Monterey County Water Resources Agency (MCWRA)  
Rachel Saunders – Big Sur Land Trust  
Paul Robins – Resource Conservation District of Monterey County  
Christina McGinnes – Monterey County Agricultural Commissioner’s Office  
Mike McCullough – Monterey Regional Water Pollution Control Agency  
Gary Petersen – City of Salinas  
Frank Aguayo – City of Salinas

**Non-RWMG Attendees:**

Susan Robinson – IRWM Plan Coordinator  
Karen Nilsen – Nilsen & Associates  
Jeanette Pantoja – California Rural Legal Assistance  
Kenia Acevedo – California Rural Legal Assistance  
Pearl Kan – California Rural Legal Assistance  
Katie Burdick – Burdick and Company  
Melanie Beretti – SureHarvest

**Meeting Minutes:**

**1. Brief Introductions.**

**2. IRWM Drought Grant Round:** Susan reminded everyone that at the last RWMG meeting, there were three projects “on the table” for the Drought round: Monterey County Water Resources Agency (MCWRA) Interlake Tunnel, City of Salinas and Monterey Regional Water Pollution Control Agency (MRWPCA) Stormwater Diversion project, and a disadvantaged communities (DAC) project which consisted of two water supply/wastewater projects and a recycled water project at San Jerardo Cooperative. By the end of that meeting the RWMG agreed that the three project proponents should go out and determine whether there was sufficient “drought impact need” to warrant applying in this round, and if the project proponents decided there was, then the RWMG would support putting forward an application on behalf of the region.

Susan said that she and Karen Nilsen then went out and surveyed water suppliers and various agencies throughout the region to determine the impacts of the 2014 drought in Monterey County. The result was that they were unable to demonstrate significant impacts of the drought (though there may well be great need by the end of this summer, and there certainly will be great need in the event of another dry winter). Susan added that the relative lack of drought impact “now” was especially notable given that other parts of the state were experiencing such severe impacts, and that this Drought grant round was a statewide competition (i.e., much more competitive than the typical IRWM grant round). Based on that information, two of the project proponents decided not to apply, but one of the project proponents – the City of Salinas/MRWPCA – decided they would like to apply anyway. Since the outcome of this situation didn’t exactly fit the scenarios discussed with the RWMG at the last meeting, Susan felt it was important to get the RWMG’s approval before putting forward an application for the Drought round.

There was a short discussion. Susan said she wondered whether submitting an application without being able to demonstrate strong “need” might somehow cast a negative light on our region with DWR, and affect our chances for future grant rounds. No one seemed concerned about that. Gary Petersen said they feel they can make a strong case for this project and that, in fact in his experience with writing grants, the harm comes when you disappear from the process, not when you keep “knocking on the door.” He said the project would capture ag wash water as well as first flush (which made the water quality folks in the room very happy).

Rob raised the concern that, at last month’s meeting, we learned (from Katie Burdick) that these statewide competitions tend to favor urban areas – and that our region is definitely not that. He added, importantly, that there was a water rights issue pending in the City of Salinas/MRWPCA’s proposal: the proposal includes capturing water from the Rec Ditch, but MCWRA has applied for Blanco Drain and Rec Ditch water rights. Gary said that the proposal would only include capturing runoff from the South Salinas neighborhoods (not the North Salinas neighborhoods, as proposed originally), thereby not involving the Rec Ditch. Frank noted that the Rec Ditch portion of the original proposal was only included as a “TBD” pending the water rights issue.

In the end everyone pretty much agreed that if the project proponents wanted to go forward and were willing to pay for the application, then they should be allowed to go forward. Everyone voted in favor of submitting the application on behalf of the region. Sierra asked, how can the RWMG help? Susan said her biggest concern with this grant was establishing “need” in terms of drought impact, and that if anyone knew of any information regarding drought impacts to please send it her way. Someone suggested that she talk with Abby Taylor-Silva at the Grower-Shipper Association, and Christina suggested she take a look at the newly released Crop Report.

### **3. Status of Funds to Develop a Drinking Water and Wastewater Plan for DACs in the Salinas Valley:**

Jeanette informed the Group that on Monday, the legislature approved and signed the Governor’s May revise budget, which included a \$500,000 appropriation to provide funding to our RWMG to develop an integrated water quality and wastewater treatment program plan for DACs in the Salinas Valley (focusing on nitrate contamination in drinking water).

As background: In 2008 a bill was signed into law to require the State Water Resources Control Board, in consultation with other agencies, to prepare a report to the legislature to better understand the sources of nitrate contamination and identify solutions for nitrate contamination of groundwater used for drinking. In response, UC Davis published a report commissioned by the State Water Board entitled, “Addressing Nitrate in California’s Drinking Water.” The study found that 10 percent of people in the Tulare Lake Basin and the Salinas Valley rely on drinking water that may contain levels of nitrates that are above the state drinking water standards. The Tulare Lake Basin area was given \$2 million to develop a plan to determine sustainable solutions. The \$500K appropriated to our region would enable us to develop a similar plan, modeled after the Tulare Lake Basin plan. Susan said this was tremendous news, and that we should devote next month’s RWMG meeting to begin discussing (the many) logistics. All agreed!

**4. 2014 Water Bond:** Rachel provided a brief update on the 2014 Water Bond. The latest, most popular Water Bond bill is SB 848 (Wolk). The cost of this bill is now up to \$10.5 billion. Rachel said that Senate staff are working on amendments to the bill this week, trying to include a provision for IRWM funds in the bond to be used for watershed and flood protection projects (whereas there is no or very little funding provided in the bill for those purposes now), among other things. There have been a number of concerns raised about this bill, including the fact that there are a lot of earmarks. There is \$3 million earmarked for the State Coastal Conservancy, and earmarks within that, but there would still be some money available that the Central Coast could potentially access in that fund.

Rachel said that there are similar bills on the Assembly side; we’ll have to see which bill “pops out” first. In order for it to be on the ballot by November, the bill must pass out of the legislature by July 3<sup>rd</sup>. If neither bill meets that deadline, then the current Water Bond will stay on the ballot. The question then will be whether money will be raised to support a campaign for the bond. Mike noted that Wolk’s bill has trimmed down the amount of money

that had been available for recycled water projects, which isn't good. Rachel said she'd keep the RWMG posted on the status of SB 848 and the Assembly bills.

**5. Water Resource Project Coordination Process:** Now that the WRPC process is winding up, Sierra led a "debrief" for the RWMG and an evaluation of the process.

Sierra began with some background. The process started in 2011, when the RWMG was looking to integrate projects during one of the project solicitations. The Project Review Committee was struck by how many projects were located in the same geographic area but were not integrated. This was due to various reasons, ranging from conflicting goals to people simply not talking to each other. Integrating many of these projects seemed to be beyond the scope of the regular integration process in the IRWM Plan. A special process was needed.

So the RWMG formed a subcommittee to figure out how to move forward with more integration. In 2011 the Planning Grant was funded, enabling the Group to run a pilot test on a new sort of "fact-finding" conflict resolution/integration process. The subcommittee chose the Gabilan Watershed in the lower Salinas Valley – encompassing most of City of Salinas, mountains in the Gabilan mountain range, plus agriculture – because that area had the most projects.

In January 2012 the subcommittee held a stakeholder meeting. The subcommittee put a lot of work into getting representative stakeholders, including environmental justice, ag, land trusts, universities, regulatory, and local governments. The meeting was very successful. They brought together people who hadn't sat together in a room before. After that meeting, and with substantial input from the stakeholders, they hired Katie Burdick to act as facilitator for the WRPC process. Katie spent the summer of 2012 interviewing about a dozen stakeholder groups to learn about their concerns and issues.

In January 2013, the subcommittee held a full-day stakeholder meeting. Representatives from pretty much every stakeholder group attended. The meeting posed the questions: What are the major challenges in the watershed? What is your individual vision for the watershed? What are the challenges/opportunities for achieving that vision? Sierra said they had hoped that integrated projects would "fall from the sky and we would all agree on them." That didn't quite happen, but it was a positive event nonetheless. They found there to be a lot of overlap in visions for the watershed. The subcommittee realized that they still had to move past a few challenges before they would be ready to develop integrated projects, so they came up with the idea for the "Gabilan Watershed Blueprint." The Blueprint is based on the challenges and opportunities that came up during the meeting and consists of the following four sections:

- 1) **Landscape Scale Visioning:** Before projects could be integrated, Sierra said, they really did need to come to some common vision of the watershed. This graphic visioning process was meant to achieve the common vision.
- 2) **OnFarm Solutions:** Sierra said they had gotten a lot of interest from the ag community during the stakeholder workshops in building the growers' capacity to move forward on sustainability measures. The subcommittee decided to provide some WRPC funds to support a new partnership between research and the ag community, called OnFarm Solutions.
- 3) **Corporate Social Responsibility:** There had been a lot of stakeholder frustration expressed with the current state of grants available for funding sustainability projects. The WRPC subcommittee hired SureHarvest, a private consulting company that provides solutions to growers and agrifood companies pursuing sustainability strategies, to look at the possibility of working with the ag industry on funding sustainability measures in the watershed.
- 4) **Regulatory Compliance:** Regulatory compliance has been notoriously confusing and difficult to navigate. This section of the Blueprint focused on understanding the plans, roles, and gaps within agency mandates that impact the region.

Paul acted as lead on the Landscape Visioning section, and explained that process. He said he took the drawings that came out of the 2013 workshop and distilled them into themes. He said there were a lot of references to the city with lots of greenspace, parks, with very distinct boundaries (ag, urban), and the connections that people

would have with waterways going through the city (an amenity). Then in the countryside, lots of images of creeks, fishing, productive ag. There was a lot of talk of the Rec Ditch and Carr Lake as focuses of interest. Paul had created a big drawing of the Rec Ditch that was then displayed with different levels of vegetation (trace overlays). He contacted 10 people, including growers and people who had been involved with the Rec Ditch, and showed them those images. He wanted to get a sense of where the “shared” parts were (he wasn’t worried about “not shared” because “shared” is where projects could be). Another main theme was for area farms to contain farm runoff water quality management techniques (he pointed out that there are projects already in the IRWMP for this). Another theme: The Rec Ditch would be able to convey storm flows, etc. Finally, there would be a bike path connecting Salinas to coast – but this, he noted, was a hot topic, the place of least agreement among the groups. He pointed out that the pathway could lie along existing rights of way, such as roadways. Paul said that these drawings were created mainly as an outreach piece.

Bridget described the OnFarm Solutions section. She said they wanted to engage the ag community in the WRPC effort, and began working with Abby Taylor-Silva of the Grower-Shipper Association along with Marc Los Huertos at the Watershed Institute at CSUMB. The goal of this effort was to help growers gain a better understanding of nitrate quick tests, including how to use them, compile them, interpret them, and their true cost benefit to the organization. The specific tasks for OnFarm Solutions included developing a website with nitrate quick test information for growers, revising the standard operating procedures (SOP) for the nitrate quick test to be regionally specific (i.e., to better understand nitrate composition in soil, how to manage their applications), and developing a database to store the results of testing.

Bridget noted that they have had some issues with the deliverables because OnFarms Solutions had been working to build capacity but not necessarily to report, and DWR had issues with that. So the work is on hold temporarily except for developing the website and the SOP for the quick test. Also, they lost their technical lead (Marc Los Huertos), though he will still review the final products. The SOP will be included in the final Blueprint, and the website will be on ongoing deliverable, which will be continually updated.

Melanie Beretti from SureHarvest gave a summary of the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) part of the Blueprint. Melanie said that there has been a big push in the industry, especially coming from the market place (e.g., Walmart, Coca Cola), toward wanting more transparency, first addressing sustainability within their own corporations and now moving out to their supply chains. So this section of the Blueprint was intended to look at what’s going with CSR in the ag industry. There are now individuals within many companies focused on sustainability. The question was – how to work with those individuals as part of Central Coast watershed protection efforts. The idea was simply to begin a conversation with the industry, and leverage what they are already doing.

In March 2014, funded in part with Planning Grant WRPC funds, SureHarvest convened and facilitated a half-day agricultural industry roundtable discussion on sustainability initiatives. Twenty-two industry leaders, company executives, and CSR/sustainability directors on California’s Central Coast and beyond participated in the roundtable. The workshop was co-sponsored by Central Coast Grower-Shipper Association, Western Growers, and Monterey County Sustainability Working Group. Melanie said this was the first time that the industry had come together in the broader perspective to talk about the state of sustainability and what’s happening in the marketplace. There were some really good, optimistic outcomes. She wrote a summary report that outlines these initiatives, challenges identified by the group, and next steps. A couple of take-home messages:

1. Sustainability is feeling like a compliance burden to growers. They’re having to deal with answering a bunch of questions from buyers. Knowing that, there appeared to be good opportunity to re-engage with the ag community through the Agriculture Water Quality Alliance (AWQA). Growers don’t always know who to call in terms of regulatory issues. That’s one arena where there’s a need and a good opportunity.
2. The scope of focus expanded out because some of these organizations are part of larger companies growing in other areas.
3. There wasn’t much desire to explore certification programs. There was more interest in self-assessments that could help address compliance requirements.

Katie Burdick led the Regulatory Compliance section of the Blueprint, and explained the process. She said she interviewed people, went to websites, and created a matrix with all the different agencies' permitting requirements, then had additional discussions with agency staff about their willingness/ability to collaborate. She said that everyone wanted to collaborate, but no one perceived themselves as having the time to do it. She also noted that the difference between a specific project moving through the regulatory process vs. what the matrix shows is really different. There's a disconnect between the entry-level permitting receivers vs. the "inside the agency system" permitting evaluators. Additionally, increasingly agencies don't have the capacity for determining baseline water quality conditions and leave that to the permittees. When it comes to interagency negotiations around mitigation, yes they want to do it, but it can take years to get interagency staff to agree on mitigation measures on a project-specific basis. The reality is this process will always be complicated and expensive.

So we've got the matrix, she said; it will be useful for some people as an entry-level step. We've learned enough to inform the project integration process and the project development process. But we haven't cracked the problem.

Next steps: Katie said they took apart all of the existing projects in the IRWM Plan into components, put all components that were the same into one basket, then looked at geographies, and ultimately created a list of integrative themes or integratable places, e.g., Moro Cojo (diverging projects can all be implemented in the same place, addressing different objectives). Now Katie and her team will begin meeting one-on-one with different entities and stakeholder groups (which she calls "circuit riding") to try to develop integrated projects.

Katie started this process with the City of Salinas. She showed the RWMG a diagram of the Salinas Valley that depicted an integrated industrial and ag water, stormwater, and sanitary sewer treatment efficiency and source water augmentation improvement project – a project that includes the City of Salinas and beyond. As a next step for this project, she said they will take the project to the environmental justice, ag, and then environmental contingents. At what point does the integrated project become a deal breaker for each of these groups? Through this process of "circuit riding," they will develop some new hybrid project. Katie says she hopes to have four integrated projects, containing components of 4 - 8 previous IRWM Plan projects, by the end of July. They will also do a funding evaluation identifying potential funding sources for each project.

Jeanette commented that she hopes the consultation with the EJ groups is not just to determine whether there are any deal breakers, but whether there can be positive benefits. Katie said absolutely. Ross asked, how do you deal with deal breakers? There are a lot of deal breakers out there... how do we get past that? The response was, one step at a time...

Sierra and Katie then led a discussion with the RWMG to evaluate the overall WRPC process. Sierra began by reporting on feedback from stakeholder participants, which she said was very positive. Bringing all those people together in one room proved to be a positive experience for the participants. But she said the WRPC subcommittee should have established a vision of what they were working toward early on. And yet at the same time, someone pointed out, they were trying to be open to ideas – which is exactly why they didn't establish a vision early on.

#### *What worked:*

Jeanette said she thought this was a more accessible process to a layperson coming to water management than the IRWM planning process has traditionally been. She attributed that to the landscape process. Paul said he liked the watershed focus. The project *outcomes* keep it a positive process. Sierra said the networking was good, partnership building, people talking to each other for the first time. Ross commented on it being an open process for anyone who could and wanted to participate.

#### *What didn't work:*

Everyone agreed – the timeline was a challenge. There was a huge loss of momentum created by the contract process with DWR. Bridget added that the subcommittee also changed dramatically over the course of the WRPC process because of the extended timeline. Jeanette said that as someone who wasn't part of the subcommittee, it was hard to envision how they arrived at the final outcomes – i.e., the four sections of Blueprint – from the first

January 2012 stakeholder meeting. Sierra agreed, the subcommittee should have had more meetings, more conversations, more input as they were moving forward. Katie commented that they didn't get projects on the table early enough because the process was so conceptual. Christina said she would have liked an example of what a good project looked like coming out of this process – that was hard to envision.

*Is this process useful for the future? Would we want to do it again?*

Jeanette said yes, but there should be more transparency, more clarity from the beginning. Ross said, "I'll have to tell you in two months because what Katie is doing now is critical to whether this has been successful." Bridget commented, it will be useful to see how the Blueprint contributes to those projects. She said, "We have a lot to learn from what we did, the step by step." To the question, should we do it again? Bridget responded maybe; we have the momentum, we can build off of it... Maybe we can reproduce the process, but with caveats. Katie commented that, through all of her work with different IRWM regions, one thing she's seen work again and again is this circuit riding strategy. Convene a group, circuit ride, convene... She added that if they hadn't had the initial process already spelled out for them, they probably would have followed the initial interviews with project development, and gone from there.

Jeanette suggested that we use educational materials to engage stakeholders. Let's build tools to educate folks about LID, etc. Sierra noted that there are a lot of projects that have come out of this process, though not all fundable by DWR. Katie added that this is a region that is well suited for other funding sources. Paul said, "The Salinas River is the big one – a major regional planning issue. That will be a major place to do homework. What we've learned from this – the circuit riding, all these stakeholders, the stakeholder process for project development – this is what it'll take. We should take what we learned from this, build on the momentum from this process and learn from it – but not necessarily do it all over again."

Christina noted that we would have gained more from the process if it had been less conceptual for agencies, if we had asked them for more concrete input. Horacio commented, "There's not enough money for project implementation, for all the time we've put into developing these projects... We have all kinds of ideas but at the end of the day there's no money." There was a general moan of agreement. Katie mentioned an existing effort to create an IRWM sustainability fund that would give each region \$100K/year or more to run the IRWM effort, including subsidies for the development of projects.

On that note, Susan thanked the WRPC Committee for their extraordinary work, and particularly Sierra and Katie for facilitating such a challenging process so successfully.

**The next RWMG meeting is scheduled for July 16, 2014, location TBD.**