

**Greater Monterey County Integrated Regional Water Management Program
Regional Water Management Group Meeting
May 18, 2016
Location: Cal Water office in Salinas, CA**

RWMG Attendees:

Horacio Amezcuita – San Jerardo Cooperative, Inc.
Ken Ekelund – Garrapata Creek Watershed Council
Brenda Granillo – California Water Service Company
Tom Harty – Monterey County Resource Management Agency
Bridget Hoover – Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary
Heather Lukacs – Environmental Justice Coalition for Water
Karen McBride – Rural Community Assistance Corporation
Mike McCullough – Monterey Regional Water Pollution Control Agency
Christina McGinnis – Monterey County Agricultural Commissioner’s Office
Rob Johnson – Monterey County Water Resources Agency
Michael Ricker – City of Salinas
Paul Robins – Resource Conservation District of Monterey County
Ed Waggoner – City of Soledad
Scott Wagner – California Water Service Company

Non-RWMG Attendees:

Karen Nilsen – Nilsen & Associates
Susan Robinson – Greater Monterey County IRWM Program Coordinator

Meeting Minutes:

1. Brief Introductions.

2. Governance Structure: Bridget led a discussion about forming an Executive Committee, and asked if anyone had any concerns with the concept (no one voiced any). The Group reviewed the four categories (Conservation/Watershed, Disadvantaged Community, Agency, Water Supply/Management). It was noted that there may be some overlap; e.g., City of Soledad is an agency, a water supplier, and a DAC. Everyone was OK with these categories, plus including the IRWM Program Coordinator as the fifth Executive Committee member. Paul asked that the RWMG ensure that both agricultural and urban water users are represented on the committee.

Bridget reviewed the draft bylaws. There were some minor suggestions for revisions. Susan thought the responsibility description for the Executive Committee exercising “some or all powers of the RWMG between regularly scheduled meetings” could give too much power to the committee, noting that it wouldn’t be fair, for example, for the committee to select projects to put forward for IRWM grant funds. Ken agreed, commenting that it is unclear what the Regional Water Management Group will look like in the future, given the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act. It was decided that Susan and Bridget would work on that bullet point and get back to the RWMG.

Bridget asked for volunteers to serve on the committee for the first year (with one-year term limits, and option to serve one additional year). Michael volunteered Gary Petersen (City of Salinas) as the agency rep. Heather suggested that the three DAC organizations get together and figure out who should serve first. Brenda was prompted, and agreed, to serve as the water supply/management rep. Ken was nominated, and agreed, to serve as the conservation/watershed rep.

Bridget gave a brief update on contributions to support the IRWM Program Coordinator, noting that four out of

seven Tier 1 organizations have contributed, but only one Tier 2 organization has contributed thus far. She asked those who haven't yet done so to contribute, and to let her know one way or another.

3. Update on Disadvantaged Community Plan: Susan gave a brief introduction, outlining the objectives of the “Integrated Drinking Water and Wastewater Plan for Disadvantaged Communities in the Salinas Valley” and describing the work that has been done on the project to date, since its start in January 2015. She noted that the project has been greatly enhanced by in-kind assistance from Community Engineering Corps (CEC) with funding from a USDA grant to conduct in-depth analysis of the problems and solutions for each of the high priority communities. She then turned it over to Heather (EJCW) to provide a more detailed update on behalf of the whole project team (which includes other EJCW staff, Karen Nilsen with Nilsen & Associates, Karen McBride with RCAC, Horacio with San Jerardo Cooperative, and Susan).

Heather explained that CEC is focusing on six small disadvantaged communities (DACs), conducting site visits and collecting data for each community. She noted that there are additional communities on the project team's list, which are still “on the radar” but not being provided this in-depth analysis for one reason or another. The six communities were selected due to high nitrates in their wells and either recorded DAC status or suspected DAC status. She illustrated examples of nitrate levels for each of the six communities. Heather commented on the tremendous contribution that the CEC teams are making, including water quality sampling, which alone is costing \$20K. The overarching goal is to provide the communities with *options*, which they will then choose from. To that end the CEC will be conducting some preliminary engineering and feasibility studies to better inform the communities as to their best options. This information will also feed into the project proposals, which Karen Nilsen will be developing. CEC and the project team has also been meeting with system operators (where one exists), and talking with nearby larger utilities to determine the potential for system expansion.

Given the project team's work thus far, Heather highlighted four points:

1. Nitrate levels have been steadily increasing over the years.

Someone asked if people are drinking the water. Heather responded that most know not to drink the water, but children may be, and about 20% reportedly use water for cooking. Horacio noted that cooking concentrates the contamination. Someone else asked if the project team was approaching nearby ag operators who may be responsible for the high levels of nitrates. Horacio responded that nitrates have been applied through agricultural practices for many years, and it may be hard to assign responsibility to any one grower. Someone else added that high nitrate levels could also be caused by failing septic systems. Christina recommended that the project team focus on the source of the problem – and to work with neighboring growers to try to address it.

Ed commented that the City of Soledad allows access to water from hydrants as an interim solution as a safe drinking water source for nearby disadvantaged communities. The city has also been working on a possible extension of service to Santa Teresa, a small disadvantaged community (on the project team's high priority list).

2. As the project team was conducting site visits to the communities on their list, they noticed numerous neighboring communities with very small systems (i.e., less than 14 connections) that were also out of compliance. Including these neighboring systems in the project will increase the project scope (e.g., for Schoch Road, it would go from 5 to over 40 connections).

Ed pointed out that there is still a huge need for communities that aren't designated as DAC but that have very high nitrate levels.

3. Status of site visits: Heather informed the RWMG that the CEC teams have two more site visits to conduct (two remaining communities), and the project team is still in the process of meeting with nearby larger utilities and assessing possibilities. The project team plans on conducting community meetings in July through early September, after all of the data has been collected by CEC.

4. Preliminary findings: Heather reported several preliminary findings and challenges as follows.

Water quality issues include not just nitrates but other contaminants, including chrom-6 and 123-TCP, which could make potential treatment solutions more complicated. As a general rule, the County prefers other alternatives – including extension of service – over wellhead treatment as a solution to drinking water problems. Also, the water quality in a given well may not allow for wellhead treatment.

There is no legal recourse when some neighbors don't pay for their water. For this reason some community members are interested in having water service extended to them, where everyone has their own meter. Also, the project team has found that some people don't want a deeper well, since nitrates have been found in deeper aquifers as well. In general the project team has found the nearby larger utilities to be willing partners; the limiting factor will be funding. Karen Nilsen will be doing a funding analysis. Heather also noted that some "state small" (5-14 connections) system managers have expressed a desire for consolidation since they no longer want to manage their systems for no or little pay.

Heather briefly reviewed the project timeline and said that the final report should be out in April. Susan noted that the project team will be asking the State for a contract extension. They don't expect the extension to meet with resistance, since the State had originally granted the project team three years to complete the project, while the project team had opted for an expedited two-year process.

Tom brought up the point that the source of nitrates may be nearby failing septic systems. Karen McBride noted that where communities are unable or unwilling to connect to a centralized wastewater system, the project team may recommend an O&M inspection and monitoring program. Rob mentioned the State Water Board's GAMA (Groundwater Ambient Monitoring and Assessment) program, noting that the program was able to distinguish between human, animal, and fertilizer nitrate sources. This could be useful information for sourcing the nitrate problems, and working with ag to develop solutions.

4. DAC Involvement Funds: Prior to the meeting, Susan had emailed the RWMG preliminary proposals (scopes of work and budgets) from EJCW, RCAC, and Nilsen & Associates for the upcoming Prop 1 IRWM DAC Involvement grant funds. Susan provided a brief description of the funding source, noting that the DAC Involvement funding is Round 1 of two DAC IRWM funding rounds, with this first round aiming to provide DAC engagement and assist them to become "project ready" for Round 2, which will be DAC Implementation. The Greater Monterey County region can expect \$887,517 for each of the two rounds (minus 5% admin = \$843,141). Susan noted that the combined proposal budgets add up to much more than the funds available, and asked each of the three organizations to give a brief summation.

Karen Nilsen noted that the RWMG has done a great deal of DAC assessment over the years (beginning with Round 1 IRWM Implementation funds, and EJCW/CRLA's assessment of DACs in the Greater Monterey County region), and continuing now with the current DAC Plan. She noted several communities that were flagged in the first assessment but were "stalled" for one reason or another, and still need attention. She suggests focusing DAC Involvement funds on the preliminary engineering/feasibility work needed to bring the existing high priority communities *plus* these other DACs to truly "shovel ready" projects (while the current DAC Plan will only bring a small subset of communities to that point). Most of the funds in her proposed budget would go toward engineering, etc. with Nilsen & Associates providing oversight, management, coordination, and proposal development. Budget: \$464,500 over two years.

Karen McBride gave an overview of RCAC's areas of expertise. RCAC's overarching goal is to position communities to be successful in the long-term, focusing on affordable solutions. She proposed a budget of \$250K over two years to fund 1 FTE from RCAC to provide services including: TMF assessment, MHI surveys, rate studies, regionalization/consolidation, and ongoing TA and training for existing operations.

Heather said that one of the specific goals of DAC Involvement funding is to involve DACs in IRWM activities,

and therefore EJCW proposes a full-time DAC Coordinator for the IRWM region (over two years). This position could conceivably be shared with other Central Coast IRWM regions. EJCW also proposes continued outreach to DACs to provide support while they are developing their projects (paralleling Karen Nilsen's proposal, but on the community side). Thirdly, EJCW proposes continued needs assessment. She pointed out that EJCW's proposed budget does not necessarily have to be for all EJCW staff; it could include other organizations. Total budget: \$550,000.

Susan asked the RWMG for volunteers to serve on a subcommittee to help the DAC Plan project team over the next 4-6 weeks hone in on a final scope of work and budget for DAC Involvement funds. Volunteers:

Monique Fountain (via email prior to the meeting)
Mike McCullough
Christina McGinnis
Horacio Amezquita
Bridget Hoover

The next RWMG meeting is scheduled for June 15, 2016 at the Monterey County Water Resources Agency office in Salinas.