

**Greater Monterey County Integrated Regional Water Management Program
Regional Water Management Group Meeting
December 14, 2016
Location: Elkhorn Slough Reserve, Watsonville, CA**

RWMG Attendees:

Horacio Amezcuita – San Jerardo Cooperative, Inc.
Ross Clark – Central Coast Wetlands Group
Dave Feliz – Elkhorn Slough National Estuarine Research Reserve
Monique Fountain – Elkhorn Slough National Estuarine Research Reserve
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
Mike McCullough – Monterey Regional Water Pollution Control Agency
Christina McGinnis – Monterey County Agricultural Commissioner’s Office
Heidi Niggemeyer – City of Salinas
Rachel Saunders – Big Sur Land Trust
Mark Silberstein – Elkhorn Slough Foundation

Non-RWMG Attendees:

Jeff Condit – Monterey Regional Storm Water Management Program
John Hunt – UC Davis
Sachi Itagaki – Kennedy/Jenks Consultants
Karen Nilsen – Nilsen & Associates
Susan Robinson – Greater Monterey County IRWM Program Director

Meeting Minutes:

1. Brief Introductions.

2. Salinas Area Storm Water Resource Plan: Earlier that day, Sachi Itagaki had sent the group the latest draft of the Storm Water Resource Plan (SWRP) for the Greater Salinas Area. She briefly reviewed some of the updates since the previous version. She said the planning team had had conversations with several of the project proponents with regard to how their projects should be scored, and she noted that they scored projects “generously” across the board. The updates/edits to project descriptions are now reflected in the draft plan (Section 5.1, and Table 5.2 including revised project scoring). Also included is a narrative describing the scoring process (Section 5.3), and a map of locations of projects and implementation strategies.

Sachi noted that this plan was funded by Monterey Regional Water Pollution Control Agency (MRWPCA) and the City of Salinas (City) and developed specifically to support the City and MRWPCA’s application to the State Water Resources Control Board for Storm Water Implementation Grant funds (which they were successful in receiving). As such, this plan has a “shelf life,” and will be superseded by the Greater Monterey County SWRP. They are required to complete the plan within 90 days of grant award, which would be around March 1, 2017.

The timeline moving forward: Review comments at the January 18, 2017 RWMG meeting, and finalize the plan at the February 15, 2017 RWMG meeting. Sachi asked that comments be directed to Susan Robinson (srobinsongs@frontier.com), and noted that with limited funding remaining, the planning team

won't have much time to respond to comments. Sachi said she's hoping that Susan will compile all comments into one version for Sachi in order to minimize their effort.

Susan offered congratulations once again to MRWPCA and the City of Salinas for being recommended for the Prop 1 Storm Water Implementation Grant. Mike commented that 50 projects did not get funded.

3. Disadvantaged Community Involvement Funds: Susan said that the Central Coast Funding Area is intending to submit their joint application for IRWM Prop 1 Disadvantaged Community (DAC) Involvement grant funds by the end of January, and that the Regional Water Management Foundation – which is the fiscal arm for the Santa Cruz IRWM Program – has (almost definitely) agreed to act as Lead Applicant on behalf of the Funding Area. Each region will need to submit, along with the application, a letter of support from its RWMG for the Lead Applicant. She asked if anyone had questions. Monique asked whether there would be a cap on indirect. Susan responded yes, 5%. Rachel moved to approve the Regional Water Management Foundation acting as Lead Applicant, and Monique seconded the motion. All voted in favor, none opposed, none abstained. Susan said she would draft a letter of support and send it to Gary Petersen (as Chair of the Executive Committee) for his signature.

Bridget gave a brief update from the DAC Involvement Subcommittee regarding the grant proposal. She said they were still in discussion with the three entities involved (Environmental Justice Coalition for Water, Rural Community Assistance Corporation, and Nilsen & Associates), with an internal deadline to submit the Greater Monterey County region's scope of work and budget to the Central Coast Funding Area by Friday. The Subcommittee will be meeting with the three organizations on Friday morning.

4. Executive Committee: Ken Ekelund had recently informed the group that he would have to resign from the Regional Water Management Group because the organization he represented, Garrapata Creek Watershed Council, had dissolved as a nonprofit. Susan commented on the amount of time and effort Ken had put into the formation of the Greater Monterey County RWMG, and said his leadership would be sorely missed. She noted that in addition, Ken would be leaving a vacancy for the "Conservation/Watershed" position on the RWMG Executive Committee. She said the "environmental" entities on the RWMG had discussed a replacement, nominated Ross Clark, and Ross had agreed to serve as the representative.

Mike asked what the categories on the Executive Committee were. Susan described those as:

Conservation/Watershed

Big Sur Land Trust
Central Coast Wetlands Group
CSUMB Watershed Institute
Elkhorn Slough NERR
Monterey County Resource Conservation District

Disadvantaged Community

EJCW
RCAC
San Jerardo Cooperative, Inc.

Agency

Monterey County Ag Commissioner's Office
Monterey County Resource Management Agency
Monterey Regional Water Pollution Control Agency
City of Salinas

City of Soledad
Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary

Water Supply/Management

Cal Water
Castroville Community Services District
Marina Coast Water District
Monterey County Water Resources Agency

The group expressed support for Ross acting as the representative for the Conservation/Watershed position on the Executive Committee.

5. IRWM Planning Grant: Susan reminded everyone that the Region had recently been awarded an IRWM Planning Grant in the amount of about \$77K to update the IRWM Plan to 2016 IRWM Plan standards. She gave a brief overview of “what to expect.” Several RWMG meetings in 2017 will focus on various aspects of the Plan update. This includes:

- Addressing AB 1249 compliance: This entails identifying the extent and impacts of nitrate, arsenic, perchlorate, and chrom-VI in the region and developing a plan of action. Karen Nilsen will take the lead in collecting data. A Technical Advisory Committee will be convened. Susan said she is hoping for the TAC kickoff meeting to coincide with a RWMG meeting in early 2017.
- Climate Change chapter updates: This task will be led by Central Coast Wetlands Group.
- Updates to the IRWM Plan related to Objectives, Resources Management Strategies, Project Review Process, Local Water Planning, and Local Land Use Planning: All of these updates will essentially involve Susan leading the RWMG through discussions and then Susan drafting revisions to the IRWM Plan to reflect the outcomes of those discussions.
- Incorporation of the Greater Monterey County SWRP into the IRWM Plan: Susan will work alongside the SWRP planning team to guide the RWMG through the SWRP planning process at every major milestone and decision point, much as Sachi did with the Greater Salinas Area SWRP.
- A disadvantaged community outreach effort: This will be led by EJCW, and will dovetail with the AB 1249 effort.

Monique asked how the AB 1249 effort would fit with the GSA formation process. Susan responded that she wasn't sure; that would be a good question for the TAC to figure out. Christina suggested that perhaps the TAC and planning team get in touch with Gina Bartlett, the facilitator for the GSA formation process, to see how the two processes might be coordinated.

6. RWMG Spotlight – Elkhorn Slough Ecological Reserve: Dave Feliz, Reserve Manager, offered a presentation on the Elkhorn Slough Ecological Reserve. Dave explained that NOAA partners with different State agencies on management of the 28 National Estuarine Research Reserves (NERR) across the country. In Elkhorn Slough that State agency is the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), who employs him. He described how the Reserve is funded: the Reserve receives NOAA grant funds via the State Coastal Conservancy, as well as other sources of funding (license plates, annual passes, tax on fishing permits, etc.). The Elkhorn Slough Ecological Reserve was established to provide research, education, and restoration.

The Reserve consists of 1,700 acres owned and managed by CDFW, mostly on the east side of the

Slough. The Elkhorn Slough Foundation (ESF) – the Reserve’s nonprofit fiscal arm – owns 4,000 acres, mainly in the surrounding watershed. ESF is trying to create wildlife corridors, and provides a nice complement to Reserve efforts.

Dave described the great diversity of habitats, and how those habitats have changed dramatically over the years. The Salinas River historically drained into the slough. In 1940 a channel was cut to the ocean, resulting in the slough being subject to significantly increased tidal action. Today the Salinas River drains directly to the ocean about 10 miles south of the slough, resulting in a significant loss of freshwater flows and sediment to the slough.

Dave noted that many wildlife species are thriving in the slough, and ecotourism has taken off. Now they need to educate tourists how not to harass the wildlife. They are conducting a lot of outreach and education.

Since 1988, Reserve staff have been conducting monthly monitoring of marsh conditions, including water quality conditions, across 24 sites. They have found that where water control structures exist, there is a great deal of eutrophication. This long-term monitoring data is compiled in a national NERR database, which includes monitoring results for water quality and weather conditions across the 28 reserves. Dave said the Reserve also sponsors short-term monitoring projects, for example, wildlife conditions, and conducts restoration projects mainly through their stewardship program. Eel grass restoration data is available online.

Monique is the director of the Tidal Wetland Project, whose goal it is to address the loss of wetlands in the slough (50% of the historical wetlands have been lost). She noted that their research is available online. Dave said the Tidal Wetland Project documents changing conditions of the salt marsh. The marsh has been “drowning” due to the changing hydrology (including opening of the harbor mouth, the reclamation of salt marsh for agriculture, and subsequent land subsidence resulting in a topography too deep to support marsh habitat). In addition, nitrate resulting from fertilizer use in the surrounding agricultural lands has caused eutrophication. Monique briefly described a marsh restoration project they have been conducting, which was funded through an IRWM Implementation Grant.

Dave said the Reserve also has an education program, which includes reserve tours (over 100 tours/year), after-school programs (over 5,000 children/year), visitor center, teacher workshops, a teaching lab, and a Coastal Training Program, which is a professional training program for decision-makers. He described some of the specialized workshops that they offer. He noted they work with local schools to bring school children out into the slough, because they had found that locals weren’t actually using the slough. In the future they will be providing training on grazing to CDFW staff, and sea otter management.

Dave noted that there used to be a lot of freshwater ponds, but the underlying aquifers no longer support them. Many amphibious species and other animals still depend on freshwater (e.g., western pond turtles), and so the Reserve staff started a program a few years back to install pond liners in areas throughout the slough, collect and store freshwater (water catchment storage), and then use that freshwater throughout the year to create freshwater ponds. They have installed six freshwater ponds around the slough, and have had tremendous results already in terms of the freshwater species observed. They have found larvae for California tiger salamanders and long toed salamanders. There has been some evidence of hybridization; the staff are trying to learn more about that.

7. RWMG Spotlight – Big Sur Land Trust: Rachel Saunders gave an overview of the Big Sur Land Trust (BSLT). BSLT is a land trust accredited by the national Land Trust Alliance, which requires them to adhere to certain standards of practice. BSLT was founded in 1978 by seven families sitting around a kitchen table, and was one of the first land trusts in the country to form. They have 15 staff and 15 board

members. Since 1978 they have conserved about 40,000 acres in Monterey County, including many different geographies. BSLT owns 5,000 acres of land in fee, and owns 35 conservation easements totaling 6,000 acres. Most of the landowners they purchase properties or easements from are motivated to protect the land that they love and want to ensure that it stays intact after they pass; others are land rich and cash poor. Sometimes the land is donated and sometimes purchased by the land trust.

Rachel described their “marquis” lands:

- **Glen Deven Ranch:** This property in Palo Colorado Canyon consists of 860 acres. Since 2001 Glen Deven Ranch has served as a staging area for natural disasters (e.g., forest fires). BSLT has been conducting a major effort to remove eucalyptus trees on the property, which includes a community education component. They conduct outdoor education programming at Glen Deven, including bringing youth primarily from the Salinas Valley to the Big Sur coast.
- **Marks Ranch:** BSLT acquired this 816-acre property in 2007, transferring most of it to Monterey County to become part of Toro Park. They now own close to 80 acres. Toro Park was the incident command center used by CAL FIRE during the recent Soberanes Fire, and they used Marks Ranch property as well.
- **Mitteldorf Preserve:** Mitteldorf Preserve is an inholding within the Santa Lucia Preserve. BSLT acquired this 1,100-acre property located in Carmel Valley in 1990. The Soberanes Fire “burned down” through the entire property, destroying a barn and burning many trees. CAL FIRE used this property to access the backcountry.
- **Arroyo Seco Ranch:** BSLT took ownership of Arroyo Seco Ranch in 2007. The property consists of about 1,700 acres. The property has been used as a helicopter base during major forest fires.

Christina asked about firebreaks created by CAL FIRE during the major fires. Rachel said they didn’t create too many firebreaks on the BSLT properties, but she noted the need for CAL FIRE to work more closely with natural resource management agencies and property managers/owners *prior* to forest fires in order to develop a better mapping system and a better plan for reducing the ecological damage from the fire fighting effort. Christina asked whether CAL FIRE was required to do restoration afterwards, and Rachel responded yes, but it’s very rudimentary.

Rachel described BSLT’s stewardship staff, managing the properties, and monitoring the easements once/year. They also have an outdoor programming team, and a conservation team (land acquisition). In recent years, the land trust focuses not just on acquiring properties but to a larger extent on programming and multiple benefits. Two major projects include:

- **Carmel River Floodplain Restoration and Environmental Enhancement (Carmel River FREE):** The project will “free” the Carmel River near Highway One and reclaim the southern floodplain, which has been restricted by levees. The project was envisioned after the big floods of 1995 and 1998. The property was donated to BSLT by the Eastwoods (except for a 2-acre lot). The key components: 1) creating notches in the south levee to allow the river in major flood events to enter the southern floodplain; and 2) building a causeway on Highway One further south of the existing bridge. This will reduce flood levels. The project includes maintenance roads that will serve as trails and the creation of an agricultural preserve (elevated above flood levels). The County will manage construction of the project. It is a \$28M project; BSLT has another \$11M - \$12M still to raise. They hope to break ground in 2018.
- **Carr Lake:** BSLT is in the process of acquiring a 73-acre property on Carr Lake in the City of

Salinas. Carr Lake is 480 acres in its entirety, and is one of seven historic lakes that existed in this area before they were reclaimed. Three Japanese-American families have owned the Carr Lake properties since 1930s, and still farm it to this day. BSLT is hoping to close on the land deal in mid/late January 2017, and will be embarking on a major community engagement process.

8. RWMG Spotlight – Elkhorn Slough Foundation: Mark Silberstein, Executive Director of the Elkhorn Slough Foundation (ESF), provided a presentation on the Foundation’s work. Following in the path that BSLT had blazed, ESF was founded as a nonprofit organization about 25 years ago. They acquire and manage properties around the slough. They own 3,500 acres in fee and 300 acres in conservation easements. They also purchase and transfer properties to the Elkhorn Slough Reserve and to the County.

Mark described the upper hills around the slough (the “Elkhorn Highlands”) as having been dotted with farmland, much of it farmed on steep sandy slopes. The County in the early 1980s had been concerned about the amount of erosion; at 33 tons/acre of sediment on average, it was recorded as the highest occurrence of erosion west of the Mississippi. The Soil Conservation Service came up with tools to help minimize erosion, and ESF wound up purchasing most of that land. They have reduced farming by about 700 acres, taking the steep sandy slopes entirely out of production. ESF now manages 150 acres in cultivated land, all certified organic. By leasing farmland, they receive in return: 1) revenue; 2) someone “there” everyday (eyes and ears on the ground); and most importantly, 3) the formation of positive relationships with the farming community (they now have at least one ag representative on the ESF board). Together they are working to find a way to balance economic production of the lands, conservation, and water management.

Mark pointed out that these conservation lands provide many benefits, including water conservation, wildlife corridors, water quality improvements, and opportunities for recharge. Andy Fisher (professor at UCSC) has informed them that these hills have some of the highest recharge potential in the Pajaro Basin for restoring groundwater.

Mark showed an image of land owned by ESF that is still in agricultural production – but now the erosion from that land is zero. Reducing erosion is also important for reducing nutrients into the slough, which is a major concern for wildlife (Elkhorn Slough has the highest concentration of sea otters along the California coast). Mark ended with an example of a property that ESF had purchased (Sand Hill Farm), which had had tremendous erosion problems. Their stewardship team restored the property with the help of the California Conservation Corps. The upper steep slopes are now entirely out of production, the lower gentler slopes are currently in organic production. He emphasized that these are *community* projects; they don’t work unless the community supports them.

Christina asked how it was that so much of their land could be in organic production. Mark explained that there is a big demand for organic land leases currently, and berries top consumers’ concern for food safety. The ESF has reduced the lease rate for the time of year the land is fallow, and cover crop those parcels – essentially subsidizing organic farmers to enable them to afford the leases.

9. Other Business. There was no other business.

The next RWMG meeting is scheduled for January 18, 2017, 1:30PM – 3:30PM, location TBD.