Greater Monterey County Integrated Regional Water Management Program
Regional Water Management Group Meeting
September 20, 2017
Location: Moss Landing Marine Labs, Moss Landing, CA

RWMG Attendees:
Horacio Amezquita – San Jerardo Cooperative, Inc.
Melanie Beretti – Monterey County Resource Management Agency
Brenda Granillo – California Water Service Company
Sarah Hardgrave – Big Sur Land Trust
Tom Harty – Monterey County Resource Management Agency
Bridget Hoover – Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary
Elizabeth Krafft – Monterey County Water Resources Agency
Heather Lukacs – Environmental Justice Coalition for Water (EJCW)
Karen McBride – Rural Community Assistance Corporation (RCAC)
Christina McGinnis – Monterey County Agricultural Commissioner's Office
John Olson – California State University Monterey Bay
Sarah Stevens – Monterey One Water

Non-RWMG Attendees:
Supervisor Luis Alejo – Monterey County Board of Supervisors
Javier Gomez – Staff member for Supervisor Alejo
Matthew Keeling – Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board
Karen Nilsen – Nilsen and Associates
Susan Robinson – Greater Monterey County IRWM Program Director

Meeting Minutes

1. Brief Introductions.

2. Integrated Drinking Water and Wastewater Plan for Disadvantaged Communities in the Salinas Valley and Greater Monterey County IRWM Region (DAC Plan): Susan Robinson stated the purpose of this meeting: To present and discuss the DAC Plan, and to obtain input from the Regional Water Management Group (RWMG) and Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) members. This is not a public review, but rather an internal review. She asked that RWMG and TAC members send written comments to her no later than October 11th, with an aim to have the final plan approved by the RWMG at the November 8th RWMG.

Susan began by introducing the Project Team and described the TAC. She explained the background of the project: The RWMG was granted $500K to develop a plan to address drinking water and wastewater needs of disadvantaged communities in the Salinas Valley, with a focus on nitrate contamination. The funds were approved by the legislature through AB 1630, which was sponsored by then-Assemblymember, now-Supervisor Luis Alejo. The funds were provided to the RWMG from the State Water Resources Control Board from fines/penalties from the Waste Discharge Permit fund. Susan thanked Supervisor Alejo for his tireless efforts in getting the funds appropriated. She also recognized EJCW for their efforts in garnering support for the bill. In June of this year, the RWMG received a budget extension of $200K in order to increase community engagement and complete the planning process.

The Objectives of the Plan were to:

1. Identify disadvantaged communities within the planning region, with a specific focus on small disadvantaged communities in unincorporated areas.
2. Identify drinking water and wastewater problems.

3. Develop a database and create maps to show the location of the communities.
4. Identify potential solutions.
5. Develop project descriptions and cost estimates for "high priority" communities.
6. Identify potential funding sources.

Susan reviewed the Plan's table of contents, noting that plan chapters essentially follow those objectives. Susan then gave a very brief overview of the *Introduction* chapter, which provides some regulatory and legislative context and brief synopses of a few relevant studies and plans.

Heather Lukacs presented the next several chapters of the Plan. Chapter 2 is *Identifying Disadvantaged Communities*. She explained the definition of "disadvantaged community" and "severely disadvantaged community" and the methods used to identify disadvantaged communities (American Community Survey and median household income [MHI] surveys). Heather noted that because this data changes every year, the list of disadvantaged communities in the region must be updated annually. She noted that MHI surveys can help identify "hidden" disadvantaged communities that are located within US Census block groups that have higher MHIs.

Heather said many grants to not consider the number of people living in a home, and it is a problem. One exception is USDA Community Development Block Grants do take the number of residents per home into consideration).

Heather showed maps illustrating the geographic areas in the Greater Monterey County IRWM region that are identified as being disadvantaged, noting how much of the region is disadvantaged. Heather pointed out that the Department of Water Resources has a broader definition of "disadvantaged community" for the purposes of the Proposition 1 Disadvantaged Community Involvement (DAC-I) Grant Program: DWR also includes "economically distressed areas"[1] (EDAs) and "underrepresented communities" (not defined). Including EDAs within the definition of "disadvantaged community" would make 20 additional small water systems with high nitrate levels in the Greater Monterey County IRWM region eligible for grant funds.

Heather showed a map demonstrating nitrate "hot spots" from small water system data, in relation to locations of disadvantaged communities. She demonstrated the new map viewer (beta version) that has been developed for the project. The map viewer can be accessed on the Greater Monterey County IRWM website: www.greatermontereyirwmp.org/documents/disadvantagedcommunity-plan-for-drinking-water-and-wastewater. The Water Resources and Policy Initiatives at California State University will be hosting the Salinas Valley project maps on a three-year renewable basis. She commented that keeping this data updated would be a good task for upcoming DAC-I funds. Bridget asked her where in the scope of work this would fit, and Heather responded it could be a task of the Disadvantaged Community Coordinator.

Chapter 3 is *Identifying Drinking Water and Wastewater Problems*. The methods used to identify problems included nitrate data from the County Environmental Health Bureau for small water systems, consultation with TAC and community members, and a door-to-door survey conducted by EJCW to over 150 households in small disadvantaged and suspected disadvantaged communities (June-July 2015). The result was a list of disadvantaged and suspected disadvantaged communities with drinking and/or wastewater problems, as summarized in Table 3.1 in the plan. The Project Team then prioritized the communities according to need, with "high priority" including communities with known drinking water or wastewater problems and facing an immediate public health threat. She showed a map illustrating the

[1] "A municipality with a population of 20,000 persons or less, a rural county, or a reasonably isolated and divisible segment of a larger municipality where the segment of the population is 20,000 persons or less, with an annual MHI that is less than 85 percent of the statewide MHI, and with one or more of the following conditions as determined by the department: (1) financial hardship, (2) unemployment rate at least 2 percent higher than the statewide average, or (3) low population density (Water Code Åò79702(k))."

location of the high, medium, and low priority communities.

The Project Team also conducted outreach to disadvantaged community US Census "places" and some large water utilities located near small disadvantaged communities in order to assess need and potential capacity to extend service. This effort was led by Karen McBride with RCAC. Karen said she interviewed the following communities: Boronda, Soledad, Moss Landing, San Ardo, and San Lucas. She displayed a table that summarized water supply and wastewater information for these places. Based on the interviews, Karen shared several observations, including:

- There is great need to educate and train at the local level.
- Creating local jobs, and ensuring affordability for long-term success is the goal.
- It is important to address decentralized wastewater treatment and disposal, including septic system management plans, for those households that cannot benefit by extension of service.
- The Project Team recognized a substantial gap in interim solutions and funding. When a community discovers a drinking water or wastewater system failure, posing a public health and possibly an environmental threat, a great deal of time can exist between "crisis mode" and long-term solution. There needs to be funding for interim solutions to see the community through.

Chapter 4 is *Identifying Solutions*. Heather said that Table 4.1 in the plan summarizes next steps and recommendations for all of the disadvantaged communities on the high priority list. Seven of the high priority communities were further targeted for engineering studies and project proposals. These communities were selected based on: disadvantaged or suspected disadvantaged community status, high nitrate levels, and community interest. The seven communities were: Santa Teresa Village, Middlefield Road, Schoch Road, Walnut Avenue, Johnson Road, Hudson Landing Road, and Apple Avenue (she showed a map illustrating the location of the communities).

A partnership was struck with the Community Engineering Corps (CECorps), an alliance of the American Society of Civil Engineers, the American Water Works Association, and Engineers Without Borders-USA. CECorps developed engineering studies (with outside funding) for six of the communities. Heather generally described their process as well as the "preparation work" conducted by EJCW, including data/information collection, site assessment, operator interviews, water quality testing, and meetings with nearby water utilities. Consolidation was the recommended option for six of the seven targeted communities. The Project Team is in the process of finalizing cover sheets for each of the CECorps reports, based on TAC feedback and other information. Those will be available soon.

Karen Nilsen led the preparation of project proposals for each of the targeted high priority communities. The project proposals summarize the CECorps recommendations, cost estimates, institutional and other barriers, project sponsorship, funding sources, an action plan, and schedule. Karen shared two observations: 1) A primary barrier to implementing long-term solutions is finding a project sponsor. Nearby water utilities are often reluctant to be project sponsors due to difficulty in getting reimbursed from funding agencies for administrative costs. 2) Cost (i.e., household monthly cost) is one of the most significant determinants of a community's interest in participating in a long-term solution. It is challenging to find funding sources that will cover costs not covered by the State, including lateral costs (from meter to home). Heather added that often it takes just one barrier to stall a project indefinitely. Environmental review, for example, can take much longer than expected, and can stall a project.

Key findings of this portion of the project included: high variability of nitrate levels within communities; some wells drilled 5-10 years ago now have nitrate exceedances; there is an increasing trend in nitrate levels; other contaminants were found in some places, including hexavalent chromium, 1,2,3-TCP, and bacteria. Heather also discussed challenges associated with neighboring small water systems, and noted the need for increased community engagement to potentially bring those neighboring systems in on long-term solutions. Matt Keeling wondered whether "complete buy-in" within a community was needed in order to move forward, and Heather responded that they generally aim to have at least a majority to continue to work on a project.

Chapter 5 is *Other Related Efforts and Considerations*. The Project Team has also been tracking other developments and efforts, which include: the Salinas Valley Interim Replacement Water Settlement Agreement, SB 623 Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Fund, chrom-6 court ruling, UCLA pilot project, point-of-use/point-of-entry treatment options, Monterey County Local Agency Management Program, Monterey County's plan to transfer ownership of wastewater systems; and Monterey One Water's conceptual plan for wastewater treatment expansion in unincorporated areas of the county, including some high priority disadvantaged communities north of Salinas. Several "obstacles" are also discussed in the plan, including: challenges in addressing the source of the problem (nitrate loading); affordability; consolidation, extension of service, and sponsorship; technical, managerial, and financial (TMF) capacity; and data gaps (notably for septic systems, and private wells).

The final chapter is *Recommendations*. Recommendations from the Project Team included:

1. Guaranteed set-aside funds for small disadvantaged community water systems
2. Support for community engagement, including: refreshing the list of disadvantaged communities, and updating assessments of all state/local small water systems and nearby domestic wells in disadvantaged community block groups; pre-project and project development for high priority projects underway; community education; and technical assistance
3. Support for outreach to private domestic well owners
4. Support for interim solutions
5. Support for lateral costs and O&M
6. Support for wastewater education
7. Funding for ongoing assessment of needs
8. More efficient reimbursement from State grants
9. Project sponsorship, noting that the Project Team would like to see the County take a lead role in project sponsorship for small communities, or see development of a Joint Powers Authority
10. Closer connection with Monterey County Health Department, noting that they are working closely with the communities, and it is important to have their input in recommendations
11. Need for increased certainty in identifying project costs, including recommendations for a "pre-approval" process to lock in a grant amount while an application is being prepared

Heather summarized next steps for high priority projects. The Project Team is actively moving some projects to application, including: Apple Ave construction application, and Middlefield Rd planning or construction application (hopefully in partnership with Cal Water and/or Monterey County). MHI surveys are proposed for Johnson Rd, Hudson Landing Rd, and Schoch Rd. Some of this work will continue through DAC-I and other funding sources.

Bridget Hoover congratulated the Project Team, and asked whether they had achieved what they had set out to do. Heather said she thought they had met and exceeded the original objectives. Sarah Hardgrave suggested bringing the results of this work to the newly formed Groundwater Sustainability Agency. Karen McBride said she felt more attention could be paid to wastewater issues in future work. Karen Nilsen stressed the need to keep the plan updated, i.e., updating the list of disadvantaged communities each year along with changing water quality data. Matt asked, *who* will refresh the data layers?

Horacio commented on the difficulty in bringing communities as large as some of those identified in this plan to consensus. He compared, for example, Johnson Road (80+ properties with no organized structure) with San Jerardo Cooperative (one property with 60 members who are a legal entity with a structured decision-making process), noting how long it took the San Jerardo community members to come to a final solution. In the case of San Jerardo, everyone was already part of the cooperative and agreed to the solution. In the case of Johnson Road, many of the neighbors have not previously met one another.

Matt asked: 1) To what extent will the Project Team engage with the RWMG to gauge their receptiveness

to the recommendations? 2) To what extent are the recommendations binding on the RWMG? Heather responded that this presentation to the RWMG was intended to get their feedback. Susan added that the recommendations won't really be "binding" since the IRWM program is a voluntary effort, however, she suggested that the Project Team find a way to turn the recommendations into projects, that could then be added to the IRWM Plan Project List and submitted for grant funding. Bridget added that DAC-I funds can help in that regard. She said she considered this team to be the "experts," and hopes the RWMG will stand behind their recommendations.

Matt said that the report does a great job addressing the symptoms of a broader problem, and would like to invite public pressure on the Regional Board with respect to addressing the sources of nitrate and 1,2,3-TCP to prevent the symptoms from getting worse. The agency has been making strides to address source loading that has caused and is contributing to the drinking water issues identified in the report, but it is very political. He said he hopes the Project Team will use the report to present as additional information to the Regional Board and State Board that the drinking water problem "will continue to get worse" unless the sources of loading are addressed.

Melanie made an analogy between the challenge of finding project sponsors and champions for individual small community projects throughout the county and, many years ago, the need to find support for watershed coordinators throughout the state; the State then developed a grant source for this purpose. She emphasized the need to think creatively, and suggested some sort of planning or thought process with regard to funding sources available or entities that exist who might move that forward.

Karen McBride said she thought the support from the regional level (specifically, Central Coast Regional Board) was excellent. Where support was lacking, she thought, was from the local level. She specified a need for local management oversight of septic systems, and for support around decentralized efforts.

Christina McGinnis suggested that the Project Team present the plan to the Ag Advisory Committee, noting that the Committee could possibly support a recommendation to the County board that the County help with efforts to resolve challenges for disadvantaged communities in the county. The Project Team will follow up with Christina about that.

3. Other Business: Susan noted two important date changes for upcoming RWMG meetings:

- The October meeting will be held on October 16 (rather than October 18)
- The November meeting will be held on November 8 (rather than November 15)

The next RWMG meeting will be held on October 16, 2017, 1:30PM – 3:30PM, at Moss Landing Marine Labs.