Greater Monterey County Integrated Regional Water Management Program
Regional Water Management Group Meeting

March 18, 2020
GoToMeeting Conference Call

RWMG Entity Attendees:
Shandy Carroll – Monterey County Resource Management Agency
Ross Clark – Central Coast Wetlands Group
Beth Febus – Big Sur Land Trust
Bridget Hoover – Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary
Alison Imamura – Monterey One Water
Elizabeth Krafft – Monterey County Water Resources Agency
Pam Krone – Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary
Zane Mortensen – Rural Community Assistance Corporation
Paul Robins – Resource Conservation District of Monterey County
Rachel Saunders – Big Sur Land Trust

Non-RWMG Attendees:
Emily Gardner – Salinas Valley Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency
Kamyar Guivetchi – California Department of Water Resources
Francisco Guzman – California Department of Water Resources
John Hunt – UC Davis
Kelli McCune – Sustainable Conservation
Susan Robinson – Greater Monterey County IRWM Program Director

Meeting Minutes

1. Brief Introductions.

2. DWR Presentation on Flood-MAR: Kamyar Guivetchi, Division Manager at the Department of Water Resources, provided a presentation to explain Flood-MAR. Flood-MAR is an integrated and voluntary resource management strategy that uses floodwater resulting from rainfall or snow melt for managed aquifer recharge (MAR) on agricultural lands and working landscapes.

Kamyar began by providing some context as to why Flood-MAR is essential for California. Flood events and drought periods are becoming increasingly more frequent and more consequential, and climate change is intensifying that trend. He discussed institutional and systemic challenges to water resource management in the state, including: 1) a highly decentralized and fragmented way of making decisions; 2) regulations can be inconsistent, and at times conflicting; 3) lack of data necessary for good decision making; 4) inadequate funding; 5) insufficient monitoring (performance tracking). Kamyar briefly discussed Governor Newsom's Water Resilience Portfolio. Noteworthy in the Portfolio are the guiding principles, which include:

- Prioritize multi-benefit approaches that meet multiple needs at once
- Utilize natural infrastructure such as forests and floodplains
- Embrace innovation and new technologies
- Encourage regional approaches in watersheds
- Incorporate successful approaches from other parts of the world
- Integrate investments, policies and programs across state government
- Strengthen partnerships with local, federal and tribal governments, water agencies and irrigation districts, and other stakeholders

The Draft Portfolio, released in January 2020, included 130 recommendations organized around four topics: 1) how to maintain and diversify water resources; 2) how to protect and enhance natural systems; 3) building

connections we need physically and institutionally, recognizing that integrated resource management is the approach we need to use for the future; and 4) being prepared for more extreme conditions.

The 2018 Update of the California Water Plan underscores the importance of changing conditions. Kamyar emphasized the need for "sector co-management." This includes integrated watershed co-management to plan multi-benefit projects and knit together the different agencies' various pots of funding in order to implement projects. Flood-MAR represents this integrated approach. Flood-MAR is based on voluntary public/private partnerships, integrates flood, surface water, groundwater as well as ecosystem management, and is scalable. Flood-MAR has been implemented for over 25 years on a small scale, but can be implemented on very large scales. The larger the footprint, the larger the benefits that can be accrued. Flood-MAR is still an untapped part of California's water portfolio.

Flood-MAR utilizes a "headwaters to groundwater" strategy. Examples of public benefits resulting from Flood-MAR include: flood risk reduction, drought preparedness, aquifer replenishment, ecosystem enhancement, groundwater remediation/water quality, working lands preservation and stewardship, climate change adaptation, and recreation.

There are many potential barriers to Flood-MAR implementation, having to do with agency sector coordination, water rights and other legal issues, policy issues including how to get landowners compensated, issues related to implementation, and other barriers. DWR convened a Flood-MAR Research Advisory Committee in late 2018. The committee produced a Research and Data Development Plan, which identified 130 information gaps along with 39 priority actions. Kamyar added that the plan is full of research and pilot project ideas, for those interested in pursuing these. One overarching recommendation of the plan: Build a Flood-MAR Network to continue sharing information and to track studies and projects. DWR is currently working on how to build and maintain a Flood-MAR Network. In 2019, DWR convened a Flood-MAR forum, with over 200 participants. The forum identified ways in which the State can move Flood-MAR forward – recognizing California's aquifers as natural infrastructure; also, helping regions get the funding they need to implement Flood-MAR projects.

Kamyar noted the importance of creating markets for Flood-MAR private/public partnerships. He stressed the need to keep agricultural/open space land with recharge potential from getting developed, thereby losing the opportunity for groundwater recharge. He noted that land currently in cultivation can be repurposed, e.g., crop rotation for healthy soil management, recharge basins, terrestrial or aquatic ecosystem restoration, or solar farms. This is one potential way to keep farmers on their land.

Kamyar discussed a Flood-MAR pilot study conducted for the Merced River watershed. Results of the study showed that the accumulated volume of water potentially available from recharge opportunities over 100 years in this watershed equaled almost 5 million acre feet (AF), with only a small amount (11,000 AF) that could not have been used for recharge. One take away from the pilot study: The project not only achieved aquifer recharge but did it in such a way as to reduce flood risk.

Kamyar concluded by noting that everyone – landowners, academics, NGOs, government agencies, regulators, policy makers – has a part to play if we want to scale up Flood-MAR in California. Kamyar then opened the floor for discussion.

Ross Clark commented that the Central Coast Wetlands Group is a Flood-MAR partner, and that they have been running into hurdles in implementing. He asked, how can we as a multi-stakeholder group be supported by the State to move forward from concepts to pilot projects? Kamyar responded that DWR would be interested in exploring how studies similar to those conducted in the Pajaro, Merced, and Tuolumne watersheds might be conducted here in the Salinas River watershed. Kamyar noted that DWR has access to $5 million in Prop 50 funds and is seeking potential pilot projects. These funds will be accessible beginning in July 2020 (this will not be a competitive bid process). Ross briefly discussed the Central Coast Wetlands Group's modeling work in the lower Salinas Valley, noting that this work could potentially be expanded to the larger Salinas watershed. He also pointed out projects in the Storm Water Resource Plan that could potentially fit into the Flood-MAR

framework. Susan offered to organize a follow-up meeting between Kamyar and Ross, and others who are interested in continuing that discussion (to include John Hunt, Elizabeth Krafft, and Emily Gardner).

Elizabeth Krafft noted that the Monterey County Water Resources Agency uses releases from the San Antonio and Nacimiento Reservoirs to recharge aquifers throughout the Salinas Valley. One of their management actions is reoperation of the reservoirs, and they've been discussing with the Salinas Valley Basin GSA how to tackle that. She wondered whether DWR might be able to offer help? Kamyar responded yes, DWR has been looking at reservoir reoperation; they could compare notes on what reoperation strategies are being used (e.g., atmospheric river forecast-informed strategies).

John Hunt commented that Governor Newsom's Water Resilience Portfolio emphasizes regional coordination. He noted that this IRWM program has built a great deal of trust among entities, but he wondered what will happen with IRWM now that the State's attention has shifted to groundwater. He asked, "Where do you see IRWM fitting in?" Kamyar responded that we need to work on the next generation/iteration of IRWM. SGMA legislation is silent on IRWM so there is some work to do on a policy level. He suggested that Flood-MAR could be a vehicle by which we motivate and incentivize IRWM – a vehicle for collaboration. Bridget Hoover commented that a lot of what Kamyar has discussed is what this group been trying to achieve through IRWM over these past 10+ years, adding, "We have all the right players." Kamyar noted that IRWM is incentive based and the GSA is regulatory based; we need to bring them together.

3. Debrief on John Hunt's Presentation to the Board of Supervisors, and Region-wide Funding Strategy: John Hunt was scheduled to present to the Monterey County Board of Supervisors on March 17th to highlight the benefits of the IRWM Program and the Storm Water Resource Plan (SWRP) for Monterey County, including the fact that the IRWM Program has brought in some $20 million in grant funds to the county for water resource management projects. The intent was for IRWM and SWRP project proponents and Regional Water Management Group members to be present in the room so as to demonstrate support for the IRWM program and to answer board members' questions. However, due to the health emergency, the public was asked not to attend the meeting in person; and then due to technical difficulties, John was unable to give his presentation. John will re-schedule for a later date. He asked the group to keep in mind how best we can use that opportunity.

John then led a discussion with the RWMG about implementing a region-wide funding strategy for projects in Monterey County and the Monterey Bay Area region, including projects in the SWRP, in the IRWMP, and in the Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP). He noted that a core group has been meeting to strategize, including meetings with Mike Gardner of Aqaix, who has been instrumental in identifying public/private funding opportunities, and Alan Arvin with the California Marine Sanctuary Foundation. John pointed out the 20 projects in the IRWM Plan, 17 projects in the SWRP, and the many projects in the GSP and Salinas River Long-term Management Plan (he had emailed this list prior to the meeting) – and wondered how implementing one project might affect another. He noted that there is some work to be done in analyzing "how the plumbing fits together," and in developing new projects, enhancing existing projects, identifying grant funds and other financing options, permit coordination, etc.

John posed the question, if we were able to develop additional organizational capacity to do these things, what would Regional Water Management Group members seek most? He gave several examples, including providing technical capacity (hydrology, water quality monitoring, etc.), tracking policy and liaisoning with decision makers, providing assistance with concept development and preliminary design, community outreach, permitting assistance, data management, reporting, identifying financing options (grants, matching funds), assistance in writing grants, and identifying fiscal agency. John also asked what this "additional organizational capacity" should look like (JPA?, department within an existing entity?, a re-organized nonprofit?, expanded IRWM capacity?), and how might we fund/maintain it. Susan suggested perhaps we should send out a questionnaire to the Regional Water Management Group and others to identify what sort of skills/capacities they would benefit from most.

Ross added that in their discussions with the Salinas Valley Basin GSA, the GSA agrees that implementing these other watershed projects would be beneficial but the GSA simply doesn't have the capacity (or mandate) to focus on other priorities. So how can we bring that added capacity to benefit these agencies? Emily Gardner (GSA) noted that clarifying objectives would be a helpful first step. She referred to her former work with the Pajaro Community Water Dialogue as a positive example of a community forum defining the "bigger bucket" of work that needs to be done, but that may not be within any one agency's project list. All agreed that crystallizing objectives was a key next step. Rachel Saunders added that identifying financial support for this "added capacity" will also be key. Perhaps after objectives and "assets" are more clearly defined, this idea can be taken to the Sanctuary Foundation (or others) to seek initial funding support. She noted that finding a funding mechanism to maintain such an effort over the long term may be challenging. Bridget added the need to find ways of incentivizing partnerships – if we can figure out incentives to encourage willing landowners to develop multi-benefit projects, perhaps we can get the momentum going.

Kelli McCune suggested as a starting place the question, "Who benefits from the outcomes?" – building on the connection between beneficiaries and benefits produced. Kelli offered to send the group memos produced by an economist that outlines some creative funding possibilities. She encouraged the group to use Sustainable Conservation as a resource, as they have done considerable work in this area.

Susan suggested as a next step that the core group get together and brainstorm the purpose/goals of this "added capacity" entity, its capacities, and what that entity might look like, and then provide it as a basis for discussion to the Regional Water Management Group. Susan asked others to let her know if they would like to join the core group (Rachel and Paul Robins said they were interested). Emily emphasized the importance of reaching out to landowners.

Kamyar commented that this discussion was a distillation of a lot of things that DWR has been talking about in the context of integrated management. He noted that the Flood-MAR Research Advisory Committee had a major breakthrough when they started thinking about this as a "Network" rather than an entity per se, with a focus on the "connectors" rather than the "nodes." Any organization can be a node as long as they agree on the connectors (objectives). A Network is a self-perpetuating information exchange. Kamyar mentioned a book as a useful reference, *Networks That Work*. He noted that if the GSA and the IRWM group, as nodes, agree on the connectors, this could be very powerful. Susan agreed but commented that "there still needs to be someone(s) steering the ship." Each node is so busy carrying out their own mandates, unless there is a dedicated leader(s) to push forward the agreed-upon objectives, things won't get done. Perhaps the work of the Regional Water Management Group should morph into this purpose?

The next RWMG meeting will be held on May 20, 2020, 1:30PM – 3:30PM, location TBD.