

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

**August 19, 2020
Google Meet Conference Call**

RWMG Entity Attendees:

Beth Febus – Big Sur Land Trust
Jessica Williamson – Central Coast Wetlands Group
Brian Frus – City of Salinas
Rachel Godwin – Monterey One Water
Alex Henson – Monterey County Water Resources Agency
Bridget Hoover – Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary
Paul Robins – Resource Conservation District of Monterey County
Eric Tynan – Castroville Community Services District
Zane Mortensen – Rural Community Assistance Corporation

Non-RWMG Attendees:

Emily Gardner – Salinas Valley Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency
John Hunt – UC Davis
Susan Robinson – Greater Monterey County IRWM Program Director
Mo Wise – Irvine Ranch Water District

Meeting Minutes

1. Brief Introductions and Check In. Alex Henson introduced himself to the group as MCWRA's new RWMG representative.

2. Irvine Ranch Water District's Natural Treatment Systems: Mo Wise received her Master's of Science in Marine Sciences (Chemical Oceanography) at Moss Landing Marine Laboratories in 2017 and is now working as the Wetlands Scientist for the Irvine Ranch Water District in Irvine, CA. She provided a presentation on the water district's natural treatment wetlands systems for treating urban runoff.

The District has constructed over 40 treatment wetlands since the 1980s. The largest is the San Joaquin marsh, which captures the flow of all of the other treatment wetlands and drains to Upper Newport Bay, an Ecological Reserve. These treatment wetlands are built into the urban environment and are fed by storm drains and gutters. The wetland systems clean waterways and provide habitat. Nutrients and bacteria are reduced through an entirely passive process that includes: plant uptake, sedimentation, denitrification, UV treatment, and biological volatilization.

Mo described the basic design that applies to all of the various sizes of treatment wetlands in their system: Water enters, spreads out, settles, travels through a channel; plants stabilize the soil and uptake nutrients. Then water flows to an outlet pond where it lingers for a time while UV light kills bacteria. Finally the water flows to an outlet structure fitted with trash screens, which get cleaned out regularly. Mo described the results of this process. In one year, over 50,000 pounds of total nitrogen were removed, plus 202 pounds of ammonia, 137 pounds of selenium, and very high percentages of bacteria removal.

Mo showed an example of a treatment wetland that also serves as a storm water/floodwater retarding basin (the District has five or six of these). She emphasized the importance of the land/sea interface and the beneficial value of wetlands. The District does a lot of biological monitoring and native plant restoration.

John Hunt asked whether there were regulatory drivers motivating the construction of these wetlands. Mo said that the District has a regulatory compliance department; they are constantly monitoring. Bridget wondered, how does the District know how to size the wetland system to meet the regulatory standards? Mo explained that their system is based on flow capacity rather than nutrient removal efficiency. Bridget mentioned the Central Coast Wetlands Group's pilot treatment wetlands and suggested partnering with the District as a way of validating the model. Mo agreed, noting that the District has accurate flow rates, weekly water quality parameter testing, etc.

3. SGMA Watershed Coordinator Grant Proposal: Paul Robins provided an overview of the proposal that Central Coast Wetlands Group, the Resource Conservation District, and the Salinas Valley Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency are putting forward for the California Department of Conservation's SGMA Watershed Coordinator grant. The Central Coast Wetlands Group is the lead applicant.

Paul noted that the Department of Conservation has been funding this grant program since 2000 but this is the first time they've modified the RFP to include a nexus with groundwater. It's a bit unusual because watersheds are typically defined by surface basins, which don't necessarily line up with underlying groundwater basin boundaries. The RCD, CCWG, and the GSA have teamed up to advance work that the RWMG has done especially with the recent Storm Water Resource Plan, because many of these projects benefit groundwater. The proposal includes four basic concepts:

1. Push forward one of the recently funded IRWM projects to maximize the benefits, watershed coordination and recharge potential.
2. Put additional energy towards pursuing alternative funding sources for project implementation.
3. Assessment: Looking at groundwater recharge potential in context of storm water capture. This includes, for example, supporting Big Sur Land Trust with their Carr Lake project, develop infiltration/multi-benefit watershed projects in the upper Gabilan watershed (eastside subbasin), and the Castroville to the Sea project.
4. Coordination with permitting agencies regarding water rights issues associated with recharge projects.

The Watershed Coordinator role would be split between two people. Susan Robinson would assume about a 20%-time role (primarily #4 above), with the bulk of the Coordinator role provided by an on-the-ground person hired by CCWG. The maximum award is \$250K with a three-year project period.

4. CivicSpark Fellow and Tribal Engagement: The Central Coast Funding Area has been invited by the Department of Water Resources to work with a CivicSpark Fellow over the course of the next year on activities to increase Tribal engagement. CivicSpark is an AmeriCorps program in which Fellows are matched with state, local or community-based organizations to work full-time on at least one project, which benefits at least one local public agency (or in this case, Tribe).

Susan explained that an opportunity has been presented for the Greater Monterey County, Santa Cruz, and Pajaro IRWM regions to host a CivicSparks Fellow to work with Amah Mutsun Tribal representatives on

land stewardship research and activities in traditional Amah Mutsun Tribal territory. Our RWMG's role would presumably be to provide information/data and guidance for the CivicSpark Fellow to further the Fellow's research in the Greater Monterey County region related to these questions. Another suggested project for the CivicSpark Fellow would be to explore issues related to homelessness within the Central Coast Funding Area with regard to water resources.

Susan asked whether the RWMG is interested in participating in this opportunity. Brian Frus commented that the City of Salinas has had great experiences with CivicSpark Fellows, however he cautioned that the administrative aspect was daunting. Paul Robins asked if the Amah Mutsun Tribe was supportive of this idea. Susan responded they were, and Paul commented that he would not want to stand in the way of providing a resource for the Tribes. Regarding the homelessness issue, Emily noted that this is a major societal issue and a "huge nut to crack..."

There was quite a bit of discussion about the potential administrative burden. Susan said that the Santa Clara Valley Water District has volunteered to be the lead agency, along with the Amah Mutsun Tribe, and therefore the RWMG *in theory* shouldn't have any administrative responsibilities. The group consensually agreed that as long as there is no administrative burden, they were supportive of hosting a CivicSpark Fellow to perform those specified tasks.

5. VOTE: Invite Salinas Valley Basin GSA to Become a RWMG Member? At the last RWMG meeting (June 17, 2020), Ross Clark, who is a member of the East Side Subbasin Committee for the Salinas Valley Groundwater Sustainability Agency (GSA), brought up a recommendation to invite the GSA to become a voting member of the RWMG. It was decided that a formal vote should be held at the August 19, 2020 meeting.

A quorum was present (Susan had been asked to act as proxy for Central Coast Wetlands Group and for CSUMB). Several RWMG members, including Eric Tynan, Brian Frus, Bridget Hoover, and Paul Robins, spoke up in support for the GSA becoming a RWMG member. Bridget commented on the connection between the recent storm water planning work and groundwater. Paul said he saw no conflicts of interest. After some discussion, Eric motion for the GSA to become a RWMG member; Brian seconded the motion. All voted in favor, none opposed, none abstained. Susan will extend the invitation to the GSA.

6. Other Business: Paul announced that the RCD has been awarded \$5M in grant funds for forest fire protection, and another \$2.5M has been awarded to the US Forest Service and NRCS for a forest health project in Monterey County. Paul wondered whether the IRWM Plan includes objectives related to upland health and/or forest fire. [Yes: Under the Environment Goal: Support research and monitoring efforts to understand the effects of wildfire events on water resources.] Susan offered if the RCD has any ideas for projects to support their work, let the group know.

Susan invited ideas for future RWMG meeting topics. Paul mentioned a project that RCD Santa Cruz County has been working on in coordination with RCD Monterey County, Central Coast Wetlands Group, and Elkhorn Slough Foundation: North Monterey County Amphibian Recovery Plan. Some of those projects, he noted, could double for groundwater recharge projects. Perhaps request a presentation?

If anyone has any ideas for agenda items for upcoming meetings, please let Susan know!

The next RWMG meeting will be held on October 21, 2020, 1:30PM – 3:30PM.