

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

**October 21, 2020
Google Meet Conference Call**

RWMG Entity Attendees:

Horacio Amezcuita – San Jerardo Cooperative, Inc.
Ross Clark – Central Coast Wetlands Group
Beth Febus – Big Sur Land Trust
Emily Gardner – Salinas Valley Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency
Rachel Gaudoin – Monterey One Water
Alex Henson – Monterey County Water Resources Agency
Bridget Hoover – Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary
Kevin O'Connor – Central Coast Wetlands Group
John Olson – California State University Monterey Bay
Paul Robins – Resource Conservation District of Monterey County
Rachel Saunders – Big Sur Land Trust

Non-RWMG Attendees:

Kendra Howell – Salinas Valley Memorial Healthcare System
John Hunt – UC Davis
Kelli McCune – Sustainable Conservation
Ashley Paulsworth – Monterey County Sustainability Program
Susan Robinson – Greater Monterey County IRWM Program Director
Jake Smith – Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority

Meeting Minutes

1. Brief Introductions.

2. Announcement: The Salinas Valley Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency board has accepted the Regional Water Management Group's invitation to join the Group! Welcome!

3. Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority Watershed Programs: Jake Smith, the Conservation GIS Coordinator with the Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority (OSA), presented on the watershed programs that the OSA has been implementing in the Santa Clara Valley. The OSA was formed in 1993. They currently have 44 staff and are largely supported from a local parcel tax. To date they have conserved 26,000 acres in fee or easement.

The *Santa Clara Valley Greenprint* is long-range guide and a living decision support tool for the OSA to identify critical areas for land conservation to protect natural species, conserve water resources, sustain ag lands, and ensure livable communities. The document identifies acres that could potentially provide multiple benefits, and supports the viability of working lands. The Greenprint considers nature as infrastructure: nature provides important ecosystem services that are important to protect, such as recreation and public health, clean water supply, agriculture, climate resiliency, flood protection, wildlife connectivity. In June 2014, OSA produced the

report, *Healthy Lands & Healthy Economies: Nature's Value in Santa Clara County*, which provides a screening of ecosystem services and assigns economic value. Being able to assign some level of economic value had strategic benefit in helping OSA make the financial case for Measure Q, a \$24 parcel tax measure that was passed in November 2014. Over 10,000 acres have been conserved since 2014. The tax measure generates \$120 million over 15 years. The measure is back on the ballot this November to make it perpetual (until there is a measure to retire it).

Jake presented Coyote Valley as an example of OSA's work. Coyote Valley sits between the Santa Cruz and Diablo mountain ranges, between San Jose and Morgan Hill. This area has been threatened by development since the 1980s, but was also identified as having high integrated conservation value by the Valley Greenprint, is a vast aquifer recharge area, and provides a crossroad of trails, amongst other benefits. Protecting Coyote Valley also provided an opportunity to protect the Laguna Seco wetland, a 1,000+ acre wetland reclaimed in 1916. Jake described how OSA made the case for protecting Coyote Valley. OSA promoted the *Coyote Valley Landscape Linkage Report* – a restoration vision for Coyote Valley, including corridor crossings and increased permeability. OSA collaborated with key partners (“conservation synergy”) to help avoid and minimize potential impacts related to the California high-speed rail project, which was slated for development across the Coyote Valley area. Results of this collaboration included, for example, the design of nine dedicated wildlife crossing underpasses.

Jake also described OSA's work to leverage the open space area of Coyote Valley to detain storm water for downstream flood protection, increase aquifer recharge, and restore historic wetlands, riparian areas, and uplands. OSA partnered with Santa Clara Valley Water District to evaluate the downstream flood benefits associated with retiring levees/dam in order to restore Laguna Seca and the Fisher Creek floodplain. This effort included analysis and quantification of benefits of natural/green infrastructure investments, and helped inform San Jose's Measure T infrastructure bond. Measure T is providing \$46 million toward a \$93 million deal to purchase 937 acres for conservation, creating the Northern Coyote Valley Conservation Area. A 3-5 year Master Planning process will kick off in Spring 2021.

OSA recently kicked off a groundwater assessment process with the Peninsula Open Space Trust and City of San Jose. The aim is to develop a five-year monitoring program for groundwater dependent ecosystems; and if impacts are identified, to work out a process to collaboratively address those impacts. Jake also described the *Santa Clara Valley Agricultural Plan*, a joint effort between OSA and the County of Santa Clara, with the aim to conserve farmland and ranchland as a climate change mitigation and economic development strategy. Santa Clara Valley has lost over 20,000 acres to development and over 28,000 acres are at risk. Protecting working lands will help prevent increase of greenhouse gas emissions. The program has identified the need to update mapping in the State Farmland Mapping protocols.

Paul Robins asked about return on investment from ecosystem services. Jake said it was very important, and challenging, to get business owners behind Measures Q and T. OSA's strategy was to focus not on project-level ecosystem services but more on overall ecosystem services. Rachel Saunders wondered, regarding stakeholder involvement with the Greenprint, who pushed back, and about what? Jake responded that they had technical groups for each theme. OSA didn't present the strategy as an acquisition plan but focused more on conservation values. They reached out to the community and got feedback – so the strategies were those of the stakeholders.

4. Monterey County Sustainability Program: Ashley Paulsworth is the new Sustainability Program Manager for Monterey County. Ashley discussed plans for the revitalization of the County Sustainability Program, noting that the Sustainability Program Manager position had been vacant for a few years.

Ashley discussed the 2030 Municipal Climate Action Plan (MCAP) goals, explaining that local governments are called on to be key implementers of the State's goals. The County wrote the MCAP in 2013. She noted that emissions in 2020 were significantly reduced due to COVID, with 25% of the workforce telecommuting. She expects some of that to carry forward into the future, post-COVID. The MCAP includes a 20% reduction goal of greenhouse gas emissions by 2020, with an aim for 58% reduction by 2030 from 2005 levels.

Ashley believes that net zero carbon emissions by the County are achievable! How do we get there? The Sustainability Program is undertaking an energy assessment of the County's buildings, beginning with a pilot study of two buildings. The project will start with an audit, and then begin the process of improving energy efficiency – all through grants and low-interest loans with the aim of being “budget neutral.” The strategy includes utilizing savings from both energy efficiency and renewable energy strategies to electrify the buildings, bringing carbon emissions to zero. The long-term strategy is to develop an Energy Action Plan for the whole county.

Ashley described the 2015 County emissions profile, noting the aim to reduce emissions for the entire county 40% by the year 2030. AMBAG will be providing an updated emissions profile in February, and Ashley will use that to move forward. Most of the reductions are expected to come from the solid waste sector, from reducing organics in landfills. Other significant reductions are expected to come from residential/commercial sectors. They are looking at energy efficiency and electrification to reach the goals. Ashley's team reached out to over 200 stakeholders regarding sustainability topics of “critical importance,” and found that water concerns ranked high. She has proposed sustainability goals to the County board of supervisors, but has not received enough comment yet to make these goals official. Ashley expects to have the Climate Action Plan fully adopted by the year 2022. The process will include a high level of stakeholder engagement, including working groups. Ashley noted the potential role of Regional Water Management Groups and the IRWM program could include historical knowledge/context, vision for adaptation/mitigation strategies, connectedness to local policy and key stakeholders, and a context for sharing information and providing feedback to the County.

John Hunt asked whether Ashley has had collaboration with sister programs in Santa Cruz and Santa Clara counties, noting similarities in climate issues. Ashley responded that she has been in contact with Tiffany Wise-West in Santa Cruz, and has also been talking with the Department of Emergency Services (which produces the Local Hazard Mitigation Plan) and with AMBAG to host a half-day summit.

Ross Clark added that there are opportunities that the IRWM Program can help implement; and having Ashley and her team as part of the “network” can definitely help bring in grant money to fund these projects. Jake wondered whether there's been discussion about Governor Newsom's 30x30 declaration, including natural working lands as a strategy for sustainability. Ashley said no, but she's interested! Paul Robins briefly noted local efforts around agriculture and ecosystem services.

5. Blue Zones Project - Monterey County: Kendra Howell with the Salinas Valley Memorial Healthcare System presented on the Blue Zones Project Monterey County. The project is a publicly endorsed health and wellness initiative that is privately funded (in full) by the Salinas Valley Memorial Healthcare System, Montage Health, and Taylor Farms. Kendra commented that we spend so much money on trying to manage chronic disease; the goal is to move the needle toward health and wellness. The project is focused in the City of Salinas, but will be expanding to other communities throughout Monterey County.

Kendra described the Blue Zones Project. Blue Zones is based on the research of Dan Buettner and National Geographic. Buettner identified nine commonalities of life in places where people lived the longest. The original

project focused on five communities, where people were three times more likely to live to be 100 – and 100 “good” years. Kendra described these original Blue Zones (Sardina, Italy; Okinawa, Japan; Loma Linda, CA; a town in Costa Rica; and a town in Greece), noting some of the characteristics that were thought to contribute to healthy longevity. The “commonalities” included:

- Moving naturally
- Sense of purpose
- “Down shifting” (less stress)
- Eating until 80% full
- Plant-based diet
- Wine with friends on a regular basis
- Participating in a faith-based community
- Connectedness to family
- Connectedness with other like-minded people

The Blue Zones project considers the question, “What are influential factors with a ‘life radius’ of a community?” The project supports land use policy that provides access to open space, good transit, bikeable/walkable communities, and supports health policies such as restrictions on tobacco use.

The City of Salinas is the first Blue Zones project in northern California. It was started in 2018, and is a five-year program. The project conducts “purpose” workshops, encourages people to move more (walking groups), sponsors cooking classes, supports the safe-routes-to-school program, advocates for improved health policy and food policy (e.g., how to ensure people in need have access to healthy food). In 2021, the program will begin expanding to Monterey, Seaside, and Marina, and to a limited extent on the county level. By end of 2021 the program will expand to south county, specifically King City and Gonzales.

Susan Robinson asked how the project is demonstrating that it is effecting change? Kendra responded that metrics were taken at the start of the project (e.g., how many kids walk/bike to school?). They update those metrics on a yearly basis (e.g., how many policies have they changed? How many restaurants are engaged with the program?).

Ross noted that many projects listed in the *Storm Water Resources Plan*, such as reclaiming floodways, come with opportunities for open space and recreation. He wondered, has Kendra and her team been able to form partnerships to take over some of those responsibilities in the long term? Kendra responded that they have, to some extent, noting that the challenge is finding funding for maintenance. Jake commented that typically OSA brings one-third of the funds needed for a project, but then assumes the long-term responsibilities of maintenance. Rachel Saunders emphasized that Monterey County doesn’t have an open space authority, and finding an entity to take over long-term operation and maintenance is a major challenge. Ross suggested that tax measures for water resource projects could potentially be made more appealing to the public by including parks, open space, and recreational elements. This would have a greater chance of success, he said, “if we bring the weight of all of our organizations behind it.” Rachel said that the Big Sur Land Trust welcomes the opportunity to discuss that further.

6. Other Business: Paul Robins reported that the RCD has been working with USDA to address impacts of the recent River and Carmel Fires. They are anticipating winter erosion impacts. Paul wanted everyone to know that those resources are available.

The next RWMG meeting will be held on December 16, 2020, 1:30PM – 3:30PM.