

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

**December 16, 2020
Google Meet Conference Call**

RWMG Entity Attendees:

Horacio Amezquita – San Jerardo Cooperative, Inc.
Oscar Antillon – City of Soledad
Ross Clark – Central Coast Wetlands Group
Beth Febus – Big Sur Land Trust
Bridget Hoover – Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary
Mike McCullough – Monterey One Water
Donna Meyers – Salinas Valley Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency
Zane Mortensen – Rural Community Assistance Corporation
Heidi Niggemeyer – City of Salinas
Kevin O'Connor – Central Coast Wetlands Group
John Olson – California State University Monterey Bay
Rachel Saunders – Big Sur Land Trust

Non-RWMG Attendees:

Jeff Condit – Monterey Regional Stormwater Management Program
Doug Dowden
John Hunt – UC Davis
Susan Robinson – Greater Monterey County IRWM Program Director

Meeting Minutes

1. Brief Introductions.

2. Round Robin Feature Presentation: City of Salinas Community-based Public Private Partnership: Heidi Niggemeyer provided a presentation on the City of Salinas's proposed Community-based Public Private Partnership (CBP3), a performance-based approach to implementing stormwater management practices (e.g., green infrastructure, street sweeping, trash reduction) to help meet the City's total maximum daily load (TMDL) and other permit requirements.

The City has been working with [2NDNATURE](#) to develop the CBP3. The City issued an RFQ in November 2019 and selected [Corvias](#) as the private entity, utilizing a design-build – operate-maintain process. In this CBP3, the City (public) is the manager, and Corvias (private) is the implementer responsible for designing and implementing the stormwater green infrastructure and pollution prevention practices and for meeting performance targets. Corvias will also most likely be responsible for maintaining the green infrastructure as part of a long-term partnership with the City. Some key advantages to this P3 arrangement are that risks are transferred to the private entity, alternative financing can be utilized, there is increased incentive for and increased certainty of performance metrics being met, and long-term operations and maintenance (O&M) is potentially built in. Importantly, the P3 is community-based (CB), having additional advantages of, e.g., employing people within the community, utilizing minority businesses, and achieving community-centric goals (such as increasing park area and improving park conditions). With this CBP3 the City has established environmental, community, and socio-economic goals – measurable performance targets that Corvias will endeavor to meet over a three-year timeframe. Corvias and the City are utilizing the 2NDNATURE Software platform to identify focus areas for implementing projects.

Once a Master Services Agreement is signed, the City has estimated a potential \$50 million investment over the initial three-year implementation phase, which it expects to finance via a stormwater utility measure. The City is anticipating putting the utility on the ballots in the late 2021-early 2022 timeframe. But in case that measure does not pass, the City is looking to begin with a one-year \$5 million pilot program, supported with a loan from [WaterFunder](#) (with gentle pay-back terms). The initial focus areas are: Alisal, Carr Lake, and Chinatown. Heidi noted that this is an effective use of resources for “community uplift.” She presented a slide that showed the various strategies (e.g., green stormwater infrastructure, urban tree program, street sweeping, park improvements), the dollar investment for each strategy, and the performance metrics that each strategy will help to achieve. Heidi explained that Corvias *will not get paid until the performance measures are met*, i.e., after projects are implemented and a third-party has certified the performance measures have been met. Corvias has the upfront capital to get the program rolling. Heidi also noted that this process allows the City to leverage its capital: starting with the \$5 million loan from WaterFunder, developing engineering plans and establishing proof of concept, which will help the City to successfully obtain grants, and can help obtain Clean Water State Revolving Funds, etc. Note that this all remains to be defined in the Master Services Agreement.

Bridget Hoover asked how long it took to get buy-in for this ambitious endeavor. Heidi responded that it took about a year to get buy-in from department heads, City management, etc. The concept has been presented to the City’s Finance Committee and the former City Council, who approved a Resolution to continue to work towards a Master Services Agreement. The process is currently at a stall due to change in City Council, a new City Manager, and a new Mayor.

Ross Clark wondered how water quality enhancement would be documented. And how do they monetize the benefits and bill the City? Heidi explained that this will all be laid out in the Master Services Agreement. Mike McCullough asked whether CEQA would be the responsibility of Corvias or of the City. Answer: Corvias. John Hunt wondered whether it would be up to Corvias to bring in other green investors. The answer was yes, it would. Heidi noted that CBP3 partnerships are typically long-term, e.g., 30 years, with the private partner being responsible for O&M, paid for through the partnership. This is Phase I of the City’s CBP3, but it could become a 30-year partnership with Corvias. The City Council has not yet approved a Master Services Agreement; once approved and signed the City can move forward with the CBP3.

3. Round Robin Continued

Oscar Antillon – City of Soledad: Oscar is the new representative for the City of Soledad on the Regional Water Management Group. Oscar has been the Public Works Director for the City for about a year now. He says it’s a “one-man show,” he has no engineering staff. Public Works manages the City’s water system and wastewater treatment plant. The City’s water reclamation plant has been constructed (with partial support from IRWM grant funds) but has not yet been connected. He plans to connect the system this year. He mentioned 140 acres of lagoons by the river which he would like to convert to wetlands (once recycled water is connected, the City won’t have much use for that marsh), and possibly construct a trail. The City also faces stormwater challenges. There has been a lot of new development; it is difficult to track management practices, maintenance, etc. Heidi noted that one of the hardest pieces of stormwater is maintenance: green infrastructure is great but you need to have enough water to keep everything alive. Ross offered to show Oscar the wetlands that Central Coast Wetlands Group has constructed near the Salinas River (Oscar was interested!). Oscar also noted that the City will be beginning the process of updating its Urban Water Management Plan.

Susan Robinson asked the group whether anyone would find it useful to have access to a grants/loans database. Some responded that it would. Heidi mentioned the [California Grants Portal](#), which is a grants clearinghouse. Susan will send that link to the group.

Donna Meyers – Salinas Valley Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency (SVBGSA): Donna is the General Manager for the SVBGSA (and newly elected Mayor of Santa Cruz – congratulations, Donna!). She noted that the GSA has been super busy developing their Groundwater Sustainability Plans (GSPs). One plan – for the 180/400 Foot Aquifer – has been completed and the agency is currently in the process of developing five additional plans, which are due to the State by January 31, 2022. When the plans are complete, they will be turned into a single Integrated GSP, a comprehensive basin-wide plan that will guide the GSA’s work. The GSP must be updated every five years, with reports filed annually. Plan development has been a communication-rich, stakeholder-intensive process. There are subcommittees for each plan, with about 90 people involved currently.

Bridget Hoover – Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary: Bridget said she had attended the Santa Cruz Regional Water Management Group (RWMG) meeting recently, where Tim Carson discussed the timeline for IRWM Implementation Round 2 (solicitation is scheduled for late 2021: **Draft PSP will be released middle of Summer 2021, Final PSP released in December 2021**). Bridget suggested we start planning; Susan agreed, and said she would begin thinking through the process. Since a storm water project must be included in a Storm Water Resource Plan (SWRP) in order to be eligible for a State bond-funded grant, including IRWM, Heidi asked, how will projects get included in the SWRP? Susan said we need to figure that out... John Hunt noted that with completion of the SWRP, ownership and maintenance of the document was officially transferred to the RWMG. Susan said she would start figuring out the process for including storm water projects in the SWRP. Ross offered that he and John work with the City of Salinas to quantify benefits for their new storm water projects.

Bridget continued... The Sanctuary mobilized volunteers this past weekend for the First Flush event. They worked with the Monterey Regional Stormwater Program. They monitor 13 sites from Seaside to Carmel, plus two sites in Salinas. Sadly, the City of Santa Cruz, Santa Cruz County, and Capitola no longer participate in First Flush. (Donna Meyers, new Mayor of Santa Cruz, responded: “Noted!”) Bridget said she has also been involved in the update of the Sanctuary’s Management Plan.

Beth Febus and Rachel Saunders – Big Sur Land Trust: Beth reported that Big Sur Land Trust has been very busy working on the Carr Lake project. They now have 30% design plans. They will be creating 67 acres of habitat, with trails, plus a 6-acre neighborhood park. The City of Salinas is the lead agency for CEQA; it is close to finished, and will be a Mitigated Neg Dec. They are working on the cultural analysis now. CEQA documents will be released for public comment February/March, and to the City Council for approval in March/April (along with approval of General Plan and zoning amendments). Big Sur Land Trust has continued working with Return of the Natives; they have a native plant demonstration site at Carr Lake, and had a small planting event this year (small due to Covid). More planned for next year! Community engagement has been challenging due to Covid; Zoom meetings not so successful.

Rachel added that the Big Sur Land Trust is in continued dialogue with their two agricultural neighbors on Carr Lake, and are being careful to ensure no impacts to their farms. A grant from the Coastal Conservancy is covering most of the design work (up to 50%) and CEQA; they are now seeking additional funds. Heidi asked Rachel how green infrastructure would be watered (response: there’s a well). Rachel added that Big Sur Land Trust is in discussions with the City about long-term management and ownership of the new park and open space, with a possible funding measure on the ballot. Heidi asked Rachel to remind City staff that the City will be responsible for maintaining and inspecting anything with green infrastructure per the City’s NPDES permit.

John Hunt noted that Monterey County Water Resources Agency is also considering putting something on the ballot. All of these individual ballot measures may be potentially competing. He recalled discussions of creating one big Everybody-Benefits bond; thoughts about that? Heidi pointed out that different types of programs are suited to different types of taxes or fees, so for example a parks measure might be funded through a parcel tax; but

that funding mechanism might not necessarily be appropriate for a stormwater measure (which might use a property-related fee). Kevin O'Connor argued that it's possible to have an Everybody-Benefits bond measure, it's all in how you *word* the bond measure. He pointed to the Santa Clara Valley Water District's \$45.5 million Measure S as an example. Rachel said that Big Sur Land Trust will be conducting a feasibility study to look at different options, such as having a Park District in the Salinas Valley. Donna noted that the Santa Clara Valley's example is exciting; maybe create a subcommittee of the RWMG to explore this further?

Horacio Amezcuita – San Jerardo Cooperative, Inc.: Horacio reported that San Jerardo has recovered funds from the Department of Water Resources, from Prop 84 IRWM Implementation Grant Round 1, for their wastewater project and water conservation measures. Monterey County is in the process of transferring ownership of the wastewater system to San Jerardo. San Jerardo has updated their drinking water and wastewater systems and has installed new low-water valves in all of the houses. Horacio has also been working as part of the Advisory Committee for the State Water Board's SAFER (Safe and Affordable Fund for Equity and Resilience) drinking water fund. He noted that there are so many communities and so many wells that are *not* on the SAFER funding list. He pointed out, for example, very high levels of chromium-6 and TCP in the Prunedale area.

Ross Clark – Central Coast Wetlands Group: Ross said the Central Coast Wetlands Group has been working with Paul Robins (RCD) and Sarah Lopez (Preservation Inc.) on coordinating ag water quality enhancement in line with the Ag Order. Ross and crew are focusing on off-farm treatment systems, Paul is focusing on on-farm treatment, and Sarah is helping initiate discussions with landowners for possible participation in collaborative projects in targeted watersheds (Alisal, Gabilan). Ross pointed out that this is a way for landowners to address water quality issues before stormwater reaches the City of Salinas and Carr Lake. The Central Coast Wetlands Group has EPA funding to do load estimates (nitrogen and phosphorus) and to monitor how effective the treatments are for helping to reduce harmful algal blooms offshore. They will be monitoring at four locations within each watershed and at the mouths of the Pajaro River, Salinas River, and Moro Cojo Slough. Heidi mentioned that the City of Salinas has been using TSS as a proxy for pollutants; could Central Coast Wetlands Group use that as well so they can see how well the correlation works? Ross said good idea; he'll look into that!

The next RWMG meeting will be held on February 17, 2021, 1:30PM – 3:30PM.