

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

**February 16, 2022
Zoom Conference Call**

RWMG Entity Attendees:

Jenny Balmagia – Central Coast Wetlands Group
Melanie Beretti – Monterey County Housing and Community Development Department
Ross Clark – Central Coast Wetlands Group
Beth Febus – Big Sur Land Trust
Alex Henson – Monterey County Water Resources Agency
Bridget Hoover – Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary
Donna Meyers – Salinas Valley Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency
Heidi Niggemeyer – City of Salinas
John Olson – California State University Monterey Bay
Eric Tynan – Castroville Community Services District

Non-RWMG Attendees:

Christy Cooper – Harris & Associates
Sarah Faraola – Harris & Associates
Fay Hartman – American Rivers
John Hunt – UC Davis
Jennifer Morales – Department of Water Resources
Jeff Odefey – American Rivers
Susan Robinson – Greater Monterey County IRWM Program Director

Meeting Minutes

1. Brief Introductions.

2. New Online Federal Funding Opportunities Tool: Fay Hartman and Jeff Odefey from American Rivers provided a demonstration of a [new online tool](#) for searching federal funding opportunities. The tool was developed by American Rivers and partners primarily with the Colorado River Basin in mind, though most of the opportunities are also relevant for California projects. Development of the tool was prompted by the myriad of new federal grant opportunities being released through passage of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) in November 2021, making over \$8 billion available for Western water infrastructure.

Fay began by providing an overview of the document, “Ten Strategies for Climate Resilience in the Colorado River Basin,” and showed some Funding Fact Sheets that highlight state and federal funding allocations. The online federal funding search tool was developed to help project proponents identify funding to implement these strategies for improved water resource and watershed management. Some grant programs relevant to the Central Coast are not included in the database, notably, NOAA grants and coastal funding opportunities. Fay called attention to the Bureau of Reclamation’s WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Program (applications due March 31).

Jeff added that there is a large amount of money flowing from the US EPA to the State Water Board for Clean Water and Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (SRF) programs. He emphasized the novel types

of projects for land acquisition and watershed programs that can be financed through SRF, including green stormwater infrastructure projects. Note however, SRF is primarily a loan program, not a grant program; however, US EPA is requiring states to distribute more of their SRF funds in grants. There is also quite a bit of Department of Transportation funding available for stormwater management. Another source to keep an eye on is Housing and Urban Development block grants. Some useful links:

- Federal Funding Opportunities Tool: <https://www.tenstrategies.net/newfederalfunding>
- Ten Strategies for Climate Resilience in the Colorado River Basin: <https://www.tenstrategies.net/>
- Guidebook to the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law: https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/BUILDING-A-BETTER-AMERICA_FINAL.pdf#page=230
- Introduction to the IJIA Handbook: <https://the-atlas.com/ijia-handbook-for-local-governments/introduction/>
- Bureau of Reclamation WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Program: <https://www.usbr.gov/watersmart/cwmp/index.html>

3. IRWM Implementation Grant - Round 2: Susan Robinson discussed the RWMG's general approach to the project solicitation for Round 2 (final round) of the IRWM Implementation Grant, the timeline for the project solicitation, and the criteria for selecting projects. Amount of funding available to the Greater Monterey County Region for Round 2:

DAC Implementation: **\$492,517**
General Implementation: **\$3,067,823**
TOTAL: **\$3,560,340**

Disadvantaged communities can apply for more than the “DAC Implementation” amount, but the region must have at least \$492,517 in projects that directly benefit DAC populations or geographic areas that are at least 75% DAC. Caveat: If the other Central Coast regions happen to have DAC projects for Round 2 whose combined costs exceed the amount of DAC Implementation funding that the Central Coast Funding Area is required to meet (i.e., 10% of the entire Implementation funds), then Greater Monterey County Region will not need to meet the minimum DAC spending amount (\$492,517).

DWR will be releasing the final Guidelines and Proposal Solicitation Package (PSP) in April, and will be asking Regions to select their preferred application deadline for Round 2. At this point it's likely that the choices will be October 2022 or February 2023. Susan asked RWMG members for their preferred date. Several voted for the later date, one voted for the earlier date; but it was decided that the entire RWMG should weigh in on this decision. Susan will initiate an electronic vote via email.

Susan then walked through a proposed project solicitation timeline for each scenario, October 2022 or February 2023; all agreed (or at least no one objected) to the proposed timelines. Finally, Susan reviewed a proposed approach for selecting which projects to include in the Round 2 application. The approach consists generally of:

1. Eligibility checklist (all projects must meet these criteria)
2. Proposal-level considerations (criteria to keep in mind when putting the application package together)
3. Ranking criteria for individual projects

Susan noted that DWR will not be scoring the Central Coast Funding Area applications for Round 2. They will be reviewing proposals for eligibility only. But the Regional Water Management Group does need to demonstrate how it utilized a competitive process for selecting projects, including how projects were

ranked and prioritized. Susan emphasized the importance of RWMG members weighing in on the selection process, and asked them especially to provide feedback on the points assigned in the proposed scoring criteria. Some good suggestions were made during the meeting. Susan will incorporate those suggestions and then send the revised Project Selection Criteria to the RWMG for further consideration.

Bridget Hoover offered – Going back to the RWMG’s original goal and intent of developing and implementing integrated, multi-benefit projects, is it possible to achieve truly integrated projects in this final round of IRWM? Something to think about.

4. RWMG Member Updates and News: Bridget announced that the annual request for funding for IRWM Coordination is still open. She thanked the eight entities that have contributed thus far.

Castroville Community Services District: Eric Tynan reported that seawater intrusion has taken out one of Castroville Community Services District’s wells and is now within 2,000 feet of the District’s remaining wells. CCSD is considering a desalter to desalt brackish water, in coordination with the Salinas Valley Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency’s work on a saltwater extraction barrier.

Salinas Valley Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency (GSA): Donna Meyers announced that every critically over-drafted basin will be receiving a minimum of \$7.6 million in State Budget funds (don’t have to compete for this!). The GSA is submitting a work plan for \$10 million worth of projects in the 180/400 Foot Basin. Included in the work plan (among other projects):

- Looking at data gaps: data management, data expansion, data modeling. The GSA will be working jointly with Marina Coast Water District on seawater intrusion modeling.
- Adding monitoring wells to the monitoring well network.
- Groundwater dependent ecosystems (GDEs) – with assistance from Central Coast Wetlands Group. They will be pulling in more data related to DACs and small water systems, and pulling in Irrigated Lands Program data when available.
- Feasibility studies for:
 - Demand management: The first step in the GSA’s allocations approach. Will consider legality of water rights. Will develop a stakeholder process around demand management.
 - Saltwater intrusion extraction barrier.
 - Aquifer storage and recovery (ASR) – utilizing river water, injection or as substitute water.
 - Study on potential recharge wells where aquifer thins in the 180/400 Foot subbasin.

Central Coast Wetlands Group: Ross Clark noted that Jenny Balmagia, the SGMA Watershed Coordinator, has been reaching out to stakeholders to get projects moving. They are focusing especially on “Castroville to the Coast” and projects in the foothills above Salinas.

City of Salinas: Susan asked Heidi Niggemeyer about the Closter Park project, and Heidi responded that the City will not be submitting that project for Round 2 as there is not enough money available.

Monterey County Housing and Community Development Department: Melanie Beretti reported that the County is in the process of updating the General Plan Housing Element, will be taking amendments to the Board of Supervisors on March 22, 2022. News of note:

- Community Climate Action Plan is underway, looking for public input
- County is continuing to work on the Salinas River Groundwater Basin Study
- Moss Landing Community Plan: climate regulations under development
- Establishing priorities for ag land protection
- Castroville Community Plan Update

- Housing Element: 6th Cycle Update. Will also be updating Safety and Environmental Justice elements.
- Continuing to work with the Resource Conservation District (RCD) of Monterey County on Partners in Restoration Master Permit.
- Adopted a Water and Energy Efficient Landscape ordinance, which aligns with State requirements. This ordinance applies to unincorporated areas of the County only.

Monterey County Water Resources Agency: Alex Henson reported that MCWRA is busy working on the EIR for the Interlake Tunnel – the process is going well. They are also working on a Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP), aligned with reoperation of the dams (the reoperation plan was funded by IRWM Round 1). The HCP will cover all areas that the Agency owns and manages, from the dams downstream to the mouth of the Salinas River. They will also be developing a Low-Effect HCP for breaching at the mouth of the Salinas River, which will be incorporated into the larger HCP.

California State University Monterey Bay: John Olson noted that he will be working with the RCD on a biological assessment of the Salinas River where Arundo was removed. They did a baseline assessment three years ago, this is the follow-up ecological conditions assessment following treatment.

The next RWMG meeting will be held on April 20, 2022, 1:30PM – 3:30PM.