

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

**October 19, 2022
Zoom Conference Call**

RWMG Entity Attendees:

Jenny Balmagia – Central Coast Wetlands Group
Ross Clark – Central Coast Wetlands Group
Kevin Contreras – Elkhorn Slough Foundation
Beth Febus – Big Sur Land Trust
Emily Gardner – Salinas Valley Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency
Bridget Hoover – Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary
Erik Lundquist – Monterey County Housing and Community Development
Robert Mazurek – California Marine Sanctuary Foundation
Donna Meyers – Salinas Valley Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency
John Olson – California State University Monterey Bay
Paul Robins – Resource Conservation District of Monterey County
Rachel Saunders – Big Sur Land Trust
Eric Tynan – Castroville Community Services District
Emily Zefferman – Resource Conservation District of Monterey County

Non-RWMG Attendees:

Sherry Lee Bryan – Ecology Action
Susan Robinson – Greater Monterey County IRWM Program Director

Meeting Minutes

1. Brief Introductions

2. IRWM Implementation Grant - Round 2 Project List and Budget: Susan Robinson presented the proposed final Round 2 IRWM Implementation Grant Project List. The projects and budget amounts were decided upon collaboratively by the project proponents themselves. Susan described the changes since the previous Regional Water Management Group (RWMG) meeting. Notably:

- A Grant Admin task was added – California Marine Sanctuary Foundation (CMSF) will be the Lead Applicant: \$356K
- CMSF’s Food Safety study was expanded to include amphibians, rodents within treatment wetlands and an additional focus on birds in treatment wetlands, with a budget increase of \$200K
- The four Central Coast Wetlands Group projects were bundled into one, and the overall budget was reduced by \$200K
- The Round 2 IRWM funding will support re-treatment of Arundo on about 2,500 riparian acres on the Salinas River
- Ecology Action’s turf replacement project budget was increased to \$493K to meet the disadvantaged community budget minimum obligation

Several RWMG members had voted electronically prior to the meeting. All had voted in favor except for Monterey One Water (M1W), who voiced uncertainties about the Central Coast Wetlands Group project. Mike McCullough emailed to say that, while M1W is supportive of the project, they would have

to vote “no” because they are unsure as to the potential impacts of the project on M1W’s existing water rights in the Rec Ditch. Mike wrote: “We agreed to continue the conversation and actually are pulling in the same direction about reusing water, etc.” Sherry Lee Bryan commented that a similar conversation is occurring in other regions as well. Ross Clark noted that perhaps a larger conversation should be initiated with the State about restoring waterways and potential impacts on water rights.

Rachel Saunders moved to approve the proposed Round 2 Project List. Erik Lundquist seconded. All in the room voted in favor. The final tally, including electronic votes and those present in the room: 13 voted in favor, 1 opposed. The Round 2 Project List is approved.

3. RCD Arundo Eradication Update: Emily Zefferman, Ecologist, and Paul Robins, Executive Director, of the Resource Conservation District (RCD) of Monterey County provided a status report for the RCD’s Salinas River Arundo Eradication Program. The impacts of Arundo include increased flood risk, decreased water supply, and degraded wildlife habitat. Emily is the lead on this project.

Paul noted that the project targets 1,500 acres of *Arundo donax* infestation, spanning the entire length of the Salinas River in Monterey County. The issue was first identified by the Monterey County Ag Commissioner’s Office, which requested the RCD’s help in setting up a program to tackle the large-scale infestation. Ten+ years later, the RCD has raised almost \$12 million. There are about 350 parcels adjacent to or intersecting the Salinas River. The RCD currently has 41 landowner agreements signed. These are 10-year access agreements, with RCD responsible for treatment the first five years, many landowners assuming responsibility the second five years, and RCD obtaining grants (such as IRWM) for follow-up treatment where landowners are unable.

The RCD is currently in the 9th work season. They are taking a south-to-north, upstream-to-downstream approach and are roughly halfway through, having treated almost all Arundo along 50 river miles (over 750 Arundo acres, plus about 100 acres through Stream Maintenance Program mitigation). During drought, treatment begins earlier (June); otherwise treatment begins in late July/August. Professional crews mow the large stands of Arundo and then spray the re-growth over multiple years (during the summer and fall). Other woody invaders are also treated, including tamarisk and tree tobacco. Upstream of King City, the approach is “search and destroy.” Large stands of Arundo start around King City, and downstream from there.

Emily discussed the project benefits. Arundo impedes water movement in the floodplain; water is more constricted to the mainstem. A goal of the project is to increase water movement on the floodplain and decrease erosion potential both in the mainstem and on levees. This will benefit steelhead and other aquatic species. Another goal is to decrease water use – though documenting actual water savings from eliminating Arundo is complicated. A vegetation monitoring study has been underway since 2017. The RCD is relying upon passive restoration (no planting). They have found a 98% decrease in Arundo after the first herbicide treatment (year 1), an additional 74% decrease after the second treatment (year 2), and no change in year 3 (with no further treatment). They have found native woody plant cover to be increasing, along with some weeds (such as poison hemlock and perennial pepperweed); though they expect the perennial vegetation to outcompete the weeds eventually.

Pathways for Wildlife conducted a two-year wildlife study (2019-2021) using remote motion-activated cameras to determine whether Arundo removal affects wildlife movement. The study found a big spike in wildlife movement after mowing, including deer, bobcat, coyote, and a decrease in movement as Arundo starts to grow back. The RCD is also collaborating with CSUMB in studying the effects on aquatic invertebrates and bats. Those studies are underway.

Up next: The RCD just received US Bureau of Reclamation funding to treat an additional 150 acres downstream. With IRWM Prop 1 Round 1 grant funds, the RCD completed re-treatment on about 500 riparian acres, and in 2023 plan to re-treat about 750 riparian acres. The Round 2 IRWM funding will support re-treatment on about 2,500 riparian acres.

4. GSA Updates: Emily Gardner, Deputy General Manager of the Salinas Valley Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency (SVBGSA), provided a general GSA overview and updates on GSP project implementation.

Emily described the 2017 Joint Powers Authority agreement, comprised of County of Monterey, Monterey County Water Resources Agency, City of Salinas, City of Soledad, City of Gonzales, City of King, Castroville Community Services District, and Monterey One Water. SVBGSA has a Board of Directors and a 25-member Advisory Committee. Emily emphasized the collaborative nature of the GSA and its reliance on local partnerships. There is a Subbasin Committee for each subbasin, allowing for input from stakeholders. SVBGSA also collaborates with the Marina Coast Water District GSA, Monterey County GSA, and Arroyo Seco GSA.

SVBGSA has full or partial jurisdiction over six subbasins, including one critically overdrafted basin (180/400 Aquifer), two high priority basins (Eastside Aquifer and Langley Area subbasins), and three medium priority basins (Forebay, Upper Valley, and Monterey Aquifer subbasins). A Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) was submitted in 2020 for the 180/400 subbasin, and GSPs were submitted for each of the other five subbasins in 2022.

Emily provided a general overview of the GSP process, which defined sustainable management criteria for each subbasin, identified data gaps, and described monitoring networks. The GSPs are long-term planning documents with updates every five years. Sustainability must be achieved within 20 years (by 2042) and maintained for another 30 years. Priorities for the first five years include:

- Fill data gaps/complete monitoring networks
- Initiate Implementation Actions
- Maintain stakeholder engagement
- Begin implementation of management actions and projects
- Review sustainable management criteria in Annual Reports
- Update GSP (2027)

The GSP Subbasin Planning Committees, which are now Implementation Committees, defined undesirable results, minimum thresholds, and measurable objectives for each Sustainable Management Criteria, defining which conditions they wanted to avoid, and what they would like to achieve. They also vetted concepts for projects and management actions that could be undertaken to achieve/maintain sustainability (“management actions” don’t involve infrastructure). The GSA now has a portfolio of high-level projects and management actions that they are in the process of thinking through, and which fall into the following categories:

1. Demand management: conservation, pumping reductions, ag land retirement
2. New supplies in lieu of extraction: desalting, recycled water, reservoir re-operation/surface water diversion, Castroville Seawater Intrusion Project (CSIP) optimization
3. Reduced evapotranspiration: invasive species eradication (e.g., Arundo)
4. Groundwater recharge: recharge ponds, floodplain restoration, aquifer storage and recovery (ASR)
5. Seawater intrusion barrier

All six GSPs include implementation actions that contribute to groundwater management and GSP

implementation but do not directly help the Subbasin reach or maintain sustainability. These include, for example: Working with Monterey County to fill in gaps for their well registration program, working with MCWRA on GEMS expansion and enhancement, connecting local stakeholders to the State's dry well notification system, supporting the Water Quality Coordination Group to make sure the Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board and GSAs are coordinating, and coordinating with Monterey County on land use matters.

The SVBGSA has received \$7.6 million in Round 1 SGMA grant funds and is beginning implementation of the 180/400 Aquifer Subbasin GSP. Major issues of the 180/400 Aquifer include: lowered groundwater elevations, seawater intrusion, and exceedances in the nitrate maximum contaminant level (MCL) and levels of concern for other constituents. There are five categories of projects:

1. Feasibility Studies: seawater extraction barrier with goal to stop seawater intrusion at the 2017 extent and push it back; ASR; and demand management, which will require a robust conservation with stakeholders
2. Compliance Reporting and Data Expansion
3. Interested Parties Engagement and Outreach
4. CSIP and Regional Treatment Plant projects, including a dry chlorine scrubber at M1W recycle water plant, and CSIP distribution system upgrades.
5. Implement Deep Aquifers Study Recommendations: Montgomery & Associates are developing the study, which is expected to be complete by end of 2023. This is a collaborative project with MCWRA, MCWD, Monterey County, Castroville, Alco, irrigated ag, SVBGSA, others.

The SVBGSA has until 2025 to complete this work.

Meanwhile, the Subbasin Committees for the five medium/high priority subbasins are meeting on a monthly or quarterly basis. The GSA is currently applying for Round 2 SGMA Implementation funds to begin implementation of these GSPs.

On October 31st the GSA will be holding a Demand Management workshop. Demand Management is a complex topic that regions across the state are grappling with...

5. Other Business: Rachel Saunders noted that the Big Sur Land Trust will be having a site visit for a possible \$3.67 million grant from the California Natural Resources Agency Urban Greening Program for Carr Lake. Eric Tynan reported that Castroville Community Services District, SVBGSA, and Central Coast Wetlands Group recently hosted a tour for 30 Salinas high school students of CCSD's arsenic treatment plant and the Castroville Slough Treatment Wetland and Bioreactor project.

The next RWMG meeting will be held on Wednesday, December 21, 2022, 1:30pm – 3:30pm.