

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

**October 18, 2023**

**Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary, Monterey  
and Zoom Conference Call**

**RWMG Entity Attendees:**

Melanie Beretti – Monterey County Housing and Community Development  
Lindsay Brown – Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary (MBNMS)  
Ross Clark – Central Coast Wetlands Group  
Beth Febus – Big Sur Land Trust  
Jason Demers – Monterey County Water Resources Agency  
Emily Gardner – Salinas Valley Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency  
Sarah Hardgrave – Salinas Valley Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency  
Piret Harmon – Salinas Valley Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency  
Alex Henson – Monterey County Water Resources Agency  
Jazmine Mejia-Muñoz – Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary  
Ileana Miranda – San Jerardo Cooperative, Inc.  
Alena Newson – California Marine Sanctuary Foundation  
John Olson – California State University Monterey Bay  
Paul Robins – Resource Conservation District of Monterey County  
Lucas Sharkey, Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board

**Non-RWMG Attendees:**

John Hunt – UC Davis  
Susan Robinson – Greater Monterey County IRWM Program Director

**Meeting Minutes**

**1. Brief Introductions**

**2. Salinas River Operations Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP):** Jason Demers, Monterey County Water Resources Agency (MCWRA), provided an update on the Salinas River Operations HCP.

The reason/need for the HCP was the construction and ongoing operations of the Salinas Valley Water Project (SVWP). The US Army Corps of Engineers construction permit for SVWP included a formal consultation with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). A Biological Opinion was issued in 2007, which included a flow prescription for steelhead; however, when the permit expired in 2017, it was not renewed: The Biological Opinion was challenged on grounds that MCWRA wasn't providing enough fish passage opportunities as originally envisioned (not enough passage in drier years). So the path forward is the HCP: The HCP is needed to secure an incidental take permit for the Agency's current operations. The completed HCP will include:

- A revised flow prescription for operations of Nacimiento and San Antonio Dams,
- A sandbar management plan that addresses the needs of steelhead, tidewater goby, and western snowy plover at the Salinas River Lagoon, and
- Operation and maintenance of select MCWRA facilities.

Development of the HCP is largely grant funded. The first phase – Salinas Valley Long-Term Management

Plan – was completed in 2019. The second phase – HCP – is currently underway. This phase consists of technical studies, species surveys, and habitat modeling.

## Technical Studies Completed or in Progress



A short-term solution for the Salinas River Lagoon to cover emergency sandbar management for flooding is needed; a Low Effect HCP will be completed by end of 2023. MCWRA is now in the early phases of developing a reservoir reoperation protocol. MCWRA recently performed initial habitat assessments above the Nacimiento and San Antonio Dams. They've held two stakeholder workshops in 2023, and will continue stakeholder engagement. They are hoping to obtain Section 6 grant funding next year to continue work on the HCP. In 2024 they expect to have a rough draft of all HCP chapters (incomplete draft – won't have reoperations for reservoirs by 2024).

In 2022, a critical riffle analysis was initiated to determine flow requirements for steelhead migration in the lower reaches of the Salinas and Arroyo Seco Rivers. They are using drone photogrammetry to create models of critical river reaches in four reaches of the Salinas River and in one reach of the Arroyo Seco, along with field measurements. Analysis is still underway.

Next steps: First draft of HCP chapters will be completed by first quarter 2024. Then MCWRA will complete the reoperation protocol modeling and the second Administrative Draft HCP. NEPA/CEQA come next. They expect to have the permit by late 2027 or early 2028. Visit the [HCP website](#).

Ross Clark asked if MCWRA noted any significant movement in the main or side channels as a result of the 2023 storms. Jason responded that there was not as much change in the low-flow main channel as

expected (they didn't assess the side channels). Jazmine Mejia-Muñoz wondered how MCWRA has conducted outreach for landowners who do not live locally (70% of ag land is leased). Jason responded that they have conducted outreach primarily through agricultural organizations, e.g., Grower-Shipper and Farm Bureau, the Groundwater Sustainability Agencies, and through individual property owners communicating with one another. Jason noted that the focus of the HCP is on reservoir operations, primarily through changes in flows; the Agency is not looking to make changes on private property.

**3. First Flush 22-Year Stormwater Trend Report:** Lindsay Brown, Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary (MBNMS) Water Quality Protection Program Coordinator, presented on the 22-year Stormwater Monitoring Trend Report. Lindsay described the potential negative impacts of stormwater on local waterways and receiving waterbodies, and gave a brief overview of stormwater regulation, including the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Phase I in 1990 (for cities > 100,000 population), and NPDES Phase II in 1999 (cities < 100,000). The Monterey Regional Stormwater Management Program (MRSWMP) was formed in 2003 as part of NPDES Phase II. MRSWMP consists of the Cities of Pacific Grove, Carmel-by-the-Sea, Del Ray Oaks, Monterey, Sand City, and Seaside; and the County of Monterey. Stormwater sampling is one of MRSWMP's programs (along with education, investigation/enforcement, community engagement). The Sanctuary works closely with MRSWMP.

First Flush is an annual water quality monitoring program where volunteers collect storm drain samples during the first major rain of the season. The program provides critical information about the types and amounts of nonpoint source pollutants that accumulate over the dry season on impermeable surfaces (e.g., brake dust, pesticides, detergents, animal waste). This information can show cities where "hot spots" exist.

First Flush samples for: E. coli and enterococcus bacteria, nutrients, metals (copper, zinc, lead), detergents, sediment, and other constituents. There are 5 monitoring locations in Pacific Grove, 3 in Monterey, 3 in Seaside, 2 in Carmel, 2 in Salinas. The program now has 22 years of data, allowing the Sanctuary and MRSWMP to evaluate the effectiveness of efforts to reduce stormwater pollutants. Results show a general reduction in nonpoint source pollutants following NPDES permitting. Concentrations of nitrate, copper, lead, and zinc have decreased significantly, and there were no significant increases seen in any of the analyte concentrations.

- Nitrate was higher during dry periods but decreased significantly in wet periods.
- Orthophosphate did not change significantly.
- Total suspended solids were higher during wet periods and did not significantly change over time.
- Enterococcus was higher during wet periods, and decreased significantly in Monterey and Pacific Grove but increased in Seaside; E. coli had similar trends in PG and Seaside.

Next steps:

- Continue public education and engagement with clean-up/sampling
- Eliminate illicit discharges
- Develop standards for construction runoff
- Implement street sweeping
- Periodically clean out storm drains
- Assess sewer line integrity

**4. Other Business:** Susan Robinson announced that California Marine Sanctuary Foundation was invited by NOAA to submit a full application for the Climate Resilience Regional Challenge Grant on behalf of project participants in Monterey and Santa Cruz Counties. Only 120 applicants were invited to submit full applications out of the 869 Letters of Intent submitted!

Paul Robins announced that the streamline permitting program for conservation and environmentally beneficial programs is nearing approval. The County released a Mitigated Negative Declaration; CEQA is out for public comment. The program will create a master five-year permit program covering County permits (only), including projects within the Coastal Zone above mean high tide.

Melanie Beretti reported that the County's Ag Mitigation program is moving forward. They have received recommendations from the Ag Advisory Committee. On November 8 the Monterey County Planning Commission will be considering the County's proposed ordinance. The County is continuing dialogue with Salinas Valley cities and LAFCO. In other news:

- County is expecting EIR to be released in December for lower Carmel River Lagoon flood management projects.
- The County is expecting to hear back from FEMA on a Hazard Mitigation Grant for Carmel River FREE.
- The County is in the process of updating three elements of the General Plan: Housing; new Environmental Justice elements; and has just finished a community survey for the Safety Element.

Melanie provided a link: <https://www.co.monterey.ca.us/government/departments-a-h/housing-community-development/planning-services/advance-planning/ordinances-plans-under-development>

Alena Newson noted that the Sanctuary is working with ALBA, Driscolls, and other ag entities on recycling plastic mulch. They had their first mechanical retrieval of mulch yesterday. They are planning on applying for a grant to create mulch with 80% recycled content (biodegradable). The Sanctuary will be hosting an Ag Plastics conference March 20 – 21.

Paul Robins noted that CSUMB recently received a large USDA grant focused on marketing and climate smart farming techniques. The RCD will work with a CSUMB intern for five years, focusing on Spanish-speaking growers, medium and small-sized farms. The project will include incentives for different soil health management actions.

Emily Gardner announced that there is an Advisory Committee meeting tomorrow to kick off the Demand Management dialogues and provide input into a fee study. She also noted that the Salinas Valley Basin GSA is updating their website.

*The next RWMG meeting will be held on Wednesday, December 20, 2023 (unless changed due to the holidays).*