

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

February 19, 2025

Location: Moss Landing Marine Labs and Zoom Conference Call

RWMG Entity Attendees:

Jenny Balmagia – Central Coast Wetlands Group
Patrick Breen – Marina Coast Water District
Emily Gardner – Salinas Valley Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency
Rachel Gaudoin – Monterey One Water
Piret Harmon – Salinas Valley Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency
Carla James – City of Soledad
Heidi Niggemeyer – City of Salinas
John Olson – California State University Monterey Bay
Ed Waggoner – City of Soledad, Interim Water Resource Manager
Emily Zefferman – Resource Conservation District for Monterey County

Non-RWMG Attendees:

James Bishop – Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board
Maureen Hamilton – Monterey Peninsula Water Management District
John Hunt – UC Davis
Bill Maxfield – Miller Maxfield Inc.
Denise Mercado – Ecology Action
Moisés Moreno-Rivera – Trust for Public Land
Jennifer Murray – Miller Maxfield Inc.
Susan Robinson – Greater Monterey County IRWM Program Coordinator

Meeting Minutes

1. Brief Introductions

2. Communication Strategies: Presentations from three Integrated Regional Water Management stakeholders – Monterey One Water (M1W), Trust for Public Land (TPL), and Salinas Valley Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency (SVBGSA) – to share their organization’s current outreach and engagement efforts to support public messaging around management of water/natural resources.

Monterey One Water: Rachel Gaudoin presented for M1W. Communications goals include: Enhancing trust and transparency, enhancing understanding and acceptance, and gathering community input. Strategies include: 1) tours (to educate about M1W’s services), 2) presentations and forums, 3) advocacy, including communications with government officials, 4) stakeholder meetings (these tend to be smaller groups, but engagement is higher). Future outreach plans will focus on: digital resources, including immersive tour experiences; expanding and enhancing M1W’s social media presence; website updates; and identifying organic ways to engage stakeholders, and to redirect any potential misinformation.

Challenges: 1) Engagement is time consuming; there are staffing constraints. 2) There are divergent interests; M1W tries to stay rooted in technical information, focus message on topics where they

consider themselves expert. 3) Changing priorities: As elected officials change, so does the M1W board. This can sometimes mean having to change course midstream.

Heidi asked: Has M1W been going out to CBOs and holding pop-up meetings? Rachel: Yes, M1W does go out when working on wastewater-related items. They want the community to understand the need to update capital improvements. They identify CBOs to help disburse that information. To identify CBOs they look at United Way's Impact Report, look for nonprofits/CBO's that might make good partners for the target communities. These partnerships are often a good way to build trust within a community.

Trust For Public Land: Moisés Moreno-Rivera presented for TPL. Moisés emphasized the power of storytelling across multiple audiences. He gave an example of the Parks for People team, working in highly populated areas to advocate for park equity in urbanized areas. The messaging occurs at different scales, and is geared differently for different audiences – but the messaging is consistent. Catch phrases are important (e.g., “10-minute walking distance”). They do the research (to justify the need) and back their proposals with data. They target decisionmakers (e.g., make pitches to legislators for funding), and create story maps. They research what gaps and opportunities exist, then determine how to work with partners to address those gaps. They build coalitions and determine how and when to engage with elected officials in an informed way. This is a much different approach from M1W's strategy, because it is typically focused on a larger geographic area. TPL has a GIS team that works on the story maps. Their team is available for hire!

Salinas Valley Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency: Piret Harmon introduced this presentation by noting how communication strategies for public agencies have changed over the past 25 years. Communications strategies used to consist of very static messaging: Users heard from public agencies only when something was wrong, e.g., a rate increase, a boil water notice, etc. There was a big change in how agencies communicated with the introduction of iPhones and iPads, and the advent of social media (FaceBook, etc.).

SVBSA is a relatively new agency (just 7-8 years old): With all of the agencies that manage water in Monterey County, what's their unique role, their value? SVBGSA has no assets, like M1W or Monterey County Water Resources Agency do. SVBGSA is a “paper agency” in charge of planning groundwater resources, which are physically “hidden.” And M1W doesn't have a customer base per se. Why should the public care about SVBGSA??

SVBGSA has hired Miller Maxfield to provide communications for the agency. Miller Maxfield gathered the community – key stakeholders, community members, growers, etc. – for five in-person workshops to learn about groundwater management. Strategies: 1) Go to where the people are, 2) offer food, and 3) play a game at the end (e.g., pretend to be a water manager for an hour). Some current/recent efforts:

- SVBGSA is attempting to *socialize/normalize* the concept of demand management.
- SVBGSA is in the process of developing a rural water use efficiency pilot program; they will meet people at their homes.
- Multi-benefit Land Use Repurposing Program (MLRP): The SVBGSA created survey promo cards, bilingual, with QR code to drive engagement.
- They are using the agency's website as central repository for all information.
- Groundwater Monitoring Program: Domestic well owner outreach, mailers to well owners with commonly asked questions. Making sure public doesn't receive any mixed messaging.

- Seawater Intrusion: “Why should you care?” Using foundational building blocks so people understand the process. Again, socializing the concept of “seawater intrusion.”
- Collaborated with Castroville Community Services District to educate public about groundwater conditions (disadvantaged community outreach).
- Groundwater Sustainability Plan updates: This is dry, technical information, but important benchmark to the public so they know the GSA is making progress.

Piret emphasized: “We need to be able to say it in simple words if we want to get our message across.” Keeping website content fresh and vital is important; make people want to come back! Social media: Share content 2-3 times/week. It’s slow growing audiences. But a great way to practice simplifying the message!

Discussion:

Moisés noted that if there’s a message that needs to get elevated, TPL can partner to help get that message out. If we do a Venn diagram, there may be something we can connect on!

Heidi raised an alternative perspective: The communications strategies, and the conversations engaged by the three organizations are *different*. Peninsula agencies may overlap, but Salinas is different: e.g., seawater is not being injected into the City of Salinas’s overdrafted aquifers.... Not sure how to have a common conversation. Different city councils will have different priorities....

John Hunt emphasized that the “big picture” is where the commonality lies. All water management is very expensive; we’ll need to pass one or more propositions in the next few years to fund the needed water management for our region: So we should collaborate on that high-level conversation.

Piret commented that there are so many agencies and groups responsible for unique aspects of managing water in Monterey County, this is undoubtedly confusing for community members. Can we do better at pointing people to the right agency?

What is needed is an internal conduit for communications! There was a suggestion to hold a half-day workshop to bring agencies together for coordination on communications strategies:

1. Agree on a short list of big picture regional issues, problems and potential solutions (groundwater shortage, seawater intrusion, drought, flood, water quality).
2. Address those with consistent messaging using common terminology, concepts, facts and graphics.
3. Share those across websites, where everybody's website space that is dedicated to this uses consistent appearance, common tools, click pathways and target info pages.
4. Be clear across the region about where funding comes from (and perhaps where it might be taken away and by whom).
5. General education about the water system, with lots of graphics.
6. Demonstrate the costs of climate change and other water management stressors, the need to maintain infrastructure, and to accumulate the capital to pay for it.
7. Possibly outline alternative outcomes to various management scenarios, such as what will be the result of investment, non-investment, ups or downs in state, federal and local funding, etc.
8. Put together a potential scope of work for Miller Maxfield.

3. Federal Grant Wellness Check: Are any programs potentially impacted by the federal transition?

- Rachel noted that M1W has \$80 million in federal grants and loans; they won't need to tap most of those funds until the Fall. There is an element of risk as they begin to award contracts.
- Emily Zefferman noted that the RCD has 25% in federal grants currently, including NOAA, US Bureau of Reclamation, NRCS grants.
- John Olson added that, while his program is not depending on federal funds, he is aware of colleagues losing their jobs, under a great deal of stress...
- Ed Waggoner noted that the City of Soledad has completed all of their design work on major construction, but are "waiting and seeing..." about the construction funds.

John Hunt suggested looking for ways to coordinate our messaging to elected officials about issues related to federal funding.

4. Updates and News: Piret announced two large feasibility studies for SVBGSA: 1) brackish groundwater, and 2) aquifer storage and recovery (ASR). Both are at final conceptual-level stage. They have identified a potential solution for seawater intrusion – but it's very expensive, so they are looking into other possible solutions. The GSA will develop a funding strategy this fiscal year. By 2026 they will need to choose a path for implementation!

The next Regional Water Management Group meeting is scheduled for April 16, 2025, at Moss Landing Marine Labs.