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

June 18, 2025
Location: Resource Conservation District of Monterey County, Salinas, CA and Zoom Conference Call

RWMG Entity Attendees:
Jenny Balmagia – Central Coast Wetlands Group
Patrick Breen – Marina Coast Water District
Rosa Carillo, San Jerardo Cooperative, Inc.
Shandy Carroll – Monterey County Housing and Community Development
James Derbin – Castroville Community Services District
Beth Febus – Big Sur Land Trust
Piret Harmon – Salinas Valley Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency
Carla James – City of Soledad
Kevin O'Connor – Central Coast Wetlands Group
John Olson – California State University Monterey Bay
Erica Parker – Monterey One Water
Paul Robins – Resource Conservation District of Monterey County
Rachel Saunders – Big Sur Land Trust
Don Wilcox – City of Soledad
Amy Woodrow – Monterey County Water Resources Agency
Emily Zefferman – Resource Conservation District of Monterey County

Non-RWMG Attendees:
Maureen Hamilton – Monterey Peninsula Water Management District
Susan Robinson – Greater Monterey County IRWM Program Coordinator
Taylor van Rossum – California Marine Sanctuary Foundation

Meeting Minutes

1. Brief Introductions

2. Overview of Current/Planned Projects in the Region: The purpose of IRWM is to connect, coordinate, collaborate, integrate. In that spirit, this meeting will highlight Regional Water Management Group members' current/planned projects in the Greater Monterey County region. This will be followed (if time allows) with a brief discussion about opportunities for coordination.

1. **Monterey County Housing and Community Development**: Shandy Carroll

Long-range Work Program:

- Current priority tasks related to water:
  - Salinas Valley Groundwater Basin Investigation
  - Water Allocation Policy: Priorities on how to allocate 70 AF water
  - Environmental enhancement permit streamlining program: The County is working with the Resource Conservation District of Monterey County to review projects, then approve projects under a blanket permit (water quality and water replenishment projects).
  - Carmel River Floodplain Restoration and Environmental Enhancement (CRFREE): Partnering with Big Sur Land Trust. Project is waiting on grant funding from FEMA; hopefully will receive that soon.

- 2010 General Plan Projects on the Long-Range Work Program (related to water):
  - Long term sustainable water supply ordinance & definition
  - Well ordinance update

Public Works Facilities and Parks projects:

- Developing a Master Plan for current and future planned projects.
- Almost done with Davis Road Bridge replacement and road widening Project, about $95.3 million
- Nacimiento Lake Drive Bridge Replacement, about $6.7 million

"We can't do these projects without the partnership of everyone on this call!"

2. **Monterey County Water Resources Agency**: Amy Woodrow

Salinas River Operations Habitat Conservation Plan: The Agency is currently developing the Salinas River Operations Habitat Conservation Plan (SROHCP). The SROHCP is a planning document required as part of an application for an incidental take permit. The Agency is seeking an incidental take permit for federally listed species related to core operations and maintenance activities including:

- Operation of Nacimiento and San Antonio dams
- Operation and maintenance of Agency-owned facilities
- Sandbar management at the Salinas River Lagoon

The second administrative draft is expected to be completed by November 2025; then public draft; then CEQA and NEPA. A parallel effort is the Low Effect HCP with California Department of Fish and Wildlife for near-term coverage of sandbar management at the lagoon. The Low Effect HCP was finalized in 2023 and the permit issued in 2024.

San Antonio Spillway Replacement: Construction of San Antonio dam was completed in 1967. Extremely High Hazard Dam due to population downstream. Spillway replacement was mandated by DSOD in 2022. An Alternatives Analysis was conducted in 2024, with 10 alternatives considered. An alternative was selected but requires DSOD approval of the design and work plan. Next steps: Final design, environmental permitting, construction.

Stream gage installation at King City: The Agency received a $76,000 grant from the California Department of Water Resources (DWR) to install a USGS stream gage on the Salinas River in King City. This will fill a large gap in Salinas River stream gage coverage. The data informs reservoir operations, flood control efforts, provides data on surface-water groundwater interaction, and informs model calibration.

Salinas Lagoon slide gate upgrades: This project is part of Climate Resilient Monterey Bay (CRMB), an initiative through the California Marine Sanctuary Foundation federally funded as part of the NOAA Climate Resilience Regional Challenge (CRRC). The slide gate structure is used to manage elevation in the lagoon. Work at the slide gate will include design and construction of an upgraded water control structure to:

- increase flow capacity
- improve hydrologic connectivity between the Salinas Lagoon and Old Salinas River
- support better management of conditions in and around the Salinas Lagoon

Design and construction work will occur through 2028. Q: Will the improvements reduce the need for lagoon sandbar breaching? A: Yes! The Agency will be able to better manage when to let water into the lagoon; can time it with tidal influence.

3. **Salinas Valley Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency**: Piret Harmon

Two of the Basin's six sustainability indicators are most important: 1) seawater intrusion, and 2) declining groundwater elevation. Potential strategies for addressing these issues:

- Optimize existing facilities: Reservoirs, Castroville Seawater Intrusion Project, Salinas River Diversion Facility
- Manage deep aquifers
- Reduce demand to raise groundwater levels
- Inject surface water (Salinas River) to recharge aquifer and push back seawater intrusion
- Treat brackish water for replacement supply and create a barrier to seawater intrusion

High priority workstreams:

- Aquifer storage and recovery: The feasibility study for ASR has been completed; the findings were not as positive as they had hoped.
- Brackish Groundwater Restoration Project Feasibility Study (aka "extraction barrier"): Series of extraction barriers along the coast, brackish water gets pumped out to treatment plant; variety of ways to beneficially reuse that water. The GSA is about halfway into this study. September 2025: draft summary report. March 2026: Feasibility study.
- Demand Management Program Development
    - Demand Management Framework provided to board in Fall 2025
    - Water Efficiency Pilot Program for Rural Residents: Target audience is rural residential households served by small water systems or private wells, in Eastside, 180/400 (North), Langley, Monterey (Corral de Tierra) Subbasins. Three components: Water Use Efficiency Webpage, Water Use Survey, Free House Calls.
- Castroville and Eastside Canals and Alternatives Feasibility Study: Evaluates project options using additional supply from the Salinas River (including but not limited to Permit 11043) for supporting groundwater sustainability. Aim is to mitigate seawater intrusion, addressing lowered groundwater levels in Eastside, Langley, 180/400 Subbasins. (Where will the water *come from* to be injected in seawater intruded area? Where will diversions be? And how much?) The injected water will likely need to be treated… In phase 1 now (historical review and identification of potential project components). This program is funded by a new regulatory fee. Fee study completed in March 2025.
- Groundwater Monitoring Program – partnership with MCWRA, monitoring levels, quality, and extractions.
    - Groundwater Extraction Monitoring Expansion: GSA monitors where MCWRA does not, including domestic users with 5-14 connections (those extractions haven't been monitoring previously!).
    - Well Registration: Applies to *all* wells in Salinas Valley. Includes general info about well ownership, well construction specs and status of the well. Data on exact well location and depth helps to understand the relationship between the water usage and groundwater conditions. Well owner name and address is kept confidential.

4. **Monterey One Water**: Erica Parker

M1W serves as the administrator for the Monterey Regional Stormwater Management Program (MRSWMP). MRSWMP membership includes: Carmel-by-the-Sea, Del Rey Oaks, Monterey, Pacific Grove, Sand City, Seaside, County of Monterey. Erica reviewed five projects:

- City of Monterey: Lake El Estero Diversion: This project includes a box culvert to redirect urban storm-water runoff, dry weather flows. 209 AFY to sewer. Cost estimate: $1 million. 90% design. Estimated construction Fall 2026.
- City of Monterey: Olivier Tunnel Diversion. This project will construct a storm drain gravity pipe to redirect urban stormwater runoff, dry weather flows. 10-20 AFY to sewer. 30% design. Cost estimate: $1,025,000. Next step: contract with environmental consultant for CEQA analysis. Construction expected July 2026-June 2027.
- City of Seaside: Del Monte Manor Infiltration. This project will redirect storm drain flows to a bioretention pond, underground infiltrators. Construction June 2022 – Nov 2023. Cost: $830,000. They are currently midway through three years of monitoring. In 2024: 6.91 AF.
- County of Monterey: Pajaro Trash Capture. High-flow capacity trash capture system on dual stormwater conveyance lines. Prevent trash from entering Elkhorn Slough. Will address ~80% of PLU trash amendment requirements. Currently in the planning phase.
- County of Monterey: Gabilan Creek Watershed Turbidity TMDL. The watershed was listed on 2014 – 2016 Clean Water Act Section 303(d) impaired waters list. The project will vegetate county roadside ditches.

5. **Castroville Community Services District**: James Derbin

Castroville is a disadvantaged community of ~7700. The service area is about 2.5 square miles, with 2300 potable water connections. Current projects include:

- Well 6: Project is in response to ongoing seawater intrusion. Seawater intrusion hit Well 3. Well 6 drills into the Deep Aquifer. IRWM Implementation Grant paid $395K for planning, design, engineering, and CEQA. Well construction is $1.4 Million Funded by CCSD cash reserves.
- Castroville Historic Sign Replacement: The Castroville sign ribbon cutting scheduled for July 10, 2025.
- Water service replacement in conjunction with Hwy 183/Merrit Street Improvements Project: The project will rehabilitate/replace hardscape and address essential bridge maintenance issues, improve pedestrian and vehicle safety. CCSD will fixed old service laterals (about 50 or 60 of them) while the road is dug up. Project cost: about $40M, funded by CalTrans.
- Washington Bypass: The project addresses a bottleneck in the wastewater collection system. All of Castroville drains to a bypass on northside of town. Will reroute a gravity sewer main so it is a straighter shot to the M1W pumpstation, boring under Highway 1. Will leave old sewer line as an emergency bypass.
- Moss Landing Wastewater Collection System: This project will replace the Struve Road lift station. The project involves a total replacement of the collection system. Seeking grant funds currently.

6. **City of Soledad:** Don Wilcox

The City recently received an Urban Drought Relief Grant from DWR to offset 175 AFY of potable water withdrawal with recycled water for turf irrigation of parks and schools. Thinks they can actually get close to 225 AFY! Construction kicks off in July. Should be completed by end of 2026.

7. **Central Coast Wetlands Group**: Jenny Balmagia/Kevin O'Connor

Monitoring Projects

- Regional Monitoring for Climate Resilient Monterey Bay (CRMB): CCWG is currently developing the monitoring plan and approach for 10 flood risk reduction NOAA CRRC projects in order to standardize monitoring.
- Groundwater Dependent Ecosystem Monitoring for SVBGSA: This includes mapping and monitoring groundwater dependent ecosystems (GDS) in 6 groundwater subbasins. Involves CRAM assessments and desktop monitoring using satellite imagery.
- Greenhouse Gas Monitoring for Big Sur Land Trust at Carr Lake: Using "sniffer" to measure CO2/CH4 off-gas pre and post restoration. Measuring carbon content of soils pre and post restoration from soil cores. Also, water quality monitoring for nutrients and pesticides.

Restoration Projects

- Dune restorations: At Moss Landing and Zmudowski State Beaches. Includes ice plant eradication, native plantings, sand accumulation (hay bales) in vulnerable locations.
- Industrial Wastewater Treatment Facility (IWTF) Treatment Wetland: Project involves construction of a pre-treatment wetland for wastewater at M1W Wastewater Treatment Facility. The original plan was to create a wetland to address phosphates, but now the plan is to create a wetland to address TDS, TSS (and nitrates). Early monitoring results: Reduced TDS by 60%.
- Castroville area restorations (NMCHS, North County Regional Parks): Restoration projects for threatened and endangered species habitat and public access (trail system) – red-legged frog, California Tiger Salamander, Santa Cruz Long-toed Salamander.

Regional Planning Projects

- Multi-benefit Agricultural Land Repurposing Program: Acquiring least-viable, flood-prone land in irrigated agriculture for re-use to lower water use purposes (e.g., treatment wetlands, floodplain restoration). Grant from California Department of Conservation for $10M, through March 2028. Geographic focus in the Lower Salinas Valley. Highlighted projects for potential acquisition include:
    - Merritt Lake/Gularte Ranch: ~80-acre parcel, willing seller. Benefits would include freshwater wetland habitat, water quality treatment, flood reduction. Need to find a "take-out partner," i.e., an entity that will act as long-term landowner (and be responsible for long-term management). The RCD has expressed potential willingness, with O&M potentially funded through ag lease.
    - Espinosa Lake: ~10 acres. This project would increase the size of Espinosa Lake. Benefits would include freshwater wetland habitat, water supply improvement, flood reduction, improved habitat. Unsure of seller status.
    - Castroville to the Coast/OSR Floodplain: Many unknowns with this project! Lots of interest from agencies and community!
- IRWM Prop 1 Round 2 Implementation Grant: Construct water quality treatment systems. Grant from DWR for $1.2M, through September 2027. Geographic focus in the Lower Salinas Valley. Project will include the design, permitting, and construction of water quality treatment projects (vegetated ditches, treatment wetlands, floodplain restoration). Eligible locations: Alisal, Moro Cojo, OSR/Tembladero, Rec Ditch, Quail Creek, and Chualar watersheds. The original idea for the

grant was to support implementation of Watershed Workplans that Ross Clark had written for Ag Order 4.0 Surface Water Follow Up Program. The current idea is to support interested growers on ranch level projects, use these as pilot projects to demonstrate vegetated treatment systems on farm; and to support RCD implementation of Santa Rita Creek project on Jacob Ranch.

- National Coastal Wetland Conservation (NCWC): Grant from USFWS for $1M for land acquisition and initial design of floodplain restoration projects in the Old Salinas River/Tembladero Slough area (doesn't necessarily need to be irrigated ag). Grant runs through September 2028. Originally intended to fund Castroville to the Coast; now pivoting to additional potential locations in OSR/Tembladero to provide flexibility with landowner negotiations. Project implementation can be funded through the NOAA CRRC grant or through additional phases of NCWC.
- NOAA Climate Resilience Regional Challenge (CRRC) Grant: Construct water quality treatment systems. Grant from NOAA for $2.6M in partnership with MCWRA (who will be implementing upgrades to the slide gate between the Salinas River Lagoon and the Old Salinas River channel). Grant runs through June 2029. CCWG's role involves floodplain restoration along the OSR Channel and/or Tembladero Slough (design, permitting, construction). Land acquisition will be funded through NCWC or MLRP (irrigated lands only).

8. **Resource Conservation District of Monterey County**: Paul Robins and Emily Zefferman

The RCDMC collaborates with diverse partners to develop natural resource solutions that foster thriving and resilient ecosystems, communities, and economies. Lines of work:

- Forest Health and Fire Resiliency:
  - Rancho Rico Community Fuels Treatment Project: In Big Sur. RCDMC developed program with Coastal Commission to do fuels reduction work in Coastal Zone, special permit coverage requires a forest health and restoration nexus. Completed August 2024.
  - Skinner Ridge/Bottcher's Gap Strategic Fuelbreak Project: Assisted US Forest Service in planning and implementing fuelbreak in Santa Lucia mountains.
  - North County Eucalyptus Pilot Project: $1M to remove invasive eucalyptus near 77 homes.
  - Collaboration with Central Coast Prescribed Burn Association (CCPBA): RCD is currently serving as CCPBA's hub (help with grants, admin, organizational expansion).
- Agroecology Program:
  - Urban Ag: Large emphasis on bilingual on-farm conservation assistance. RCDMC hosted educational workdays with Monterey County Workforce Development Board CADRE program participants at urban ag sites throughout Monterey County.
  - Irrigation and Nutrient Management Support: Work with beginning farmers at ALBA's incubator farm each week on irrigation and nutrient management.
  - Small-scale Farmer Technical Assistance: Work with small-scale farmers to address diverse natural resource concerns. Provide technical assistance and financial support for soil testing, cover crop planting, compost application, erosion prevention, pollinator habitat planting and more!
- Small Farmer Land Access and Conservation Assistance Program: 5-year goal to acquire, own and manage an agricultural parcel large enough to host multiple, long-term leases with

small/growing, socially-disadvantaged farmers, provide long-term conservation practice demonstration and space for traditional ecological land management.

- Pollinator Habitat:
  - RCDMC is implementing six new community pollinator gardens.
  - Monarch butterfly habitat enhancement: RCDMC is assisting partners in implementing an early-season milkweed restoration project.
  - RCDMC and partner Habitat Stewardship Project Monterey Bay planted 300 milkweed plants to enhance monarch butterfly habitat at Fort Hunter Liggett.
- Salinas River Habitat Enhancement and Flood Risk Reduction:
  - Arundo Control Program: RCDMC has treated 1,073 total acres of Arundo along the Salinas River. River miles treated: 51 miles from San Ardo to Gonzales. 39 river miles left to go!
  - Salinas River Stream Maintenance Program: Ongoing annual vegetation and sediment management in "secondary channels" for flood risk reduction. Currently undergoing permit renewals.
- Stream and Pond Wildlife Habitat and Water Quality:
  - RCDMC has been working with Trout Unlimited over the past 10 years to develop and implement steelhead fish passage improvements in the Big Sur, Arroyo Seco, and Carmel River watersheds.
  - Replacement of low water crossing with free-span bridge for fish habitat improvement on Cachagua Creek.
  - Elkhorn Ranch Stormwater Detention: NRCS Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) project in partnership with RCD Santa Cruz to enlarge pond, mitigate stormwater runoff from strawberry fields, and elongate hydroperiod to support habitat.

9. **California State University Monterey Bay**: John Olson

- In Lower Salinas, studying the effects of habitat and aquatic systems (specifically, vegetated ditches and wetlands) on neighboring farmlands: e.g., feces on crops, quantity and types of birds over farm fields. With better habitat see increased bird activity. Studying 16 sites, with surveys now and in late summer.
- Completed study last summer to study effects of levees along the Pajaro River on several aspects of the river: water temperature, denitrification, ecological health.
- Microplastics in the Salinas River (new project!)
- Teaching a class in Professional Environmental Science: Students work with agencies. A total of 1,000 hours spread between 18 students. Don't need to be specific types of projects, but tend to lean toward aquatic and landscape projects.

10. **Big Sur Land Trust**: Rachel Saunders

Carr Lake: In 2017, BSLT acquired 73 acres of the 450-acre Carr Lake in the middle of the City of Salinas, at the bottom of the Gabilan Watershed. Acquired and developed with grant funding from many sources, including Coastal Conservancy, Natural Resources Agency, private funders such as Packard Foundation and Monterey Peninsula Foundation. Total cost: $40M+

They've developed a park – now called "Ensen Community Park." BSLT did extensive work with community to design project; engaged over 6,000 people in Salinas since 2016 in a variety of planning activities and educational programming. Worked with Habitat Stewardship Project to develop a ¼-acre restoration demonstration garden. Completed 6-acre neighborhood park! Grand opening is August 17! Prior to opening, will transfer ownership of the 6-acre park to the City of Salinas.

Carr Lake also serves as an important flood retention basin for the City. BSLT has developed a restoration design that will create 62 acres of habitat, including 29 acres of wetland. Gabilan Creek will be re-directed to a constructed treatment wetland. Includes network of 1.7 miles of public trails, and habitat palette. Designed around more routine flooding rather than catastrophic flooding. Started restoration in April, will continue through October. Plants will be planted in September (6,000 plants and 100 trees), then begins major maintenance… Once restoration is completed, BSLT will transfer ownership of that portion of Carr Lake to the City, in the Spring 2026. BSLT will continue to have a role in the restoration activities, maintaining habitat. The City will be responsible for maintaining the trails, picking up trash, etc.

The next Regional Water Management Group meeting is scheduled for August 20, 2025, at the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary Office in Monterey.