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

December 17, 2025
Zoom Conference Call

RWMG Entity Attendees:
Joel Alvarez – City of Soledad
Emily Gardner – Salinas Valley Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency
Brooke Hoffman – Central Coast Wetlands Group
Carla James – City of Soledad
Heidi Niggemeyer – City of Salinas
Kevin O'Connor – Central Coast Wetlands Group
Erica Parker – Monterey One Water (M1W)
Katie Siegler – California Marine Sanctuary Foundation/Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary
Emily Zefferman – Resource Conservation District of Monterey County

Non-RWMG Attendees:
John Hunt – UC Davis and California Marine Sanctuary Foundation
Maureen Hamilton – Monterey Peninsula Water Management District (Monterey Peninsula, Carmel Bay, and South Monterey Bay IRWM Region)
Marcus Mendiola – Pajaro Valley Water Management Agency
Susan Robinson – Greater Monterey County IRWM Program Coordinator

Meeting Minutes

1. Brief Introductions

2. Adding New Stormwater Projects to the SWRP: In anticipation of the State Water Board's Prop 4 Stormwater Implementation Grant, Susan Robinson discussed logistics for adding projects to the existing Storm Water Resource Plan for the Greater Monterey County IRWM Region. Heidi Niggemeyer noted that the City of Salinas has projects they would like included in the plan, and suggested setting up a process for soliciting projects annually. Erica Parker said she'd check with Michael Trapani as to whether Monterey County has stormwater projects they would like to submit for unincorporated areas. The City of Soledad may also have some projects. Susan will initiate a project solicitation in January.

3. SVBGSA's Castroville Eastside Canals and Alternative Feasibility Study: The Salinas Valley Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency (SVBGSA), in partnership with the Monterey County Water Resources Agency (MCWRA), is conducting a feasibility study to develop conceptual project scenarios using Salinas River diversions to meet various groundwater goals. The focus is not reservoir releases, but water received during the winter, i.e., non-stored water, winter flood flows (Permit 1104). The first phase of the study focused on evaluating water rate options, reviewing historical documents, analyzing surface water availability, and identifying project components for potential diversion, conveyance, and storage. Emily Gardner, SVBGSA Deputy General Manager, provided an overview of this feasibility study, which they aim to complete by end of March 2026.

How can the agency potentially use Salinas River water to help meet four groundwater goals, including addressing seawater intrusion and groundwater levels in areas where there have been declines? How can we capture all of that water going to the ocean during the winter?

General approach in Phase I: Water rights analysis, focusing on Permit 11043. The GSA looked at historical flows, and are estimating future flows given climate change. What are the key technical considerations, from diversion structures to conveyance to storage to treatment?

Water Rights Analysis: Permit 11043 is an old 1949 water right, held by MCWRA. The permit is for diversion only, with two defined points of diversion. The water right doesn't authorize any kind of storage; allows for excess natural flows as measured at Soledad gage, not stored flows. The permit allows diversion up to 400 cfs, up to 135,000 AFY. The divertible water is limited to the portion of excess, natural flows (i.e., not reservoir releases).

What would getting a new water right look like? A new permit. If approved it would be the most junior priority water right. It would be a long and expensive process, and there may not be that much water benefit at the end of the day.

Summary of Water Right Options

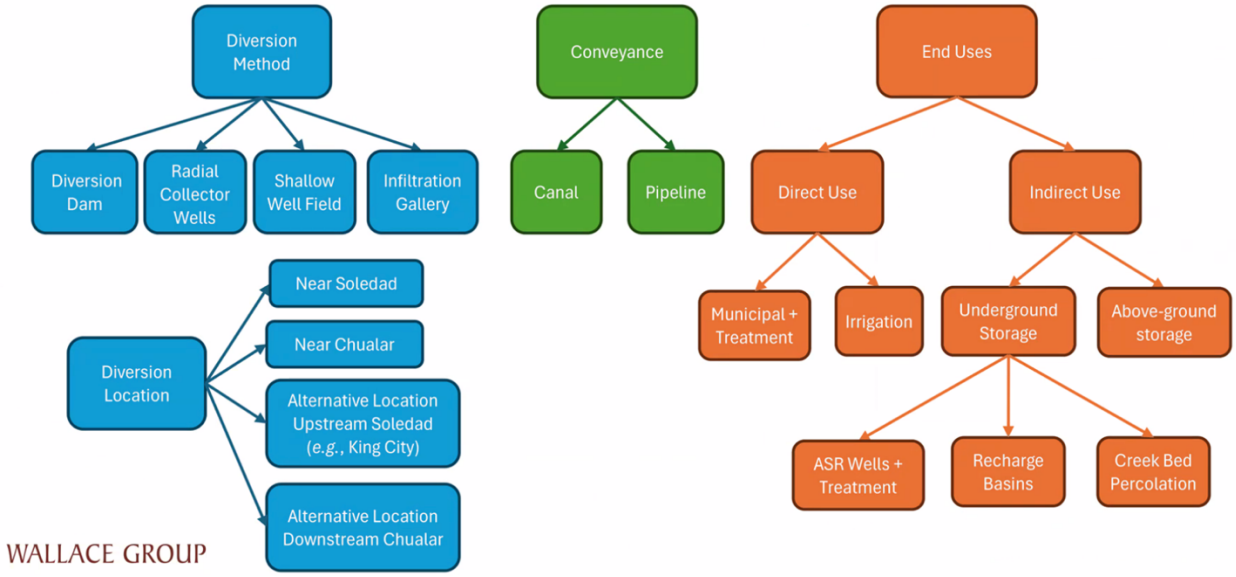
Use Existing Permit 11043	Modify Permit 11043	Obtain New Water Right
• Up to 400 cfs, 135,000 AF/year of excess natural flow • No storage allowed • Diversions at identified intake locations • Approval of petitions needed • Petition process is subject to public protest	• Need to define project and complete CEQA • Could add storage • Could change diversion location • Approval of modified petitions needed • Petition process is subject to public protest	• Most junior • Standard: lengthy/costly process including CEQA • Streamlined and/or Temporary: strict requirements • Flood exemptions

In order for this project to be used for any scenario, would need to try to add storage.

So how much water do we have? The total excess flow rate is above 600 cfs but with permit restrictions capping at 400 cfs, get a lower *average* of 165 cfs. As the diversion gets bigger, can divert more flow. The biggest hurdle is around the timing: excess flows are in winter when demand is low. There is a huge variability in flow, too; diversion varies from year to year, with no potential flow available to divert in some years. There is still not enough to meet the entire demand.

The GSA looked at historical documents over last 100 years. Projects have been proposed since the 1940s to address seawater intrusion and depressed groundwater levels. Large projects included the Nacimiento and San Antonio Reservoirs. Key observations from historic documents review: Focus was on overdraft areas, with a large emphasis on demand management. There is generally a lack of alignment with current conditions: Many of the projects proposed do not reflect current permit conditions, the Salinas Valley Water Project, or existing environmental requirements.

Technical Considerations



The GSA's consulting group, Wallace Group, is looking at diversion dams, etc. Conveyance pretty much includes only pipelines. End Uses: There is not much potential under direct use, but under indirect use they are looking at both underground and above-ground storage. If underground storage, would need to treat to drinking water standards, so that adds complexity and cost.

Technical component consideration key points:

- The GSA's focus now is on storage; without storage, the end use limits the project size. Getting a diversion point change would be an added bonus, but the primary focus is on storage.
- A larger footprint project increases environmental impact, land acquisition, and cost.
- Subsurface diversion methods benefit from riverbank filtration, providing higher water quality.
- Diversions closer to end use keep costs lower, and decrease complexity of land acquisition/agreements.

Phase 1 key take-aways: Action is needed on Permit 11043 in order to avoid revocation. The permit should be modified to add storage. Applying for a new water right is costly, lengthy, and uncertain. Timing is a constraint as is lack of storage. The volume of diverted water will be limited by the water right and practical considerations, including cost of infrastructure, operations, end use demand, etc.…

Next steps:

- SVBGSA will work with MCWRA to refine estimated timing and volume of available surface water for diversion, and model under different climate scenarios.
- They will define project components and scenarios to meet groundwater goals.
- Model diversion impacts on groundwater conditions relative to Sustainable Management Criteria.
- Conduct high-level feasibility and cost analysis of key scenarios.

The SVBGSA also completed an aquifer storage and recovery (ASR) feasibility study – looked at reservoir reoperation and diverting, and treating and injecting water into the 180/400 Aquifer, didn't stop seawater intrusion! So, then they looked at Permit 11043 flows, treating and injecting – but again, not enough water to stop seawater intrusion. So the next iteration is to analyze impacts after adding additional storage to the project scenarios.

Heidi asked, is the GSA getting agreements from ag not to increase their pumping? Who's to say ag won't just start increasing their pumping? Emily responded that the GSA is just beginning a conversation about demand management. Right now the GSA is focused on modeling: what are the groundwater impacts for less pumping? Need to put everything on the table and have community decide which path to go down…

4. Pajaro River Watershed Multi-benefit Land Repurposing Program: Eric Mendiola, Water Conservation and Outreach Specialist at Pajaro Valley Water Management Agency, provided an overview of the Pajaro River Watershed Multi-benefit Land Repurposing Program (MLRP). PV Water is the GSA for the Lower Pajaro River Watershed. PV Water was awarded $8.89 million in Round 2 of the California Department of Conservation's MLRP funding. They applied with shovel-ready projects. Four projects:

Beach Ranch Restoration – with Land Trust of Santa Cruz County. LTSCC acquired 250 acres, with the objective of returning a portion of ag fields back to wetland in Watsonville Slough. Cost a total of $13.9M for acquisition, used ~$800K from MLRP. Restoring habitat, protecting from tides/flooding.

Recharge Net Metering Program – with the Resource Conservation District of Santa Cruz County. This project dedicates 2.5 acres of irrigated agricultural land to use for aquifer recharge while restoring an additional 3-5 acres of habitat as part of the innovative Recharge Net Metering (ReNeM) program. The project will create a recharge basin with the potential to achieve approximately 100 acre-feet per year of groundwater recharge. The project includes three private landowner recharge basins. Will develop a fourth basin on a portion near edge of boundary on Elkhorn Slough Foundation property. Project cost about $1M.

College Lake Project – under development since 2012. College Lake is the largest lake in Pajaro Valley. PV Water will take out ag land and restore the lake to create a water storage and supply source with a water treatment plant. In addition to repurposing 136 acres of marginal agricultural lands, the College Lake project will provide 1,800 to 2,300 acre-feet per year of surface water as an alternative to groundwater for agricultural irrigation. The project helps South Central California Coast steelhead. MLRP support is $2.4M for this project. Construction cost is $80M.

Conservation Easements – PV Water will work with LTSCC to identify 170 acres of marginal agricultural lands located in areas prone to flooding and seawater intrusion. By removing marginal grounds from production and establishing conservation easements, this project will create habitat, reduce groundwater use, and provide future habitat connectivity.

Pajaro River-Salsipuedes Creek Confluence Project – with Pajaro Regional Flood Management Agency (PRFMA). The project targets 50 acres of marginal agricultural lands, including 30 acres of fallow land and 20 acres of additional land targeted for acquisition, for flood risk reduction and riparian habitat restoration with the potential to continue farming within the levee setbacks. The confluence area floods typically every 7-9 years since the levees were built in the 1950s. Federal match is in question, whether

it can be realized to rebuild the levee to create 100-year flood protection. The project provides flood protection, captures sediment, improves habitat, and retires ag land.

5. Transitioning IRWM to the "Watershed Resilience Program": The IRWM Roundtable of Regions recently released a proposal for regional leaders and policy makers called the "IRWM Transition Plan." The objective of the plan is to support IRWM Regions in transitioning towards the California Department of Water Resources (DWR) new "Watershed Resilience Program." Susan presented.

DWR's Watershed Resilience Program was introduced with the California Water Plan Update 2023. The new program broadens the scope of integrated management to emphasize holistic watershed health, climate resiliency, and inclusive engagement. DWR envisions the formation of Local Watershed Networks. These Local Watershed Networks may be new entities or built off of existing regional planning efforts, such as IRWM groups, GSAs, stormwater groups. DWR sees the Watershed Resilience Program as an evolution of the IRWM Program, however, placing stronger emphasis on:

- climate vulnerability assessment,
- adaptation planning,
- watershed-scale collaboration, and
- equity and inclusiveness.

DWR selected five pilot projects to develop Watershed Resilience Plans. The Pajaro River Watershed is one of the pilot regions. The planning process includes, for example, delineation of watershed boundaries, water budget, problem statement, vulnerability assessment, climate hazards and impacts, development of adaptation strategies. This pilot program, which should conclude Spring 2026, will inform the Prop 4-funded Watershed Resilience Program going forward.

The Roundtable of Regions developed the IRWM Transition Plan to outline a path for IRWM Regions to grow their governing bodies in response to DWR's shift to the Watershed Resilience Program. The plan recommends (among other things): update existing IRWM plans to focus on adaptation to current local challenges; continue regular project solicitations, and prioritize projects; and collaborate with GSAs to plan collectively.

Looking ahead at anticipated Prop 4 funding, Susan asked the group:

Should we update our IRWM Plan and hold project solicitations to make ourselves ready for Prop 4 funding?

- Prop 4 includes $100M specifically for IRWM (but probably not until 2028…?)
- There's $200 million earmarked in Prop 4 to update/create Watershed Resilience Plans. DWR will likely provide additional/separate Prop 4 funding for Watershed Resilience Implementation Grants.
- The Greater Monterey County IRWM region will likely hold annual project solicitations for the IRWMP for stormwater projects regardless…

Should we re-evaluate/revamp our Regional Water Management Group to position it as a Local Watershed Network?

- Note other groups that may want to assume that role: GSA, Monterey Bay Climate Adaptation Network…

Heidi wondered whether water quality is considered part of "resilience."

Emily Zefferman wondered whether the Greater Monterey County IRWM region would need to change its boundaries. Maybe! The region is currently based on both watershed and political boundaries.

Emily Gardner wondered how much of PV Water's work has been around modeling? Marcus responded that $1M went toward modeling! They are doing tree core sampling and associating USGS gaging stations to do paleo drought analysis going back 1500 years to see what a really long drought could look like, along with heavy flood extents…

The general consensus from the group was to hold off on planning, until we see what Prop 4 holds in terms of funding. In the meantime, Susan will initiate a project solicitation in January, for either stormwater projects only to include in the Storm Water Resource Plan, or potentially also for general water resource projects to include in the IRWM Plan.

4. Other News/Updates

There were no updates.

The next Regional Water Management Group meeting is scheduled for February 18, 2026, on Zoom.