

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

**June 17, 2026
Zoom Conference Call**

RWMG Entity Attendees:

Jenny Balmagia – Central Coast Wetlands Group
Rosa Carrillo – San Jerardo Cooperative, Inc.
Beth Febus – Big Sur Land Trust
Rachel Gaudoin – Monterey One Water
Piret Harmon – Salinas Valley Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency
Carla James – City of Soledad
Paul Robins – Resource Conservation District of Monterey County
Katie Siegler – Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary/California Marine Sanctuary Foundation
Amy Woodrow – Monterey County Water Resources Agency
Emily Zefferman – Resource Conservation District of Monterey County

Non-RWMG Attendees:

Maxwell Brandenburg – City of Watsonville
Emily Franc – California Marine Sanctuary Foundation
Patrick Grogan, City of Seaside
John Hunt – UC Davis and California Marine Sanctuary Foundation
Alyssa Lozano – California Marine Sanctuary Foundation
Donna Meyers – Conservation Collaborative
Moisés Moreno-Rivera – Trust For Public Land
Mi Ra Park – Elkhorn Slough Foundation / Concerned Citizen
Susan Robinson – Greater Monterey County IRWM Program Coordinator

Meeting Minutes

1. Brief Introductions

2. IRWM Implementation Grant Prop 1 Round 1 Update: The Greater Monterey County IRWM region was awarded \$3,462,861 in Prop 1 Round 1 IRWM Implementation Grant funds. The Monterey County Water Resources Agency (MCWRA) has been acting as lead fiscal agency for this award. Amy Woodrow provided an update on the projects and funding. Note that MCWRA has extended the grant agreement with the Department of Water Resources to June 2027.

Castroville Community Services District – “Emergency Deep Aquifer Supply and Storage Tank Project”: \$395,000 awarded; total project cost \$8,132,000. The project provides safe and reliable drinking water supply – planning, design, and construction of a new well into the Deep Aquifer. Project included construction of a storage tank and arsenic treatment system. All construction was completed end of 2025, notice of completion issued early 2026. The system is not yet operational, still some civil engineering work occurring but the well structure itself has been installed.

MCWRA – “Re-operation of Reservoirs: Decision Support Tool to Increase Water Supply Reliability in the Salinas Valley”: \$750,000 awarded; total project cost \$1,820,000. Project involved modeling to

understand how operations of the San Antonio and Nacimiento Reservoirs could potentially be done differently, including consideration of in-stream flow requirements, fish passage, wildlife habitat, groundwater replenishment, etc. Included stakeholder engagement and technical advisory committee. The project was completed in 2025. The project modeled three reoperation scenarios to quantify resulting changes in surface water and groundwater conditions. TAC reached consensus around the three operation scenarios. This will inform development of the Salinas River Operations Habitat Conservation Plan; identified some lower flow targets for certain places along the river that would allow for fish passage at different times of the year. This work is really critical to being able to explore those different thresholds and what larger implications might be for all beneficial users.

Resource Conservation District (RCD) of Monterey County: “Salinas River Flood and Habitat Improvement Program”: \$526,525 awarded; total project cost \$1,206,381. Focused on vegetation and sediment management to improve flood risks and invasive species eradication. Two parts to this project: 1) Arundo eradication and 2) construction of secondary channels in the river. Arundo re-treatment is completed. Involved re-treatment on over 1,400 acres in riparian zone along the Salinas River. Estimated water savings of over 450 AFY. Second component: Six new secondary channels constructed. Benefits include reducing flood risk in 5 to 7-year recurrence level and improvement of approximately 12,000 acres of riparian habitat. Real benefits realized from this project!

RCD of Monterey County: “Monterey County Farm Nutrient Management and Water Quality Assistance Program”: \$315,169 awarded; total project cost \$630,470. Supported farmers in implementing management changes and conservation projects to better manage nutrients, soil, and water (e.g., cover cropping, replacing certain equipment, updating drip tape, etc.). Exceeded initial objectives of the grant – 110+ site visits, 40+ follow-up assessments for irrigation and nutrient management, 13 implementation projects. Expanded bilingual farm water quality support services. Connected with more farmers through outreach, many Spanish-speaking, small-scale (<20 acres). This project is completed.

Partnership between Central Coast Wetlands Group and City of Salinas: “Salinas Storm Water Management: Increasing Capture, Improving Treatment, Reducing Energy Use”: \$1,129,883 awarded; total project cost \$2,407,735. Focused on City’s Industrial Wastewater Treatment Facility (IWTF). Three components: 1) Installation of a treatment wetland: This portion of the project is complete, and is being monitored every two weeks for nutrients, TSS, and TDS. 2) Study looking for ways to reactivate existing 33-inch pipe. 3) Flood protection of IWTF by re-locating electrical components above 100-year floodplain. The latter components are ongoing due to construction delays. Expected to be completed June 2027.

John Hunt asked about the status of the US Geological Survey’s Salinas Valley hydrologic model update. Amy affirmed that the USGS hydrologic model update had been completed and that the model was used as part of MCWRA’s decision support tool. The Salinas Valley Basin GSA made refinements to the published version of the hydrologic model. The GSA and MCWRA have a joint Technical Advisory Committee to ensure that all the water agencies in the Salinas Valley are on board with these tools. The hydrologic model is published and publicly available.

3. AB 1548 Monterey Bay Area Stewardship Authority Update: AB 1548 was written to establish the Monterey Bay Area Stewardship Authority (MBASA), a regional entity whose purpose would be to raise and allocate public and private funds for restoring, enhancing, protecting, engaging in long-term stewardship, and improving access for the enjoyment of natural and working lands in the Counties of

Monterey, San Benito, and Santa Cruz. Donna Meyers (Conservation Collaborative) and Moisés Moreno-Rivera (Trust for Public Land, TPL) provided a briefing.

Moisés described background of TPL's engagement on this land stewardship initiative. Obtaining ongoing funding to support long-term stewardship of conserved lands was identified as a common challenge. Hearing enough interest, TPL brought entities/stakeholders together to explore ideas. All of 2025 was about engagement.

The purpose of MBASA: To "raise and allocate public and private funds for the restoration, enhancement, protection, long-term stewardship, and improved access for the enjoyment of open space, watersheds, and natural and working lands, in the Monterey Bay Region and along its shoreline." Such an authority could distribute funds quickly, address pressing needs, facilitate block grant models, attain State funds.

Progress:

- Bill intent language for AB 1548 was introduced January 7, 2026 by Assemblymember Gail Pellerin. Full language introduced March 9, 2026 after State legislative attorneys' review of draft language. San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority was used as a model for legislative language (SFBRA was created in 2008 and has been in existence ever since).
- Passed Assembly Natural Resources Committee on April 13, 2026 with a 10-3 vote. Assemblymember Addis signed on as a co-author. Passed Assembly Local Government Committee on April 22 with an 8-2 vote and amendments were made to accommodate what was heard from agriculture and local government.
- San Benito County Supervisors unanimously supported AB 1548 on April 14, 2026.
- Passed Appropriations Committee on May 14, moved to Assembly Floor and passed on May 28, 2026.
- AB 1548 was a priority bill for the California Legislative Central Coast Caucus.

Where are we now? Assemblymember Pellerin has held the bill and won't be moving it forward through the legislative process. The TPL team continued to do outreach and briefings all through the legislative process, engaged more and more agencies, the building industry, etc. Some local governments, however, were still struggling with the concept. They asked for additional time to learn more and to understand the SFBRA model better. Assemblymember Pellerin will conduct specific engagement with local governments. Some primary areas in need of clarification:

- Governance structure: ensuring there are enough people on the board, equitable distribution
- Carrying bond indebtedness
- Equitable outdoor access: Making sure conservation lands are well maintained and that public may have access
- Taxing ability of MBASA
- Concern about potential conflicts with housing mandates and affordability: slowing housing down or making it less affordable.

Both ag and forestry entities engaged in reviewing the bill. Very productive. Engagement work with Farm Bureau and specific forestry interests will continue.

For additional information:

- [initial Press Release](#)

- [San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority](#)
- [San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority Model Legislation for MBASA](#)
- [AB 1548: Latest legislative language](#)

Next Steps: Six-month period of July-Dec 2026: Engagement and education of local government and elected officials. Will bring on communications assistance. Exploring idea of creating a leadership committee (advisory committee and help with communications/outreach). Plus convene additional field trips to showcase the kind of work that’s occurring and constraints that exist.

Q&A:

Susan Robinson: Please describe the governance structure.

A: The current legislation proposes a governance composed of nine members:

- 3 elected County government positions (i.e., 1 County Supervisor from each of the three counties)
- 3 elected City government positions (1 City from each county)
- 3 public seats, with expertise on working lands

What happens next with legislation?

A: The process will begin again. It may be re-numbered when re-submitted. Will retain the title.

Emily Zefferman: What’s currently in the bill with regard to public access? How might it affect stewardship on private lands?

A: MBASA would be a standalone authority, separate from city or county government, not a special district. The board needs to have flexibility so it can set its own priorities, but some people are concerned with this flexibility; more comfortable with “absolutes” built into the legislation. The legislation, for example, is not prescriptive in its language with regard to “level of public access” – because different situations will require different levels of access and protections. It’s the purpose of the authority to work in public settings, through public meetings, to understand *where* public access is appropriate. Note that MBASA will not own/operate land on its own. MBASA will not have land use authority.

Mi Ra Park (Elkhorn Slough Foundation board member): Feels that MBASA would position the region for a lot of funding! She offered to participate in field trips to help articulate what the benefits would be. She asked what groups were *not* in support, and what their concerns were.

A: Concern that any debt accrued would fall back onto a city or county. But there would not be any fiscal fallback on cities or counties. Another concern: Cities need to meet housing obligations and needs; if the Authority funds stewardship of lands, might there be competition for land that could otherwise be used for housing? MBASA would not have land use authority, and additionally, elected officials would have a say in what would get funded. Donna noted that the response from the League of Cities was not reflective of what she and Moisés had heard from individual city officials.

Paul Robins: What is the status with Senator John Laird during this “pause”?

A: Senator Laird has been briefed; his recommendation is to continue to engage to make sure the legislation reflects the needs of those expressing concerns.

Susan: Please talk a bit more about the taxing authority of MBASA.

A: MBASA would have the *ability* to tax; doesn't mean it has to tax. The taxing authority gives the Authority tools that a county or city has; can create a sustainable, consistent flow of money that would allow for match funding from federal and state funds. Does not supersede city/county obligations but complements them. The decision to tax would need to go through a public process, with polling, etc. All of these things must be done in public...

Susan: What might cities stand to gain?

A: Cities comprise one-third of the governing board. "Natural and working lands" is as defined in the State statute. That includes urban/neighborhood parks, and education projects to get youth outdoors. Cities can receive grants from MBASA for education, to fix trails, etc. The State Coastal Conservancy would be the staffing entity – so staffing costs would not fall on cities and counties to fund. The State has been handing down mandates – for example, related to sea level rise, adaptation plans, urban forests; MBASA funds could be used to fund those requirements. Special districts (e.g., RCDs) and JPAs (e.g., GSAs) would also be eligible to receive these funds.

Susan: I've heard concern that the Monterey Peninsula and coastal cities would essentially be funding inland projects. True?

A: The MBASA governing board can set their own priorities through public forum. There will also be an Advisory Committee. There are multiple ways for cities to weigh in and be involved.

Jenny Balmagia: How do the concerns and pause in this process compare with the process for establishing the San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority?

A: It took several years to develop the concept for that entity and then eight more years to create the measure to establish the San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority...

4. Other News and Updates: Heads up, Susan may cancel the August meeting for Summer Break, but will keep everyone posted on information related to the Prop 4 Watershed Resilience Grant, if there is news to report.

The next Regional Water Management Group meeting will take place on August 19, 2026, unless canceled for summertime fun.