

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

**October 16, 2024**

**Location: Elkhorn Slough National Estuarine Research Reserve and Zoom Conference Call**

**RWVG Entity Attendees:**

Dan Brumbaugh – Elkhorn Slough National Estuarine Research Reserve  
Shandy Carroll – Monterey County Housing and Community Development  
Gabi Estill – Elkhorn Slough Foundation  
Beth Febus – Big Sur Land Trust  
Monique Fountain – Elkhorn Slough National Estuarine Research Reserve  
Jimmy Guilinger – California State University, Monterey Bay  
Garrett Haertel – Marina Coast Water District  
Piret Harmon – Salinas Valley Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency  
Heidi Niggemeyer – City of Salinas  
Patrick Riparetti – Big Sure Land Trust  
Rachel Saunders – Big Sur Land Trust  
Jamie Tuitele-Lewis – Resource Conservation District of Monterey County  
Amy Woodrow – Monterey County Water Resources Agency

**Non-RWVG Attendees:**

Shannon Bliss – Hartnell College  
Jared Childress – Central Coast Prescribed Burn Association  
Alexandra Coblenz – Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board  
Doug Dowden – Consultant for the City of Marina  
Kathleen Gonzalez – Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board  
John Hunt – UC Davis  
Modibo Keita – Sustainable Conservation  
Robert Mazurek – California Marine Sanctuary Foundation  
Denise Mercado – Ecology Action  
Susan Robinson – Greater Monterey County IRWM Program Director  
Jesse Traller Ojeda – California Marine Sanctuary Foundation  
Jamison Watts – Santa Lucia Conservancy

**Meeting Minutes**

This meeting featured presentations from partners implementing projects in the recently awarded \$71.1 million NOAA Climate Resilience Regional Challenge (CRRC) Grant. While the grant covers the entire Monterey Bay coastal area, the IRWM meeting focused primarily on the projects located within Monterey County.

**1. Brief Introductions**

## **2. NOAA CLIMATE RESILIENCE REGIONAL CHALLENGE GRANT: Regional Adaptation for Climate Resilience of Monterey Bay Coastal Communities**

**Introduction to the NOAA Grant:** Robert Mazurek, Executive Director, California Marine Sanctuary Foundation (CMSF), provided an overview of the NOAA Climate Resilience Regional Challenge award, which is being referred to as “Climate Resilient Monterey Bay.” In July 2023 CMSF put out a broad call to Monterey Bay Area agencies and organizations to explore the possibility of collaborating on a unified, region-wide approach for reducing climate risks associated with sea level rise, storm surges, river flooding, and wildfires. The response was overwhelming, with nearly 100 individuals attending the first virtual meeting. CMSF was ultimately successful in its application, receiving \$71.1M to implement a five-year transformational climate adaptation program for the Monterey Bay coastal area. The project involves 29 partners, including local and regional government agencies, academic and research institutions, and non-profit organizations, as well as numerous subcontractors.

The grant consists of a complementary suite of projects that collectively increase the resilience of coastal communities to extreme weather and other climate change impacts. There are four major components of the grant:

- 1) **Regional Collaboration:** Establishment of the Monterey Bay Climate Adaptation Action Network.
- 2) **Equity and Inclusion:** The benefits derived from adaptation activities included in the grant will flow largely to the marginalized and disadvantaged communities occupying the low-lying, flood-prone coastal areas within the Monterey Bay region. The grant includes a robust program of outreach and engagement to underrepresented communities (\$1.8M) and Tribes (\$1.6M).
- 3) **Risk Reduction:** The grant focuses on flood risk and wildfire risk reduction, with about \$40.6M in funds for nine flood risk reduction projects and about \$10.8M in funds for four regional, coordinated wildfire risk reduction projects.
- 4) **Enduring Capacity:** Funds are provided to increase capacity for, and develop strong linkages with, other regional climate networks, specifically the Climate Justice Collaborative, the Central Coast Climate Collaborative, and the Monterey Bay Regional Climate Project Working Group.

**Overview of the Monterey Bay Climate Adaptation Action Network (MBCAAN):** John Hunt, UC Davis, and Science Advisor for Climate Resilient Monterey Bay, provided an overview of MBCAAN. The grant will establish a new regional climate network, MBCAAN, that will serve to support communication across partners, provide a forum for exchange of information and data, promote a regional approach and collaborative decision-making with regard to climate adaptation actions, identify funding to support future projects and programs, and provide regional monitoring for resiliency. MBCAAN is intended to be forward thinking. Its governance structure will be determined by the participants.

**Overview of Workforce Development Projects:** This segment was presented by Dr. Jimmy Guilinger, Assistant Professor in the Department of Applied Environmental Sciences at California State University, Monterey Bay (CSUMB), and Dr. Shannon Bliss, Director Agriculture Innovation and Technology at Hartnell College. Four institutions comprise the “workforce development team” for the Climate Resilient Monterey Bay program: Hartnell College, CSUMB, University of California Santa Cruz (UCSC), and Watsonville Wetlands Watch.

- **Hartnell** will upskill workers in trade and climate adaptation skills. The program will train 750 adult learners in topics such as trade safety, trade math, equipment, rigging, material handling, construction drawings. Participants may earn third-party credentials. In addition, the Resilience Student Ambassador Program will be offered to students for leadership training with policy and

advocacy skills. Those who participate in either of the above programs will be eligible for paid internships. The program will establish 200 paid internships, including short (75-85 hour) and long (240-360 hour) internship opportunities.

- **Watsonville Wetlands Watch** will offer paid skill training to a total of 40 Pajaro Valley residents, ages 18-24, from disadvantaged and underserved communities. Training includes 8-week sessions focusing on skills such as habitat restoration, nursery production, erosion control, water quality monitoring, permitting, GIS mapping, community engagement. Those who complete the 8-week sessions will be eligible for 4-week advanced training. WWW will also offer 10 Professional Development workshops.
- **CSUMB** will provide both an undergraduate and a graduate program: The undergraduate program will provide 40 internships over the project period, including both academic year (150-200-hour) and summer internships (10-week). Fully funded internships for graduate students will be offered through Environmental Science Professional master's degree (PSM) program, culminating in 400-hr internships, with support for 6 Fellows over the grant period. Students funded through both undergrad and PSM track will be required to complete 2 skills-based courses/certifications. The grant also includes student success support, as well as fellowships for faculty to augment or develop courses with climate resilience curriculum.
- **UCSC** will provide stipend support for 40 undergraduate students in the Climate Scholars Program. Externships will be available to 28 undergrad students with community partners, plus drone training for 16 students. Up to 10 graduate students will be supported through off-campus, year-long, full-time Capstone Fellowships with partner organizations. The program will also support 105 professionals through Elkhorn Slough National Estuarine Research Reserve's Coastal Training Program Professional Certificate Program.

**Flood Risk Reduction Project: "Adapting Marshes and Transportation Corridors to Sea Level Rise in Elkhorn Slough to Improve Public Safety and Tidal Habitat"**: Monique Fountain, Tidal Wetland Program Director, Elkhorn Slough National Estuarine Research Reserve (ESNERR), presented the Elkhorn Slough Foundation's project. The project represents the first major investment for ESNERR in climate resilience for the northeastern portion of the Elkhorn Slough estuary, the Kirby-North Marsh complex. The goal of the project is to protect public access and critical transportation corridors using Natural and Nature-based Features (NNBF), and to design and begin to implement restoration of a climate-ready salt marsh ecosystem, with high marshes that can withstand sea level rise, and with enhanced tidal flushing that help protect against climate-driven increases in hypoxia and acidification. Both the Union Pacific railroad line and Elkhorn Road are at risk to flooding due to sea level rise. If sea level rise occurs too quickly, the marsh is unable to rise quickly enough with it, and drowns. The NOAA-funded project includes three components: 1) Install a living shoreline (1.5 acres) in Kirby Park, and rebuild the public access trail (up to 2,500 LF) to accommodate at least one meter of sea level rise; 2) restore marsh transition habitat along the eastern edge of North Marsh (35 acres) to allow for marsh migration and improve climate resiliency; 3) and develop 60% design plans and permitting for the larger Kirby-North Marsh Complex (200+ acres), using NNBF approaches to restore rare tidal marsh habitat while reducing flood and erosion risks from sea level rise for the Union Pacific Railroad line and Elkhorn Road. Invasives will be removed, allowing for marsh migration. In North Marsh, a transition zone will be provided for amphibians to be able to move from a pond that's getting salty, to a higher pond.

**Flood Risk Reduction Project: "Salinas River Lagoon/Old Salinas River Floodplain Resiliency and Connectivity Project"**: Amy Woodrow, Senior Water Resources Hydrologist at Monterey County Water Resources Agency (MCWRA), provided an overview of this project, which is a partnership between MCWRA, Coastal Conservation & Research (CCR), and Central Coast Wetlands Group (CCWG). The project will reduce flood risk for coastal agriculture and for Castroville and Moss Landing, address the deficiencies of MCWRA's hydrologic control structures, enhance hydrologic connectivity and greatly improve estuary habitat condition. The project includes two main components:

1. **Design and construct new water control structures that improve flood attenuation and provide greater operational opportunities to increase climate resiliency within the Salinas River Lagoon and river channel.** The existing tide gate near Moss Landing Harbor and water elevation control structure at the Salinas River Lagoon were constructed to minimize tidal flooding; however, recent changes in rainfall patterns, often during king tides, has shown these structures to provide minimal flood attenuation capacity while also hindering wildlife migration and habitat connectivity. Flood control infrastructure will be redesigned and upgraded, allowing for bidirectional connectivity between the Old Salinas River and Lagoon to manage fluvial discharge challenges during extreme high tides.
2. **Reduce flood risk from sea level rise and improve habitat condition through floodplain restoration.** Floodplain restoration will occur (design, permitting, construction) on 20-30m linear easements on active farmlands along the Old Salinas River and Tembladero Slough. This low-lying land is easily impacted during current storms and is predicted to be impacted with sea level rise. The project will increase flood resiliency and flow capacity of the undersized flood channels. The objective is to restore a minimum of 30 acres of floodplain area, including creation of wetlands. This multi-benefit project will not only increase flood attenuation but will improve water quality, create habitat for threatened fish, and increase resiliency of adjacent urban and agricultural lands.

**Flood Risk Reduction Project: "Carmel River Floodplain Restoration & Environmental Enhancement (CRFREE): Post-Construction Restoration & Management"**: Rachel Saunders, Vice President of Conservation at Big Sur Land Trust (BSLT), described BSLT's transformational flood-risk reduction project. Monterey Peninsula Regional Park District is a partner. In 1995, flooding along the Carmel River blew the bridge out on Hwy 1, cut off Big Sur for six months. The CRFREE project will redirect water from the river into the southern floodplain to reduce flood elevations in areas north of the river. A new causeway will be built on Hwy 1. BSLT will restore much of the east-southern part of the floodplain. NOAA funds will help jump start restoration, focusing on stabilizing the floodplain. Implementation will begin early Spring 2026, with planting in the Fall 2026 and Fall 2027 (a succession of restoration efforts), including intensive revegetation in 7.4 acres, with adaptive management.

**Flood Risk Reduction Project: "Salinas River Flood Risk Reduction and Habitat Improvement Project"**: Susan Robinson provided a very brief overview of the Resource Conservation District of Monterey County's (RCDMC) secondary channel and arundo removal project (this project has been presented to the Regional Water Management Group numerous times over the years). For the NOAA grant, the project will implement three new secondary channel vegetation and sediment management (totaling 15 acres), along with removal of the invasive giant reed, *Arundo Donax*, for flood risk reduction and habitat improvement. Secondary channels are typically 0.25-0.75 miles long and connect with the main stem of the river at their upstream and downstream ends. The project will focus on the geographic area from Chualar to the coast.

**Wildfire Risk Reduction Project: "Wildfire Risk Reduction through Eucalyptus Treatment, Prescribed Fire, and Cultural Burning Expansion"**

Jamie Tuitele-Lewis, RCDMC's Forest Health and Wildfire Resilience Program Manager, provided an overview of the regional approach for wildfire risk reduction activities, and described RCDMC's project. RCDMC has been involved in forest health and wildfire prevention work since 2018. On-the-ground activities for this project will be conducted primarily by RCDMC's partners; RCDMC's role will primarily be to help with environmental compliance, grant administration, reporting, and communications between partners, CMSF and NOAA. Partners and projects include:

- Elkhorn Slough Foundation (ESF): Treat about 40 acres of eucalyptus in North Monterey County on ESF-owned property near Hall Road, with post-treatment conversion of biomass into biochar. ESF will also develop a new forest management plan. The resulting landscape will have lighter fuel loads, reduced crown fire potential, better roads for emergency vehicle access, and improved coast live oak forest health.
- Big Sur Land Trust: Fuel reduction on BSLT-owned properties of Glen Deven Ranch, Basin Ranch, and Mitteldorf. BSLT will do treatments for Mitteldorf, then RCDMC will conduct prescribed burning.
- Esselen Tribe of Monterey County: Cultural burning in Basin Ranch; the Tribe co-manages Basin Ranch property with BSLT.
- Central Coast Prescribed Burn Association: Jared Childress, CCPBA Program Manager, described CCPBA's role. CCPBA will provide assistance with prescribed burns for Glen Deven Ranch (prescribed fire to treat invasive French broom), Basin Ranch (about 100 acres, and will repair road access), Mitteldorf (coastal redwood habitat), and Mt. Madonna (15 acres of coastal redwood habitat). CCPBA will provide burn planning, prescribed fire training, technical assistance for prescribed fire, implementation and monitoring of planned burns. The prescribed burns are mostly staffed by volunteers – lots of outreach! Every burn is a training burn.

**Wildfire Risk Reduction Project: "Resilient Forest Restoration: Protecting Communities in the Wildland Urban Interface"**

Patrick Riparetti, Director of Stewardship for BSLT, described BSLT's fuel reduction project in Mitteldorf Preserve. Mitteldorf is a BSLT-owned 1,000+ acre preserve. There is a big fuel bed (thick ceanothus growth); worried about another major fire, like the Soberanes fire that burned in 2016, potentially overcoming resilience of the redwoods. Mitteldorf is home to the oldest and largest redwood tree in Monterey County, has critical steelhead habitat, and historic structures. The NOAA-funded project will reduce fuel loads across at least 60 acres of coast redwood forest. Additionally, the project will prepare the forest for future prescribed and cultural burns. BSLT will share lessons learned across the different fire risk reduction projects with this grant team.

**Wildfire Risk Reduction Project: "Wildfire Risk Reduction through Treatment of Fine Fuels, Invasives, and Ladder Fuels"**

Jamison Watts, Executive Director of the Santa Lucia Conservancy, described the Conservancy's fuel load reduction project. The NOAA-funded project will reduce fire intensity by treat fine fuels through cattle grazing. The Conservancy owns about 90% of the Preserve's land base. The Conservancy's approach to forest management is to support a "fire permeable landscape" – with a goal to reducing the speed and intensity of fire, and providing clear routes for fire fighters. The Preserve has 296 buildable lots, 8,000 acres of conservation easements, and 10,000 acres of wildlands. The 3-mile

buffer around the Preserve is considered a “wildfire program influence zone”; the Preserve has been shown to provide a buffer between Big Sur and Carmel Valley areas.

## **Q&A**

Question to Modibo: Sustainable Conservation used to be involved in permit streamlining. Are they still? Modibo will find out.

Alexandra Coblentz noted that the Central Coast Regional Board is in the process of revisions after the first draft release (in July) of a General Order to streamline fire and flood risk reduction projects, only in riparian area and waters of the state. Category A projects are “non-notifying”: no reporting, no fees: includes prescribed fire, prescribed grazing. Category B projects require enrollment fees. Restoration is not included in this.