

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

**December 18, 2024**

**Location: Moss Landing Marine Labs and Zoom Conference Call**

**RWMG Entity Attendees:**

Jenny Balmagia – Central Coast Wetlands Group  
Dash Dunkell – Elkhorn Slough Foundation  
Heidi Niggemeyer – City of Salinas  
Kevin O’Connor – Central Coast Wetlands Group  
John Olson – California State University Monterey Bay

**Non-RWMG Attendees:**

John Hunt – UC Davis  
Modibo Keita – Sustainable Conservation  
Denise Mercado – Ecology Action  
Moisés Moreno-Rivera – Trust for Public Land  
Paul Robins – Resource Conservation District of Monterey County  
Susan Robinson – Greater Monterey County IRWM Program Coordinator  
Ed Waggoner, City of Soledad, Interim Water Resource Manager

**Meeting Minutes**

**1. Brief Introductions**

**2. Securing Durable Funding for Long-term Stewardship in Tri-County Area:** The Trust for Public Land (TPL) led a 3-year Central Coast conservation initiative, “[Pathways to Climate Resilience in California’s Central Coast](#),” and launched its preliminary findings in July, after engaging community members and conducting research to guide strategic, equitable investment in the outdoors in the region. A need that emerged from community-based partner input was the need for durable funding for long-term stewardship across Santa Cruz, Monterey, and San Benito Counties to address local/regional, state, and federal goals. Mechanisms to make this a reality were explored and establishing a regional government entity (or special district) was favored via enabling legislation. In subsequent working group discussions, the idea surfaced of expanding the scope to include broader climate resilience themes, including water management and wildfire resilience. Moisés Moreno-Rivera from TPL provided an overview of TPL’s plan to introduce enabling legislation in February to form a collaborative regional entity that would secure durable funding to support these functions. Moisés provided background as to how TPL arrived at this idea:

Tied to 30x30 was a requirement for increased equity and connections with Tribes. How can Central Coast region deliver 30x30 goals? What does it mean for lands that are already conserved, the need for long-term stewardship and operations and maintenance (O&M)? TPL committed itself to work with partners to see what opportunities exist to address those gaps, and if there was as appetite to achieving something collectively. TPL found there was a recognized need for durable long-term funding. TPL established a working group; they had preliminary meetings in August 2024, and have been meeting monthly ever since.

Tools that came out of this work:

- Storymap:  
<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/5146e23c480542abab0652f143d931e6>
- Central Coast Climate Conservation Initiative Map:  
<https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/1101ebf95c6e4ec986aa7c66eafada75>
- Survey:  
<https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=9x1lwrv2vUeHLSNtw8bZ4NAHo6TAZGpPIP1uRVI9WDhURVozQVNVTVNXVDdGVVZRVDJIVTFUujEyMCQIQCN0PWcu>
- Press Release (July 9, 2024):  
<https://www.tpl.org/media-room/mapping-out-how-to-conserve-30-percent-of-san-benito-monterey-and-santa-cruz-counties-lands-and-coastal-waters-by-2030>

What would a regional entity look like? There are existing land trusts, GSAs, networks – where are the gaps? How to support, align, and uplift existing efforts? TPL collected input via survey. TPL is currently taking the lead but this will continue to be a collaborative, iterative process.

A gap: When there's lack of federal/state funding, the region feels it! Also, State bonds and other grant funds don't typically cover long-term stewardship and O&M. So the entity needs to be able to generate funding from multiple (other) sources to cover these needs. A potentially model for this new entity is the [San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority](#) – how do they do it? Recognizing the existence of a disparity between inland regions and coastal regions, will want to be sure to account for this.

What to call this entity? What kind of entity would it be?

- Conservancy? A conservancy can only receive funds allocated to them by the State through legislation.
- JPA? This would require allocating existing staff to the JPA, and the vote to establish a JPA would require the three different counties putting it on a ballot. Would be more challenging for collaboration.
- Special district? Learned from Sonoma County and the San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority about standalone legislation that allowed formation of a special district. Locals can work on developing the governance structure, etc. A special district can *generate* its own funding, and can distribute funds. Can work toward climate resilience at a regional scale. Can pass through money to support existing entities.

Would durable long-term funding cover just “conserved land” or, for example, Multibenefit Land Repurposing Program-type lands including long-term maintenance of treatment wetlands or retention basins? Moisés explained that they added the phrase “public and protected lands” to capture that flexibility.

John Hunt asked what the participation has been thus far from the agricultural community. Moisés responded: mainly from San Benito Ag Land Trust and San Benito County RCD thus far. But they're looking to hire a consultant to increase engagement with ag. John noted the vast amount of land that is in ag production, and the fact that this community is traditionally slow to embrace ideas like this. Jenny

Balmagia briefly described internal discussions to stand up a similar entity that have taken place the past few years through this IRWM group; the group entertained the idea of an “Agricultural Heritage District” – uplifting ag and creating a partnership between ag and conservation efforts. She added, however, that we wouldn’t necessarily want to dilute the current climate resiliency focus of the TPL-led effort...

Susan Robinson suggested: It might make sense to slow down, introduce legislation in 2026 if need be, in order to gain the support of ag. John asked: What’s the likelihood of functional overlap between this new district and ag? If the district wouldn’t affect ag in any significant way (e.g., with a tax based on acreage), maybe it’s not an issue. Example: Santa Cruz just passed Measure Q, which includes a parcel tax of \$87/year on every parcel (regardless of size). Jenny cautioned: Monterey County Water Resources Agency is underfunded for maintenance, has had trouble getting a tax passed...

Dash added that grazing is also important in this region culturally. The grazing community would likely be on board with a lot of this. Recommended Moisés talk with the Central Coast Ranch Land Coalition. Kevin recommended that Moisés speak with Connor Jandreau – California Central Coast Joint Venture (from Monterey down to SLO).

Moisés asked that folks fill out the survey, and make note of gaps that they have encountered. He explained that on the survey, “stewardship and O&M” is the umbrella that “conserved lands” and other projects fall under. Moisés will make some edits on the survey to make that clear, and then send to Susan to distribute via the IRWM group listserv. Moisés said he is happy to meet with individuals one on one, and to give group presentations.

**Contact:**

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Trust for Public Land  
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**3. Updates and News:**

Kevin O’Connor reported that the Central Coast Wetlands Group just received grant funds from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife for dune restoration at Zmudowski and Moss Landing State Beaches.

Dash Dunkell announced that the Elkhorn Slough Foundation received a 301(h) grant for planning to restore Werner Lake between the town of Pajaro and Elkhorn Slough. The lake is filled in with sand, and has the highest phosphorus readings that ESF has seen! (Jenny asks: Has anyone told the Regional Board why no one wants 301(h) money?? Susan suggests a few of us meet with Katie McNeill to discuss.)

John Hunt noted that the NOAA Climate Resilience Regional Challenge grant has a workforce development component, and aims to provide work for over 350 interns over the 5-year project, including young adults, undergraduates, and grad students. Includes short-term and long-term internships, with various skill types and levels (not just on-the-ground work but also planning/policy, etc.). He encouraged entities to consider needs they may have for interns.

*The next Regional Water Management Group meeting is scheduled for February 19, 2025, location TBD.*