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Receive an update on staff's participation in the Salinas Valley Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency's Advisory Committee.

RECOMMENDATION:

Receive an update on staff's participation in the Salinas Valley Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency's Advisory Committee.

SUMMARY/DISCUSSION:

Background

The Salinas Valley Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency (SVBGSA) has an Advisory Committee which plays a key role in shaping groundwater management in the Salinas Valley by providing input and consensus-based recommendations to the SVBGSA Board of Directors. The Advisory Committee reflects a broad range of perspectives, representing agencies and groundwater users across the region. Members collaborate to support the implementation of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act through the integrated execution of six Groundwater Sustainability Plans. The Monterey County Water Resources Agency (Agency) has a seat on the Advisory Committee and will provide periodic updates to the Agency BOD as it affects or is of interest to the Agency.

Summary

Staff participated in the Advisory Committee held on February 19, 2026. The significant topics were the Salinas Valley Integrated Hydrologic Model (SVIHM) and Seawater Intrusion Model (SWIM) 2025 Update, the Integrated Implementation Strategy (IIS) draft Chapters 1-2, and Understanding Seawater Intrusion: Management Options and Challenges.

The SVIHM and SWIM update provided an overview of these models including the purpose of each. The SVIHM is a regional scale model developed by the USGS for the Agency and SVBGSA that integrates the surface and groundwater components appropriate at that larger scale. The version of the SVIHM, that the SVBGSA is using, was updated on November 13, 2025, and the model files are publicly available. The SWIM was developed by Montgomery & Associates for the SVBGSA and is a more focused model at the northern end of the Salinas Valley. It was first published in 2023 and was updated on October 21, 2025, and those model files are also publicly available. The updates to the two models have provided valuable refinements but some challenges remain, especially modelling fractured granite in the Langley subbasin. These models will be used in determining Analyze effectiveness of the various Project and Management Actions (PMAs) described in the Groundwater Sustainability Plans (GSPs).

Next staff presented the beginning draft chapters of the IIS to support implementation of the six GSPs. The IIS is intended to serve as a practical implementation document that explains how the individual GSPs will be carried out together as a coordinated program across the Salinas Valley. The six subbasins are hydraulically connected and rely on the same local water supply. Actions taken in one subbasin can influence groundwater levels, seawater intrusion, recharge, and pumping conditions in adjacent areas. For this reason, implementation of the GSPs must occur in a coordinated manner even though the plans were adopted separately. The IIS is not a regulatory document and does not replace the GSPs. The GSPs remain the legally adopted management plans that establish sustainability criteria, monitoring requirements, and management actions for each subbasin. The IIS instead functions as an implementation roadmap. The committee had a robust discussion about the description of the IIS and the approach to this basin-wide implementation. This approach will need to be better understood moving forward.

The next verbal update was an overview of Understanding Seawater Intrusion: Management Options and Challenges. In short, seawater intrusion needs to be solved as early as 2040 and stopping pumping alone will not achieve the SGMA goals. The two top solutions are currently raising groundwater levels significantly or pumping seawater out. This helps frame the PMAs and how they should be analyzed. Finally, the group discussed content for upcoming meetings. Some of the PMAs will be presented to the committee in the coming months, which will likely start with on the Aquifer Storage and Recovery concept and the New Seawater Intrusion Project feasibility study.

Additional information related to the Advisory Committee can be found on the SVBGSA's website: <https://svbgsa.org/about-us/board-and-committees/advisory-committee/>

The next regular meeting is scheduled for April 16, 2026.

OTHER AGENCY INVOLVEMENT:
Salinas Valley Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency

FINANCING:
Staff participation on the SVBGSA's Advisory Committee can be covered with the existing staffing appropriations included in the FY2025-26 Adopted Budget and will not require any additional funding needs.

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