



WATER RESOURCES AGENCY

MEMORANDUM

Monterey County

DATE: January 15, 2026

TO: Board of Directors

FROM: Ara Azhderian

SUBJECT: January 20, 2026 General Manager's Report

Personnel:

First, I want to begin by congratulating Aaron Palomo, who was promoted to a Water Maintenance Worker 2 (from a 1) on January 10th. Aaron has been working with the Agency since December 2022, originally as a temporary worker, and has continued to improve his skills and obtain certifications qualifying him for this promotion. We deeply appreciate Aaron's willingness to learn and apply new skills for the benefit of himself and the Agency.

As for recruitments, the Agency has three currently underway: a Water Resources Engineer to help support the CSIP Program, for which the first applications screening will occur on January 23rd; a Water Maintenance Worker 2, for which the second round of interviews will be held January 15th; and a Senior Secretary, for which a candidate has been hired and will begin work on January 26th. Also, the proposed CSIP Program Manager classification/position has been developed and submitted to the County for review and approval for the FY2027 budget. This position will provide needed oversight and centralize program management to enhance efficacy through improved coordination amongst the various parties to sustain the success of the existing CSIP Program, and to explore the potential of its future expansion.

Lastly, we continue working on finalizing a scope of work with Gallagher Benefit Services, Inc for a Classification and Compensation Study. This is in response to a Request for Proposals for establishment of Comparable Agencies, Classification and Base Compensation Study and aligns with the desire for an updated approach to the Agency, as a special district, and not a County Department. We are aiming to begin this work in the next month or so.

Groundwater Monitoring Program:

Agency staff continue to work closely with the Salinas Valley Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency on outreach and education related to the well registration requirements in the Salinas Valley. Well registration will remain free through January 31, 2026, and we continue our efforts to spread the word before this opportunity passes. In late November, I did an interview with the County Information Office to explain the opportunity and importance of well registration, particularly for domestic wells that are most vulnerable to changes in groundwater. Additionally,

the SVBGSA has been developing and purchasing print and electronic media advertising on a variety of platforms. The interview can be seen at:

 [WRA News Briefing Segment 11.26.25.mp4](#)

Dam Safety & Operations Future Funding Strategy:

Late last year, Agency staff completed a summary description of various regulatory requirements that stem from the Agency's ownership and operation of its three dams to help inform preparation of a study by Vega Economics of the Agency's regulatory cost. The Regulatory Program Cost Study will be an important analysis of our key regulatory obligations and will help inform ongoing discussions about future cost allocation and recovery methods to support our dam safety and operation's needs. The summary generally focuses on known regulatory requirements related to the state and/or federal endangered species acts, clean water acts, water rights and dam safety standards. Vega Economics has experience in several practice areas including agriculture, data science and statistics, finance, and environmental and natural resources. Principal for the study will be Dr. Cai, who specializes in agricultural economics, macroeconomics, and finance. He has extensive experience in data analysis and model development for a variety of topics, including utility regulation and macroeconomic forecasting. Dr. Hamilton, Professor of Economics in the Orfalea College of Business at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, will also be retained for the study. His consulting engagements have included market analysis of regulated industries, economic feasibility studies, and environmental and land use regulation, including groundwater basin management. Following execution of a service agreement, we anticipate the study to be complete within a year.

Water Resources Advisory Committee:

In November, the Agency's Board of Directors voted to consolidate its Reservoir Operations Advisory Committee and Basin Management Advisory Committee into a new, single Water Resources Advisory Committee. The Agency is currently soliciting applications from members of the public with knowledge about water resources issues to serve on the WRAC. Appointments will be made by the Chair of the Board of Directors in February 2026. The first WRAC meeting is scheduled for February 26, 2026, at 1:30 p.m. Applications are due by January 30, 2026. For more information, please go to:

[Water Resources Advisory Committee | County of Monterey, CA](#)

Coordination with the Salinas Valley Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency:

The Agency continues to collaborate with the SVBGSA to identify and analyze a variety of water supply and diversion projects to help achieve defined groundwater sustainability objectives in the Salinas Valley. Over the next three months, this work will culminate in a number of studies, which are DWR grant deliverables, and presentations to both the SVBGSA and Agency Boards of Directors. One study, the Castroville & Eastside Canals and Alternatives Feasibility Study (C&E Study) has complete Phase 1, which evaluates water rights options, reviews historical documents, analyzes surface water availability, including Permit 11043, and identifies viable project components for potential diversion and conveyance systems. For more information on the C&E Study and to access the Phase 1 reports, please go to:

[Castroville and Eastside Canals and Alternatives – Salinas Valley Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency](#)