



County of Monterey

Item No.

Board Report

Board of Supervisors
Chambers
168 W. Alisal St., 1st Floor
Salinas, CA 93901

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Receive an update on staff's participation in the Salinas Valley Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency Advisory Committee. (Staff: Shaunna Murray)

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the Monterey County Water Resources Agency Board of Directors:

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 Advisory Committee roster is made up of six Subbasin Committee seats, the four Partner Agency seats, and up to three of the Board-Designated seats. Members collectively represent the diverse interests of groundwater users, partner agencies, and subbasin implementation areas. The Committee's charge emphasizes:

- Reviewing groundwater issues relevant to SGMA implementation in the Salinas Valley
- Developing consensus-based recommendations that incorporate community and stakeholder perspectives
- Supporting the Board by identifying areas of agreement and disagreement and presenting clear, well-considered options.

This work is based on a commitment to good faith deliberation, productive discussion, and respect for differing viewpoints. Committee members are expected to serve as effective advocates, collaborate with one another, and commit the time needed to understand complex and evolving issues. SGMA implementation in the Salinas Valley remains one of the most consequential long-term efforts in the region. The Advisory Committee plays a critical role in ensuring that decisions are informed by:

- A broad range of groundwater users and perspectives

- Subbasin-level knowledge and experience
- Community concerns, opportunities, and priorities
- Practical understanding of the regulatory and technical landscape

By design, the Advisory Committee is where difficult questions can be worked through in a collaborative environment that is accessible, open to the public, and protects the integrity of the process. The Advisory Committee's work helps the Board navigate the complex challenges of groundwater sustainability - balancing scientific information, legal requirements, diverse stakeholder needs, and real-world constraints. The Charter and Bylaws set expectations for how members are expected to approach discussions and decision making. The Advisory Committee works as a team, in an environment that values honesty, respect, open communication, and constructive problem-solving. This is echoed in the Agency's Code of Conduct, which calls for civility, integrity, and commitment to the common good.

The Advisory Committee is scheduled to meet the third Thursday of even months at 2 p.m., with additional special meetings throughout the year as needed.

The Advisory Committee members are as follows:

Horacio Amezcuita, Board Designated
John Huerta Jr., Board Designated
Kevin Pearcey, Board Designated
Adam Secondo, 180/400 Committee
Christopher Bunn, Eastside Committee
Allan Panziera , Forebay Aquifer Committee
Ryan Kelly, Langlely Committee
Robbie Long, Monterey Committee
Roger Moitoso, Upper Valley Committee
Curtis Weeks, Arroyo Seco Groundwater Sustainability Agency
Remleh Scherzinger, Marina Coast Water District
Shaunna Murray, Monterey County Water Resources Agency
Paul Sciuto, Monterey One Water

Summary

The Monterey County Water Resources Agency (Agency) Board of Supervisors nominated Shaunna Murray to be on the SVBGSA's Advisory Committee at their August 5, 2025 meeting. The SVBGSA made the Advisory Committee appointments on October 9, 2025. The Advisory Committee had been on hold for much of 2025 and picked back up at the end of 2025. There is an ambitious and aggressive schedule to make Project and Management Action (PMAs) recommendations to the SVBGSA Board of Directors in 2026, many of which may impact Agency existing and proposed projects and programs. Therefore, Agency staff will be providing regular updates to the Agency's Planning Committee and Board of Directors to keep the members and the public apprised of the progress the Advisory Committee is making.

The first meeting after the new Advisory Committee appointments was held on December 18, 2025. The meeting started with more administrative items such as committee member and staff introductions, adoption of the 2026 Committee Meeting Schedule and a review of the Advisory Committee Role and Responsibilities. The Charter and Bylaws, and Code of Conduct and additional information related to the Advisory Committee can be found on the SVBGSA's website here:

<https://svbgsa.org/about-us/board-and-committees/advisory-committee/>

Staff and consultants then presented items to help provide a common understanding of the scientific information related to the Salinas Valley Basin. First there was the Hydrologic Conceptual Model Update. This update included topics such as: What is HCM, Importance of HCM for SGMA and Groundwater Management, HCM in Salinas Valley, HCM Update Process, How does HCM inform Sustainable Groundwater Management. In general, the HCM is a simplified, generally qualitative understanding of the basin based on existing data and studies. The HCM identifies important hydrologic processes such as irrigation return flow and is foundational for quantitative work.

Next staff presented the Projects and Management Actions Major Efforts Update. The briefly described the various projects that are being studied that meet the SGMA goals, including to design projects and management actions to meet the measurable objectives. Those PMAs include: Aquifer Storage and Recovery (ASR) Feasibility Study, Brackish Groundwater Restoration (BGR) Feasibility Study /Seawater Intrusion Extraction Barrier, Demand Management Strategy, Deep Aquifers Management Strategy, Castroville Seawater Intrusion Project (CSIP) Optimization Studies, New Seawater Intrusion Project (NSIP) Feasibility Study, Castroville & Eastside (C&E) Canals and Alternatives Feasibility Study /Permit 11043. The road map to making a decision on moving any of the PMAs forward was also presented and is summarized below:

- Sustainable Groundwater Management (SGM) Grant Projects Update Reports in Spring 2026
- Funding Strategies TM for Board review in Spring 2026
- FY 2027 Work Plan for Board approval in March 2026
- FY 2027 Budget for Board approval in April 2026
- FY 2027 Fee for Board approval in May 2026
- Integrated Implementation Strategy for Board review in Summer 2026
- Selection of PMAs for Further Consideration: project level design, CEQA/NEPA, lead agency evaluations, funding explorations for Board approval in Fall 2026
- GSP 5-yr Periodic Evaluations for Board approval in November 2026

The consensus of the Advisory Committee was that there was significantly more information and time needed for the members to make progress, and therefore, an additional meeting was held on January 22, 2026 to continue to develop a common understanding of the Salinas Valley Basin. Staff and consultants presented an Overview of the Salinas Valley Hydrogeology which included a summary of the physical characteristics of the entire basin and dived into additional details for each subbasin. The key takeaways were:

- Salinas River is important for groundwater recharge
 - Reservoirs owned and operated by MCWRA

- The groundwater basin is hydraulically connected but to varying degrees
- Aquitards inhibit surficial recharge where they are in basin
 - Makes certain projects and management actions more challenging
- The conceptual view is scaled for the Valley, not individual projects
- We have good understanding of basin to move forward
 - Site specific projects will have more detailed understandings

SVBGSA staff and consultants then reviewed Sustainable Management Criteria and Current Conditions. They reviewed the six sustainability indicators: Lowering GW Levels, Reduction of Storage, Seawater Intrusion, Degraded Quality, Land Subsidence, and Surface Water Depletion. And provided context for the how those are measured, what the goal is (Measurable Objective), and what to avoid (Minimum Threshold). They then reviewed the 2024 data for each subbasin to give context on what the recent data is showing in relation to the Sustainable Management Criteria (SMC).

The next regular meeting of the Advisory Committee is scheduled for February 19, 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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