

PAJARO VALLEY COMMUNITY WATER DIALOGUE

PROGRESS REPORT | MAY 15, 2012



ISSUE AND BACKGROUND

The Pajaro Valley is an unusually valuable agricultural resource. Despite being the most northerly coastal valley in California, it is in many ways more mild than those to the south. While the primary crops have changed through the years and will likely continue to change, there is no doubt that as long as there is land and water available, the Pajaro Valley's extraordinary climate will be sought after for the production of important and highly valued crops.

The aquifer in the Pajaro Valley provides more than 90 percent of the water used by residents, businesses and farmers. However, a historic change in land use, coupled with urban expansion, has resulted in water being withdrawn from the aquifer faster than it can be replenished. This is causing damage to both the environment and agricultural productivity through coastal saltwater intrusion.

In response to this serious issue, a group of major landowners in the Valley created the Community Water Dialogue (CWD) in July 2010. Since its onset, the group has included a wide variety of stakeholders, including other landowners, growers, academics, nonprofits, rural residents, government representatives, and environmental leaders. Fifty to sixty members of this group have met quarterly since its formation. The issues surrounding water in the Pajaro Valley have been extraordinarily divisive over the past several decades. However, the solutions-based approach of the Community Water Dialogue has had the effect of uniting people around this common challenge and all of its members agree to the fundamental principles of the effort:

1. A commitment to protect the Pajaro Valley as an important agriculture resource
2. Recognition that the solution will not be an importation pipeline
3. A willingness to pursue diverse strategies which entail costs and sacrifices in order to bring our aquifer into balance

PURPOSE

The primary goal of the CWD is to address the imbalance of water supply and demand through individual and collaborative action to ensure agricultural viability in the Pajaro Valley. To achieve this goal the CWD's structure is broken into 5 different subgroups; a central Planning Committee, a Communications Committee, a Land Management and Irrigation Best Practices working group, an Aquifer Recharge working group, and a Big Projects working group.

COMMUNITY

The participants involved in the CWD represent the diversity of the Pajaro Valley community, with organizations such as Driscoll's Strawberry Associates, the Resource Conservation District of Santa Cruz County, Land Trust of Santa Cruz County, Community Alliance of Family Farmers, Reiter Affiliated Companies, Action Pajaro Valley, Watsonville Wetlands Watch, Pajaro Valley Water Management Agency, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Community Foundation of Santa Cruz County, Lakeside Organics, JE Farms, University of California Cooperative Extension, University of California at Santa Cruz, and the Ecological Farming Association.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- **Fostering Collaboration:** The CWD has been successful in getting groups who previously worked in isolation to come together and work collaboratively towards positive solutions. Tangible outcomes include successful collaborative projects, more engagement and a more open exchange between the community and the Pajaro Valley Water Management Agency (PVWMA).
- **Ensuring Broad Representation:** From the beginning, the CWD has had consistent involvement and support of 50-60 people from a broad variety of stakeholders.
- **Strengthening the PVWMA Relationship:** The Pajaro Valley Water Management Agency (PVWMA) sees CWD as a collaborator and forum for developing solutions. Input and participation from CWD members on the Ad hoc Basin Management Planning (BMP) Committee has guided PVWMA's long-term planning process.
- **Acting as a Knowledgeable Resource on Water Issues:** The CWD has established itself as the place to go to learn about water issues, and potential resources and solutions within the Valley.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS (cont)

- Implementing Successful Collaborative Projects: The CWD has launched its first collaborative projects to reduce water use through conservation and efficiency and to increase aquifer recharge:

WIRELESS IRRIGATION MONITORING NETWORK

Through the Land Management and Irrigation Best Practices working group the CWD developed the wireless irrigation network effort (Project WIN) to help growers improve irrigation efficiency. This project involves installation of soil tension probes and a network of communication towers to transfer data in real time to growers for improved irrigation decision-making. Early adopters are seeing 15-30% water savings with little or no yield loss. Creating this central network drastically reduces the investment required by growers, encouraging more widespread adoption of this technology. The RCDSCC is acting as central administrator of the network.

MANAGED AQUIFER RECHARGE

CWD partners have just completed construction on the first small scale “managed aquifer recharge” (MAR) pilot project designed to improve water supply, which includes Driscoll’s Strawberry Associates and Reiter Affiliated Companies, along with the Resource Conservation District of Santa Cruz County (RCDSCC), USDA - NRCS, the University of California at Santa Cruz (UCSC), California State University Monterey Bay (CSUMB), and landowners. Location-specific strategies were tested for routing runoff, minimizing siltation, cycling nutrients, and achieving other water quality benefits as excess surface flow (rainfall) is percolated into underlying aquifers. Monitoring and quantification of improvements (amount of water put into aquifers, benefits to water quality) are essential components of these projects.

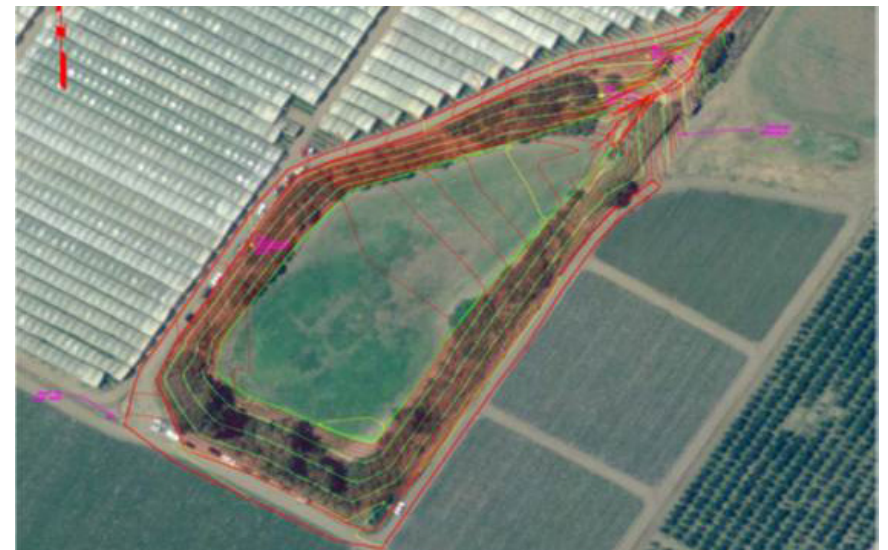
NEXT STEPS

During the next 18 months CWD will complete the following tasks and projects:

- Expand diversity and number of stakeholder participating in CWD
- Continue input into the Basin Management Plan revision
- Expand participation in the Wireless Irrigation Network (Project WIN)
- Increase educational opportunities in irrigation efficiency
- Expand number of recharge basin projects in the valley
- Investigate economics of aquifer overdraft
- Implement large scale infrastructure projects



Wireless Irrigation Monitoring Network



Managed Aquifer Recharge