

# Group focuses on drought solutions

Community Water Dialogue celebrates fifth year

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OF THE REGISTER-PAJARONIAN

**WATSONVILLE** — Five years ago, a group of Pajaro Valley landowners took it upon themselves to find ways to tackle aquifer overdraft.

They formed the Community Water Dialogue, and on Tuesday, the group updated an audience of about 40 on their recent accomplishments during a dinner and presentation at Pajaro Dunes.

Tuesday's event also marked the launch of the "Community Commitment for Groundwater," challenging agricultural landowners and others to create water conservation goals for them-

selves while sharing their strategies with others.

Jim Marshall of Watsonville-based Suncrest Nurseries said, among other things, the group was founded on the premise of bringing the overdrafted aquifer back into balance using new technologies.

"We need to find solutions that's not contentious about who did what to whom, but are focused on what we can do to utilize the ever-emerging technologies and opportunities," he said.

The group set up a number of ground rules that members are required to agree with.

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## DROUGHT

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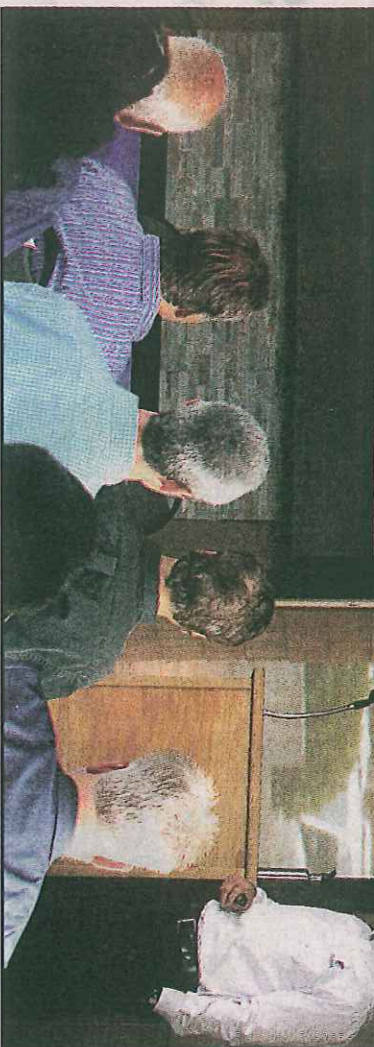
Among those, members must recognize that the solution is not an importation pipeline, and must be willing to pursue strategies that entail "costs and sacrifices" for the benefit of the aquifer.

The Community Water Dialogue helped implement the Wireless Irrigation Network, which boasts more than 60 ranches utilizing the technology. Tensiometers, flow meters and data loggers are available to growers to try out at a low cost through a loaner program by the Resource Conservation District of Santa Cruz County.

The technology allows growers to be more efficient on their irrigation decisions based on real-time soil moisture data. Erin McCarthy of the Central Coast Agricultural Water Quality Coalition said an incoming grant will allow the program to nearly double the amount of growers it can serve.

Thursday's meeting also featured an update on the state of the basin by Pajaro Valley Water Management Agency hydrologist Brian Lockwood.

According to Lockwood, from Oct. 1 to March 31, Watsonville received 18 inches of rain, and when coupled with the potential of an incoming



Hydrologist Brian Lockwood gives a presentation during the Community Water Dialogue meeting Tuesday at Pajaro Dunes.

Erik Chalhoub/Register-Pajaronian

El Niño, it has water officials optimistic.

"That's a good sign," he said. Regardless of whether the state receives a wet winter, Lockwood said more work needs to be done. Despite decreasing water use among 131 monitored wells across the Pajaro Valley in recent years, all but four of them have shown a reduction in groundwater, according to Lockwood.

Lockwood pointed to the

Basin Management Plan as one solution, which was approved by the PVWMA board in 2014. Through a series of projects, the plan, when fully implemented, aims to reduce groundwater over-pumping by 90 percent and halt seawater intrusion into the Pajaro Valley aquifer.

For information on the Community Water Dialogue, visit [www.communitywaterdialogue.org](http://www.communitywaterdialogue.org).