

## Planning Group Meeting Summary

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Held: September 14, 2018

Prepared by the Consensus Building Institute

### Meeting in Brief

The Monterey County Water Resource Agency (Agency) convened the second collaborative Planning Group meeting to develop the Salinas River Long-Term Management Plan (LTMP).

Attendees shared feedback on the draft list of LTMP Opportunities and Constraints, often noting constraints are also important opportunities (e.g., streamlining permitting, landowner partnerships, and addressing data gaps).

The Planning Group emphasized the importance of aligning multiple planning efforts (groundwater, storm water, etc.) to approach the Salinas Valley as one water system.

The Planning Group refined Stream Maintenance Program (SMP) and lagoon management preliminary management objectives and actions for the proposed LTMP.

For the SMP, discussion focused on understanding the SMP's accomplishments, lessons learned, and how the LTMP can help address challenges the SMP continues to face (e.g., data gaps, access, cost, and debris removal).

Feedback on the draft lagoon management underscored important issues such as enhancing the Old Salinas River capacity, improving fish passage, managing invasive species, supporting public access, monitoring/managing water quality, and finding multi-beneficial solution.

### Action Items

Planning Group	Sept 26	Send additional comments on the SMP and/or lagoon management memos to the Consultant Team or Agency LTMP Project Staff.
Tim Frahm	Late Sept	Develop draft LTMP stakeholders' problem statement.
Consultant Team	Mid Oct	Update LTMP list of opportunities and constraints, key permitting requirements summary, SMP memo, and lagoon management memo.
Project Team	Ongoing	Post meeting dates for upcoming working group meetings.

## General Updates

- The LTMP development may be extended to the end of February 2019.
- The draft LTMP Purpose and Goals document was updated per the previous Planning Group meeting (*refer to page 3 of the [meeting packet](#)*).

## LTMP Opportunities and Constraints

(Refer to page 4 of the [meeting packet](#) for the opportunities and constraints handout and view [key permitting requirements summary](#).)

Kathryn Gaffney, ICF and Consultant Team lead, shared the working draft of LTMP opportunities and constraints list. Attendees were also given a handout summarizing key permitting requirements (i.e., laws and regulations, related permits, responsible agency, triggers for the regulation/law, and other key information). Kathryn noted that related important laws/regulations such as the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act were not included in this summary handout because these do not have directly related permit requirements.

## Planning for Integration of Water Resources

Several Planning Group members underscored the need to align the LTMP with the various related planning efforts (e.g., groundwater and storm water) and approach water resources in the Salinas Valley as one integrated system. For instance, the planning efforts should aim to use the same or similar/translatable models and studies. Topic-specific working groups are currently meeting to help align different planning efforts and bring them all together. There was a request for the LTMP to outline the mechanics for coordinating ongoing and future alignment.

## Planning Group Recommendations

Meeting participants shared the following additional input.

### **Opportunities to add/edit**

- Engaging and building partnerships with landowners.
- Aligning the various regulations and simplifying the process (e.g., HCP and mitigation).
- Inclusivity of the LTMP development process.
- Coordination with other work happening concurrently (e.g., GSP development)

### **Constraints to add/edit**

- Clarify that the landownership constraint primarily refers to the logistical constraint to engage and work with so many private landowners.
- Addressing major data gaps and ability for data collection (due to access limitations, data collection costs, etc.).

### **Permit requirements summary**

- Add the National Marine Sanctuary, as it can exercise its authority should river conditions negatively impact the Monterey Bay Marine Sanctuary.
- Include public recovery plans for steelhead in the list of plans.

## **Stream Maintenance Program and the LTMP**

(View [presentation slides](#) and refer to pages 5-12 of the [meeting packet](#) for the stream maintenance memo.)

Shaunna Murray, Agency LTMP staff, presented an overview of the Salinas River stream maintenance history, activities, lessons learned to date, and future activities. A review of the SMP's effectiveness is underway (due in 2021 to permitting agencies). Abnormal conditions (e.g., recent severe drought and few major flow events) make evaluation a challenge at this point. Kathryn Gaffney directed participants to the Consultant Team's draft memo on stream maintenance, which includes background on the SMP, considerations for integrating with the LTMP, and potential LTMP management objectives and actions that will support and/or complement the SMP.

SMP participants, Agency staff, and consultant team members held a SMP Working Group meeting on August 22 to review and revise the draft memo content. ICF clarified the draft memos (lagoon management and SMP) are working documents that summarize the range of information and input the consultant team has gathered through working group meeting(s), Agency staff, etc. The list of attendees for working group meetings identify who participated in the meetings; it does not signify these attendees unanimously agree on all comments and suggestions in the memo.

**Opportunities for LTMP to address SMP constraints.** Individuals closely involved with the SMP explained challenges for the program are large data gaps, costs (permits, fees, inspections, monitoring, etc.), access (property ownership, scheduling/coordinating, reservoir management, agency approval, etc.), and ability to remove debris. An SMP participant/Planning Group member said it is too early to specify how the LTMP/Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) will help SMP implementation. One potential benefit is that an HCP permit agreement may require less site-specific monitoring, which is a substantial expense, since the agencies would have permitted the activities (e.g., no pre- and post- construction monitoring).

**Arundo removal.** Attendees raised arundo removal as an important issue several times during the discussion. Arundo removal is mitigation for certain SMP impacts, and the Resource Conservation District of Monterey County possesses separate permits to conduct a more comprehensive arundo removal program. Individual landowners can conduct mitigation on their own property or help pay for mitigation on another's property (mitigation banking). An SMP participant described the return of wildlife after removal and stated the need to achieve a more savannah-like, mosaic of habitats. An SMP participant/Planning Group member

reminded the group that arundo removal also takes several years and repeated treatments, and often requires pesticide treatments to be fully effective.

**Reservoir Management.** Several participants mentioned reservoir management and its relation to stream maintenance. A Planning Group member stated he expected the HCP to address reservoir management, which may affect future stream maintenance.

### Planning Group Feedback

Participants shared the following input specific to the SMP memo:

- **Objective SMP-2, Geographic framework for the LTMP.** Planning Group members expressed concern about expanding SMP activities (which focuses on flood risk) to more tributaries without sufficient knowledge of the program's effectiveness and potential impact on sensitive habitats. They supported expanding the SMP *framework* geographically to organize analytical components similarly to SMP's River Management Units. The intent is to better understand and analyze the river system more holistically and identify appropriate management actions (e.g., habitat restoration or recharge).
- **Objective SMP 3, Vegetation management program.** Attendees underscored the importance to work with the agencies to streamline permitting regulations and create an ongoing and efficient program, particularly in the context of on-going maintenance at sites already maintained once and the regulatory implications of on-going maintenance.
- **Objective SMP 4, Floodwater management program.** Incorporate intent to seek multi-benefits, not just focused on flood protection. Acknowledge that flow management, reservoir operations, etc. are dynamic and may change in the future.
- **Action SMP-10, Flow attenuation potential.** Specifically mention considering reintroduction of floodplains and increase recharge.
- **Protect / Enhance habitat.** Include an objective to protect sensitive habitat and enhancing passage for steelhead.
- **Spatial buffer.** A Planning Group member suggested including an SMP action for creating a 50-foot buffer for agricultural/operating lands and any maintained channel (primary or secondary), noting that scientific evidence points to the effectiveness of this buffer. Another Planning Group member acknowledged the importance of spatial buffers, but hesitated including that level of specificity for this document. The consultant team indicated various approaches and opportunities to address the need for buffers.

### Lagoon Management and the LTMP

(Refer to pages 13-25 of the [meeting packet](#).)

Kathryn Gaffney oriented the group to the Lagoon Management draft memo, which covered lagoon management background, current management issues, and potential management objectives and actions. Kathryn noted the draft list of proposed management objectives and actions were drawn from the existing Lagoon Management and Enhancement Plan and the outcomes of a Lagoon-focused working group. The goal of this meeting is to discuss these initial

management objectives and actions while also having the opportunity to expand or revise them.

A Lagoon Management Working Group meeting was held August 3, 2018, to contribute to the lagoon management draft memo for Planning Group discussion. Another working group meeting will occur (likely in November) to review the Planning Group's input.

The Central Coast Water Board (Water Board) indicated it generally supports breaching the lagoon as long as the need for breaching due to flooding of ag fields or infrastructure is first greatly reduced, the breach is good for water quality and the beneficial uses of water, and the breach occurs at a time that is prescribed in a well vetted Salinas Lagoon breaching management program developed with input from NMFS. In terms of increasing capacity of the OSR, the Water Board expressed a desire for a management program/schedule to sustain the increased capacity and aquatic wildlife refugia.

Participants suggested several minor edits (e.g., name corrections). Other input included:

- Research creation of secondary channel or widening the OSR to increase capacity and/or create refuge for fish and other aquatic species. Consider how to support fish passage through the slide gate.
- Investigate opportunities for habitat restoration and refugia in general.
- Examine marsh areas in the lagoon that historically flooded and investigate if there are physical impediments to flooding.
- Consider participating in the Marine Sanctuary's Water Quality Protection Program (name corrected) meetings as an opportunity to coordinate between the two efforts.

Input on specific objectives and actions in the memo:

- **Action LAG-2.** Need to redefine to recommend a study to identify the correct elevation.
- **Action LAG-4.** Concerns with the suggestion of levees here.
- **Action LAG-6, Sandbar management.** Strong support for this and clearly defining triggers for dredging.
- **Action LAG-7, Flood easements.** Consider other compensation methods such as acquiring flood-susceptible land, leasing land or exchanging for land upstream.
- **Action LAG-8, Upstream management.** A Planning Group member questioned whether this action is necessary under lagoon management.
- **Action LAG-10, Lagoon and OSR bathymetry.** A Planning Group member requested developing a management strategy for dredging the OSR.
- **Objective 2, Fish passage.** Include the importance of timing (e.g., align fish passage with migration).
- **Action LAG-17, Passage when sandbar is closed.** Include evaluation of the current condition and utility of the slide gates. Explore how to improve passage when the sandbar is closed (i.e., fish passage through the Old Salinas River).

- **Action LAG-19.** Clarify what’s meant by “restore.” Restore to what? Does this include creation?
- **Action LAG-22, Riparian habitat.** Include arundo and other invasive vegetation removal.
- **Action LAG-23, Fore dunes and dune scrub.** Enhance habitat to encourage natural sediment transport. Managers want the ability to remove ice plants (invasive), which does provide sand stabilization.
- **Action LAG-27, Sand retention and replenishment studies.** Investigate how the instream flows affect the transport of sand moving downstream. Consider how sand excavated under the SMP could be used for dune enhancement.
- **Action LAG-28, invasive species management plan.** Include research on life history for bass (e.g., explore opportunities to reduce bass spawning).
- **Actions LAG-29-31, Water quality programs and actions.** Investigate how water quality affects species before and after management actions, including in the lagoon before and after a breach.
- **Actions LAG-33 & LAG-35, Wildlife Refuge: hunting and recreational use.** Prioritize protecting wildlife during critical times of the year, but also support access when appropriate.

## Working Groups and Meeting Schedule

Planning Group members would like to be kept abreast of working group meetings in the future. The project team will likely ask for an RSVP to attend these meetings to make sure the room is large enough to accommodate participants.

- **Groundwater Sustainability.** Meeting October 2, 1:00-4:00
- **Lagoon Management.** To be determined, expected to occur in November.
- **Stream Maintenance Program.** To be determined whether another meeting is needed.

The group determined the following topics do not warrant separate working group meetings at this time:

- **Ag Waiver.** The Regional Board is holding a two-day meeting on the Ag Waiver. Shaunna Murray will attend. Since many Planning Group members are participating in the meeting, the group can decide after if a working group meeting is necessary.
- **Stormwater.** A public meeting on September 19 at Moss Landing Marine Labs will discuss the area’s stormwater plan as part of the Integrated Regional Water Management Program. Interested parties can attend the meeting and determine if a working group meeting is needed.
- **Regulations.** Two individuals expressed interest in a training session. The facilitator suggested holding space at the end of the next Planning Group meeting for those interested in learning more about the regulations; however, no one seemed that interested so the facilitator will not schedule this unless requested.
- **Flooding and Reservoir Management related to Fish Recovery.** The group decided not enough information currently exists to warrant a working group; they may revisit once

NOAA Fisheries releases the draft Biological Opinion. The consultant team plans to review the current recovery plan for potential action items and invites others to contact the team with other suggested objectives / actions.

### Next Steps

Consultant Team/Agency Staff will post upcoming Working Group meeting dates on the website.

## Stakeholder Engagement Charter

(Refer to pages 26-31 of the [meeting packet](#).)

The charter was updated per the previous Planning Group meeting. One Planning Group entity, the Central Coast Wetlands Group, will also serve on the Consultant Team. The Planning Group supported the Central Coast Wetlands Group remaining on the Planning Group.

A Planning Group member suggested the group collaboratively develop and agree on a statement describing the overarching challenges that have brought this diverse group of stakeholders together to seek multi-beneficial solutions. Tim Frahm will circulate a draft statement.

### Next Steps

Tim Frahm will draft an LTMP stakeholder statement.

## Next Steps

Planning Group members can send additional comments on the SMP and/or lagoon management memos to the Consultant Team or Agency LTMP Project Staff by **September 26**. A few Planning Group members submitted comments prior to the September 14 meeting; these will be incorporated into the revisions as well.

If interested in attending a future working group meeting, contact Stephanie Horii, CBI ([shorii@cbi.org](mailto:shorii@cbi.org)).

Upcoming Planning Group meetings:

- November 9 **16**, 9:30-12:00 (*note date change*)
- January 11, 9:30-12:00

## Meeting Materials

- [September 14 meeting materials packet](#)
- [Permitting requirements handout](#)
- [SMP presentation slides](#)