

Salinas Valley Water Coalition

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Dear Members and Friends

As we transition into the fiscal year 2023-2024, it is evident that the past year was bustling with activity, with the SVWC navigating numerous state and local challenges. We are excited to share our achievements, outline our future direction, and set goals for the upcoming year. It is essential to acknowledge that our accomplishments would not be possible without your continued support. A heartfelt thank you!

Our focus remains on finalizing the elements of the Settlement Agreement with Monterey County Water Resources Agency (MCWRA). This ensures the safeguarding of water rights for our members and every landowner in the Salinas Valley/River Groundwater Basin (SVRGB). Furthermore, we are advocating for procedures that direct the MCWRA in reservoir operations that benefit both the lands and fishery resources within the SVRGB.

Significant progress is evident. However, we are at the threshold of a new chapter as the MCWRA embarks on drafting a Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) for the Salinas River Basin. This HCP might reshape reservoir releases and the Interim Operations Plan. Our seat at the table, both on the HCP's Stakeholder Planning Committee and the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), underscores our commitment to ensuring your concerns are voiced and addressed. We anticipate a 3 to 5-year timeline for the HCP's completion, and throughout, we pledge to continue to rely on science and law as the foundation for our positions.

SGMA

The Coalition has actively engaged in the SGMA processes, notably in the formation of the Salinas Valley Groundwater Sustainability Agency and the Arroyo Seco GSA. Our Board members' participation across various SVBGSA and ASGSA committees has enabled extensive input into the subbasin GSP development. It is noteworthy that the DWR approved all the GSPs this year, a testament to collective efforts. Your engagement is pivotal to the GSP's foundation.

With GSPs now ratified by the DWR, our focus shifts to implementing relevant management actions and/or projects as appropriate and needed. As the GSAs progress, the Coalition remains vigilant, ensuring participation in meetings, GSP Implementation Committees, Board gatherings, Advisory sessions, and workshops. Notably, our hydrologist is an active member of the Technical Advisory Committee, ensuring that SVWC members' interests are well-represented. Your feedback is invaluable, and we encourage it. We are also working on organizing more workshops for increased dialogue on pressing issues.

Regarding GSA Fees, our advocacy led to a tiered fee structure's introduction. This ensures that only subbasins benefitting from a particular program/action will bear the costs proportionately, promoting fairness across Salinas Valley SubBasins. While the current tier allocations may not be flawless, it is a significant step towards ensuring cost equity. Following a decisive 10-1 vote in favor, the SVBGSA Board agreed to continue to review and refine the tier allocations as appropriate. Congratulations to all on this accomplishment!

OTHER

The SVWC remains vigilant, closely monitoring both MCWRA's and GSA's initiatives, encompassing reservoir maintenance, funding, the Interlake Tunnel Project, and their alignment with MCWRA programs. In collaboration, we have established a subcommittee, aligning with the Salinas Basin Water Alliance's subcommittee, to jointly address mutual concerns. United, our voice in agriculture is formidable.

Our collective achievements include:

- **Reservoir Maintenance:** With a focused approach on deferred maintenance funding for the two MCWRA reservoirs, we enlisted a lobbying group. Collaborative efforts with the Alliance and MCWRA's new GM, Ara Azhderian, have yielded results. We have secured the State Legislature's approval to repurpose a \$17 million grant initially

Mission Statement: The water resources of the Salinas River Basin should be managed properly in a manner that promotes fairness and equity to all landowners within the basin. The management of these resources should have a scientific basis, comply with all laws and regulations, and promote the accountability of the governing agencies.

intended for the Interlake Tunnel Project. Of this, \$3 million is designated for the design phase of the San Antonio spillway replacement, with the remaining \$14 million for Nacimiento's plunge pool repairs. This legislative success underscores the impact of collaborative efforts.

- **SVBGSA & Demand Management:** The SVBGSA is initiating its Demand Management program, to be developed and implemented for individual subbasin needs. The SVBGSA will start this endeavor with the 180/400 Aquifer Subbasin, as it is the one critically overdrafted subbasin in the Salinas Valley and their GSP requires them to develop this program. They have also received grant funding for it. The Coalition's focus remains on ensuring program consistency with respective Subbasin GSPs and that any management action and/or project/program is developed consistent with the individual GSP as applicable. It is essential to highlight that while the Upper Valley and Forebay GSPs deem their respective subbasins sustainable, while other GSPs might require Demand Management intervention.
- **Inter-subbasin Inflow Modeling:** Our subcommittee and the Alliance have emphasized the significance of understanding inter-subbasin water flows. Addressing this gap, we have collaborated with the SVBGSA to develop a comprehensive model using their USGS framework. Both the Coalition and the Alliance are financially supporting this initiative, with the model's completion cost incorporated into this fiscal year's Coalition budget.
- **Updated Historical Benefits Analysis (HBA):** The MCWRA is updating the 1998 HBA to incorporate newer operations like CSIP and SVWP. We have actively engaged with Agency staff to provide insights on the update process, which is anticipated to span 2-3 years. Continuous engagement is on the agenda to ensure the update remains progressive and that our concerns are appropriately addressed.
- **Lastly, your voluntary membership and contributions are the backbone of our endeavors and are deeply valued.**

Keith Roberts, our long-standing Chair, recently retired. In his stead, the Coalition Board has chosen Brad Rice as the new Chair. We are deeply grateful for Keith's dedicated service and warmly welcome Brad's leadership.

For any inquiries or further details, please reach out to Nancy at (831-224-2879, nisakson@mbay.net) or contact any of our Board members.

***We thank you for your support ~ it is greatly appreciated!
Your Salinas Valley Water Coalition Board***

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