



California Regional Water Quality Control Board Central Coast Region



Linda S. Adams
*Acting Secretary for
Environmental Protection*

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Edmund G. Brown Jr.
Governor

July 5, 2011

Mary Bannister
General Manager
Pajaro Valley Water Management Agency
36 Brennan Street
Watsonville, CA 95076

Dear Ms. Bannister:

SEAWATER INTRUSION IN THE PAJARO GROUNDWATER BASIN

On March 16, 2011, Harvey Packard of my staff and I met with Brian Lockwood of your staff in your office in Watsonville. We appreciate Mr. Lockwood's willingness to spend time with us to describe the efforts your agency is making to resolve the serious seawater intrusion problems facing the Pajaro valley area.

Our discussion was very informative and we are impressed with the progress you have made using a variety of projects and methods. However, it seems evident that the currently implemented and planned projects will not be enough to reverse the current trend of increasing intrusion.

Seawater intrusion of coastal aquifers is a serious problem in the Central Coast Region. Once an aquifer is degraded by salts, restoring water quality can be very difficult. Finding solutions to this severe water quality problem is a priority of the Central Coast Water Board.

In our conversation with Mr. Lockwood, he said that he was not aware of efforts by your agency to improve irrigation efficiency in the Pajaro valley. In our view, this is an area that could potentially lead to significant groundwater pumping reductions. You are probably aware of the Delta Watermaster's report earlier this year that concluded that inefficient water use is an unreasonable water use¹. I haven't jumped to the conclusion that irrigation in the Pajaro valley is generally inefficient, but I do think that some operations can improve their efficiency. The basin's water balance can be improved through capital improvement projects to "create new water," and through conservation.

¹ *The Reasonable Use Doctrine & Agricultural Water Efficiency*, Craig M. Wilson, Delta Watermaster, January 19, 2011

Conservation measures, including irrigation efficiency improvements, are typically much less expensive per acre foot than “new water” projects. During our meeting we discussed some rough estimates, considering the amount of irrigation in the watershed, and it appears that this less costly method also has the potential for filling the water balance gap that would still exist in the Pajaro Basin even if all your currently envisioned projects are successful. Your agency should evaluate irrigation practices (or have them evaluated) to determine where and how improvements can be made.

Another issue we raised at the meeting was your agency’s authority to require pumping reductions. According to our reading of your implementing authority, you clearly have that authority. The basin is being over drafted by pumping, and seawater is gradually destroying more and more of your basin’s groundwater. At what point will your agency be willing to wield that authority to preserve water quality and the long-term sustainability of the aquifer?

The State Water Resources Control Board strongly supports and goes to great lengths to encourage local solutions to these types of groundwater problems. The Central Coast Water Board takes the same approach. However, the State Water Board has the authority and the responsibility to intervene in these matters (which includes its jurisdiction to adjudicate pumping in the basin) when the local agency is unwilling or unable to develop and put in place solutions that solve the problem. Consequently, we would like to continue this conversation with you and to progress toward active steps to halt intrusion. We can discuss this issue at one of our board workshops. Please let me know if your agency would be willing to update the Central Coast Water Board regarding your activities at its regularly scheduled meeting in Watsonville in December 2011. In the meantime, please respond to me to further discuss these issues and potential solutions (preferably through discussion, but in writing if you prefer) at **(805) 549-3140 or rbriggs@waterboards.ca.gov.**

Sincerely,



Roger W. Briggs
Executive Officer

c: Tom Howard, Executive Director, State Water Resources Control Board

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