

**STATE OF CALIFORNIA
REGIONAL WATER QUALITY CONTROL BOARD
CENTRAL COAST REGION**

STAFF REPORT FOR REGULAR MEETING OF JUNE 28-29, 2018

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ITEM NUMBER: 17

SUBJECT: Building Environmental Justice Capacity in the Central Coast Region

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KEY INFORMATION:

Location: Region-Wide
This Action: Informational

SUMMARY

This informational item updates the Central Coast Water Board on staff's efforts to increase environmental justice (EJ) capacity in the region, thereby improving support to disadvantaged communities (DACs). DACs generally lack the necessary technical, managerial, and financial (often referred to as TMF) resources and capacity to identify, fund, and implement solutions that will effectively address their drinking water and wastewater issues. Staff highlighted this lack of EJ and TMF capacity as part of the February 2018 board meeting discussion on Greater Monterey County IRWM Integrated Plan to Address Salinas Valley Disadvantaged Communities, in Watsonville. This item updates the Board on our progress towards a long-term and stable EJ capacity solution.

BACKGROUND

The lack of reliable drinking water and wastewater systems is severe and widespread in rural portions of the Salinas Valley and other areas of the Central Coast. Domestic well owners, schools and small communities, with an emphasis on DACs, are subject to a disproportionately high share of the health risks, environmental impacts, and financial burden associated such problems.

In addition, there is also a severe lack of local EJ service capacity to assist DACs to address these problems in the region. Over the last several years, local EJ organizations have continuously struggled with fluctuating levels of staff resources, expertise, and capacity available to implement solutions effectively in the long term.

Consistent with the State and Regional Water Board's EJ goals and Central Coast Water Board's Human Right to Water Resolution No. R3-2017-0004¹, staff is working toward increasing regional EJ service capacity by partnering with a local EJ organization that has demonstrated long-term success in the following areas:

- Leveraging funding to ensure long-term safe and affordable water drinking water systems;
- Building strong foundations for community outreach/engagement and leadership;
- Assisting DACs to increase localized TMF capacity to effectively implement sustainable drinking water and wastewater solutions; and
- Providing continuous local presence and stability to ensure long-term organizational capacity to coordinate with partners and effectively support DACs.

The goal is to establish a continuous, long-term, local presence to provide support and increase assistance capacity for low-income residents and DACs in the Central Coast that face drinking water challenges. This assistance will help DACs to engage with funding, assistance, planning and regulatory programs relevant to securing reliable, safe and affordable drinking water. Partnering with a stable and effective local EJ organization will help to ensure that DACs with unsafe drinking water quality or inadequate supply, or inadequate technical, managerial, and financial capacity, will be receive the necessary assistance to secure the human right to water. Similarly, the EJ organization will provide TMF support for wastewater projects in cases where systems are inadequate or failing, such that water supplies and quality are protected.

This proposed local EJ organization would also coordinate with existing local EJ leaders, consultants and partner organizations to leverage funding and in-kind services, establish grants, implement projects, and build long-term relationships among public agency, non-profit, and private organizations to resolve the drinking water and wastewater problems in DACs. Additionally, the EJ organization would be expected to engage DACs and local partners to actively participate in existing safe drinking water and water quality-focused programs and projects including, but not limited to replacement water programs, virtual and physical drinking water consolidation projects, source water and wellhead protection programs, sustainable groundwater management act (SGMA) activities, and Central Coast Ambient Monitoring Program – Groundwater Assessment and Protection (CCAMP-GAP) projects such as local domestic well testing programs.

Community Water Center – Lessons Learned from the Central Valley

The Community Water Center (CWC) is an example of a local EJ organization that provides EJ service capacity in the Central Valley Region. CWC was founded in 2006 to develop and support community-driven solutions to address the ongoing drinking water problems of California's San Joaquin Valley communities. CWC's vision is that all communities have access to safe, clean, and affordable water and their mission is to act as a catalyst for community-driven water solutions through organizing, education, and advocacy.

CWC believes that those who are the most impacted by drinking water issues must be the drivers for advocating for change and developing solutions. CWC's core programs are based upon a working model designed to address the root causes for unsafe drinking water systems

¹ Resolution No. R3-2017-0004 Adopting the Human Right to Water as a Core Value and Directing Its Implementation in Central Coast Water Board Programs and Activities
https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/centralcoast/board_decisions/adopted_orders/2017/2017-0004_hrtw_fnl.pdf

and associated groundwater contamination issues holistically. These core programs are also intended to be mutually reinforcing. CWC's three core programs are: 1) Building community power and engaged leadership, 2) Safe and affordable drinking water solutions, and 3) Protecting groundwater. Effective implementation of these programs results in diverse and engaged community leadership, adequate infrastructure, sufficient TMF capacity of water providers and groundwater quality and supplies that are protected.

CWC has a successful history of coordinating with local partners, and convenes a grassroots coalition of 24 low-income communities, 11 allied organizations and more than 190 members and supporters, dedicated to securing safe, clean and affordable drinking water in California's San Joaquin Valley. CWC has also supported 22 community residents, most of them low-income people of color, to serve in formal leadership roles and has provided direct technical assistance to local communities to develop and successfully implement drinking water solutions. Current efforts include a regional drinking water supply system consolidation project of five communities in Northern Tulare County.

In addition, CWC has successfully obtained funding for local DACs and helped to appropriate \$696 million of water project-specific money within the 2014 Proposition 1 Water Bond to meet the needs of DACs, including the creation of more than \$78 million for a multi-disciplinary technical assistance program through a new Office of Sustainable Water Solutions.

As part of this item, CWC will provide a brief presentation detailing their local experience supporting safe water interests for EJ and DACs in the Central Valley. For more information about CWC, go to their website at <https://www.communitywatercenter.org/>.

NEXT STEPS

Central Coast Water Board staff is moving forward in solving the regional EJ and TMF capacity issues by developing a description of the tasks, services, and necessary qualifications required for such an organization, and expects to release a Request for Proposals (RFP) by June 20, 2018. The Executive Officer plans to allocate CCAMP-GAP funding and establish a contract to support an EJ organization that can maintain a local presence and successfully build capacity to serve the Central Coast DACs in securing safe drinking water and wastewater solutions. This planned action is consistent with the State Water Board's Supplemental Environmental Project Policy² and both the Central Coast Water Board's Human Right to Water resolution and the CCAMP-GAP charter (Resolution No. R3-2012-0024³). Staff will continue to update the Central Coast Water Board on the status and progress towards contracting with an organization to solve the EJ and TMF capacity issues in the Central Coast region.

²State Water Resources Control Board Policy on Supplemental Environmental Projects
https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/enforcement/docs/seps/20180503_sep_policy_a.md.pdf

³Resolution No. R3-2012-0024, Funding for the Central Coast Ambient Monitoring Program—Groundwater Protection Program, and Special Projects
https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/centralcoast/water_issues/programs/gap/docs/res_r3-2012-0024_final.pdf