PAJARO VALLEY MLRP
Multibenefit Land Repurposing Program

PV MLRP Plan Information & FAQs

Resources for the draft Plan public comment period

Background Information

PV Water has released the public review draft of the Pajaro Valley Multibenefit Agricultural Land Repurposing Plan (the PV MLRP Plan). Growers, community members, and all interested parties are invited to comment on the Plan through Friday, November 6, 2026.

Visit the PV Water MLRP web page to:

1. View and download the draft PV MLRP Plan
2. Find a schedule of public meetings
3. Submit comments via the public comment form
4. Connect with PV Water staff via email or phone

Link: pvwater.org/pajaro-valley-mlrp

Information and materials in Spanish are available on request. / ***Hay información y materiales disponibles en español.*** Email mendiola@pvwater.org**. /** *Para solicitarlos, escriba a mendiola@pvwater.org.*

FAQs

1. What is the PV MLRP Plan?

The Plan describes how PV Water and its partners will steward state funds to implement future multibenefit projects in the Pajaro Valley. Projects funded through the California Department of Conservation's Multibenefit Land Repurposing Program (MLRP) support voluntary transitions of marginal agricultural lands to reduce groundwater demand while providing other benefits for the valley, such as flood protection, habitat, water supply, and open space. The Plan outlines how regional partners have worked together under the current MLRP block grant to implement six initial projects, and it sets the priorities and selection process for bringing forward additional project concepts in future funding rounds.

2. Does the Plan require anyone to retire or stop farming land?

No. The Plan is a framework for voluntary projects with willing landowners and partners. It is not a mandate to retire land, not a list of parcels, and not a regulatory document. All six current projects are on flood-prone, seawater-affected, or otherwise marginal ground; none takes prime farmland out of production. Keeping agriculture viable is one of the Plan's five regional priorities and is scored in future project selection.

3. What kinds of projects does MLRP fund, and what are the regional priorities?

MLRP funds voluntary transitions of irrigated farmland to uses that use less groundwater, such as habitat restoration, groundwater recharge, floodplain and wetland projects, lower-water crops, dryland farming, parks and open space, and tribal land uses, while providing other benefits for the valley. To be eligible, water use on the project land must be reduced, and additional co-benefits must be created. Projects are evaluated according to five regional priorities, which were developed with input from the community and the Steering Committee. The five priorities are groundwater and water supply (weighted most heavily), flood risk reduction for disadvantaged communities, parks and open space, native habitat, and agricultural viability.

4. How are project ideas brought forward and selected for funding?

The Plan outlines how PV Water works with regional partners to help identify and steward project ideas for future funding consideration. Once a new funding round becomes available, PV Water may bring forward implementation-ready projects that fit the Plan, open an intake window for project applications, or both. Any interested party with a project concept should work with a PV MLRP partner to bring a project idea forward for consideration. Whichever path is taken, all projects must pass an eligibility screen and be scored by a scoring group of PV Water and program partners. PV Water then selects a portfolio of projects using the scoring and selection process outlined in the Plan, so that the portfolio as a whole aligns with the regional priorities. Projects are funded only after the California Department of Conservation reviews and approves them. PV MLRP partners include the Land Trust of Santa Cruz County, the Resource Conservation District of Santa Cruz County, Watsonville Wetlands Watch, and the Pajaro Regional Flood Management Agency, working with PV Water as the block grantee. Proposition 4 funding guidelines will be finalized in 2027 for the next round of MLRP funding. Proposition 4 will put additional requirements on funding, for example the funds need to go toward implementation and 40% of the funds need to be use for disadvantaged communities.

5. What does MLRP funding cover?

MLRP can pay the costs associated with project development and implementation. Eligible costs include planning and design, permitting, construction, monitoring, and operations and maintenance over the project term. The program can also pay for conservation easements and voluntary land purchases. Project funding is contracted through PV Water and is administered as a reimbursement grant based on invoices and receipts for approved budget items. Most projects combine MLRP with other funding sources. Every project must change how irrigated agricultural land is used in a way that reduces water use and creates additional benefits. Irrigation efficiency upgrades on their own do not qualify. The Plan describes eligible project actions and costs in more detail.

6. How does the Plan address community interests?

Community interests are built into the Plan in three places: what it prioritizes, how it scores projects, and how it fosters community engagement and participation. Two of the five regional priorities come directly from community input: reducing flood risk for disadvantaged communities, and expanding access to parks, trails, and community gardens in and near Watsonville and Pajaro. Those priorities came out of a bilingual community survey, community events, and other outreach through partner organizations. In the Plan's Scoring Guide, benefits to disadvantaged communities are their own category, so a project that addresses flood risk or creates opportunities for public open space earns additional points. Under Proposition 4, at least 40 percent of future statewide MLRP funds must provide direct benefits to disadvantaged communities. The Plan also commits the program to continued bilingual outreach and community engagement as projects are developed.

7. How was the Plan developed, and how will public comments be used?

The Plan was developed through a year-long inclusive planning process required by the California Department of Conservation, including a series of Steering Committee workshops, a bilingual community survey, community events, one-on-one meetings with community groups, growers and partners, and tribal input sessions. Public comments are open through November 6, 2026. After that, PV Water will review comments, prepare a summary of what was received and how it was addressed, and revise the Plan as needed. The Steering Committee will then review the final draft, and PV Water will submit the final Plan to the California Department of Conservation for approval. The approved Plan will then guides how the PV MLRP will be administered moving forward, including the selection and funding of future projects.

8. What were the initial projects funded under the current block grant?

The current $8.89 million block grant funded six projects, each led by PV Water or a program partner and each on flood-prone, seawater-affected, or otherwise marginal ground. The projects are:

- **Pajaro Estuary Restoration Initiative (Land Trust of Santa Cruz County**): restores about 50 acres of farmland in the Pajaro River estuary to wetland habitat, reducing groundwater use and the damage sea level rise would cause to nearby infrastructure.
- **College Lake Water Supply Project (PV Water):** repurposes 136 acres for water supply storage and delivery, providing approximately 1,800 to 2,300 acre-feet of surface water a year in place of groundwater pumping.
- **Farmer-Led Land Transitions (Land Trust of Santa Cruz County):** establishes conservation easements with willing landowners on flood-prone, marginal farmland, keeping open space and reducing groundwater demand.
- **Managed Stormwater Recharge Net Metering plus Restoration Project (Resource Conservation District of Santa Cruz County):** develops recharge basins on a few acres of farmland, with habitat alongside and water bill rebates to the landowner for measured recharge.
- **Pajaro River Confluence Restoration (Pajaro Regional Flood Management Agency):** adds flood capacity and restores river function on about 30 acres where Salsipuedes Creek meets the Pajaro River.
- **Mini Ranch Watsonville Slough (Land Trust of Santa Cruz County):** acquires about 62 acres along the Watsonville Slough, with about 40 acres of flood-prone farmland restored to coastal wetland, strengthening flood protection for the City of Watsonville.

9. How do I get answers to questions not addressed in this FAQ?

If you have questions, please contact Marcus Mendiola by email at mendiola@pvwater.org or by phone at 831-291-1037.