

## ***Report: Water usage decreasing***

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WATSONVILLE — A wet winter has slightly helped the Pajaro Valley's water situation, but the continued over-pumping of aquifers and seawater intrusion remain significant issues.

Brian Lockwood, interim general manager of the Pajaro Valley Water Management Agency, gave an update on the Pajaro Valley Groundwater Basin during a meeting of the Community Water Dialogue on Thursday.

Heavy rains in January and February gave the Pajaro Valley a wetter-than-average winter, with just under 35 inches of rain recorded as of March 15, according to Lockwood, exceeding the average of 21.8 inches.

"We are way above the historical average," he said.

As a result, wells in the area have seen some slight improvement. Lockwood noted that of the nearly 150 wells monitored from 2011-2015, their water level had decreased about five feet. From 2015-2016, the monitored wells gained an average of a foot of water, he said.

"That's a good sign," Lockwood said.

Also promising is the downward trend of water usage in the valley, with pumping decreasing every year since 2013. Groundwater pumping is at 52,000 acre-feet per year, according to Lockwood, still above the agency's goal of 50,000 acre-feet per year.

To help combat over-pumping, the PVWMA is planning a number of projects, including the College Lake Inland Pipeline project, which would yield approximately 2,400 acre-feet per year of water that currently is pumped out of the lake and ends up in the Monterey Bay. In addition, recharge basins that would divert storm water runoff from the Watsonville Slough is estimated to yield 1,200 acre-feet per year.

The agency is also nearing completion of its 1.5 million gallon water storage tank at the Watsonville Water Resources Center.

The Community Water Dialogue was formed in 2010, a group of landowners, growers, residents and others that focus on ways to balance water supply and demand in the

Pajaro Valley.

Thursday's meeting also included an update on the PVWMA's Fallowed Land Incentive Program, a pilot program that pays growers \$1,000 per acre to fallow their land for the season. The deadline for growers to apply passed in January.

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California Gov. Jerry Brown declared an end to the state's drought emergency on Friday.

Lifting the order is a largely symbolic measure that doesn't remove most of the restrictions. Officials insisted they're holding onto some conservation rules for the 40 million residents of the nation's most populous state.

Cities and water districts throughout the state will be required to continue reporting their water use each month, said the governor's order, which also bans wasteful practices, such as hosing off sidewalks and running sprinklers when it rains.

Brown declared the emergency in 2014, and officials later ordered mandatory conservation for the first time in state history.

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The Associated Press contributed to this article.