



College Lake Integrated Resources Management Project

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Why is PV Water pursuing the College Lake Project?

A: The California Department of Water Resources (DWR) has identified Pajaro Valley as a high priority, critically overdrafted groundwater basin. The long-term effects of overdraft have caused groundwater elevations to drop below sea level leading to seawater intrusion, groundwater storage depletion and degraded water quality. As a result, there is [seawater contamination of groundwater three miles inland](#). This situation is an immediate and long-term threat to our Valley. The Sustainable Groundwater Management Act requires that critically overdrafted groundwater basins such as ours be brought into balance by 2040; otherwise, the State will intervene and may impose pumping restrictions to bring the basin into balance.

For three decades, the community has considered College Lake as a potential new source of water for the Valley. From 2012-2014, a group of community members, [PV Water staff and engineers evaluated 44 potential solutions](#) to solving critical overdraft and College Lake rated highly out of the 44 options considered. The College Lake Project made the top of the list for its ability to supply the most amount of water at the lowest cost per acre-foot. The College Lake Project has an approved Water Right Permit for up to 3,000 acre-feet per year, with models showing that on average 1,800 to 2,300-acre feet per year will be typical for Coastal Distribution System deliveries.

Q: What are the components for the College Lake Project?

A: The College Lake Project consists of the following components:

- 1) College Lake
- 2) Weir Structure with Fish Passage and Screened Intake Facility
- 3) College Lake Water Treatment Plant
- 4) College Lake Pipeline: This approximately 6 mile pipeline is 30 inch High-Density Polyethylene Pipeline (HDPE) connects the College Lake Water Treatment Plant to the Coastal Distribution System Pipeline near the City of Watsonville Wastewater Treatment Plant and Recycled Water Facility. The pipeline is in roadways and agricultural fields.

Q: How will the College Lake Project help the Valley?

A: College Lake is an optimal Project within the Pajaro Valley to store, treat and deliver water for irrigation use in the spring and summer, providing an alternative supply to groundwater pumping. This is called in-lieu recharge

– the process of using a supplemental surface water supply to protect similar amounts of groundwater that otherwise would be pumped from the ground. Reducing and replacing groundwater pumping is a critical step toward eliminating overdraft. Hydrologic modeling along with [independent research from Stanford](#) has shown that reducing pumping in the coastal region is an effective way to stop seawater intrusion.

The College Lake Project has secondary benefits as well. The Project would create a fish passage structure which would allow movement of fish into and out of College Lake. Currently fish do not have passage through College Lake, which further impacts endangered Steelhead fish.

College Lake water is of higher quality than groundwater and recycled water. College Lake water will improve water quality through [PV Water's Coastal Distribution System](#) that delivers alternative water supplies to farms along the coast from Monterey Bay Academy to Moss Landing, west of Hwy 1 and San Andreas Rd in both Santa Cruz and Monterey Counties. The additional water that is delivered reduces pumping along the coast, reducing overdraft and seawater intrusion.

Q: What does this mean for me individually?

A: This is a major Project to benefit the entire Pajaro Valley. Construction will be noticeable for Valley residents for about a year and a half. Contractors will do their best to minimize community impacts and we appreciate your patience during construction of this Project.

Q: Do I need to do anything now?

A: We encourage you to attend [PV Water Board meetings](#) (typically occur the third Wednesday of each month starting at 7:00 PM) to learn more about this [community-developed Basin Management Plan](#), [College Lake Project](#), and other PV Water business. PV Water Board and Staff want to hear your comments and questions. You can email or call PV Water at info@pvwater.org or 831-722-9292.

Q: What is the status of this College Lake Project? When does construction start?

A: The PV Water Board certified the Final Environmental Impact Report (EIR) and approved the College Lake Project in October 2019. The State Water Board approved the Water Right Permit in December of 2021. Additional permitting is ongoing for the Project. The Final Project design was completed in summer 2022. When the engineering and permitting phases are completed, the Project will move into construction bidding therefore start the construction phase. Currently the construction phase is scheduled to start in the Spring of 2023.

Q: What are the next steps for the College Lake Project?

A: PV Water is in the process of acquiring property rights to the College Lake basin and temporary construction easements and permanent easements along the College Lake Pipeline alignment. PV Water is continuing to work with government agencies for permit and approvals for the Project.

Q: What streets will be affected by Construction?

A: Construction will have traffic control impacts on the following streets: Holohan Road, Highway 152 at College Road, College Road, Lakeview Drive, Highway 129 from west of Lakeview Drive to Sakata Lane and side streets, Judd Road, and Lee Road.

Q: What are the anticipated costs of the College Lake Project?

A: The anticipated construction cost is ~\$68 million for the project. PV Water is actively pursuing grant opportunities to reduce the local cost of the Project. PV Water has received \$7.6 Million from the CA Department of Water Resources (DWR).

Q: Why not take College Lake water further downstream in the Pajaro River before diverting it into a pipeline?

A: PV Water's team of engineers and environmental scientists evaluated this option. The conclusion was this was a higher cost option with more permitting uncertainty. Land values are higher near the coast and PV Water would be required to build more infrastructure, like two weirs instead of one at College Lake. Additionally, there would be higher ongoing maintenance costs for two weirs and additional environmental monitoring. Building a weir in the main stem of the Pajaro River would have a greater impact on sediment accumulation and fish species mobility. This would make the Project harder to permit and harder to construct.

Q: Why is the pipeline going through town and did you consider other alignments?

A: The pipeline needs to connect the College Lake Water Treatment Plant (north of town) to the Coastal Distribution System near the City of Watsonville's Water Resource Center (south west of town near the coast). There is not one single easy way to get through the City of Watsonville. PV Water's engineering team provided a pipeline alignment that keeps the pipeline in roadways and agricultural fields where possible. There were several alternatives evaluated for routing the pipeline through the center of town. The Pipeline alignment chosen will provide faster construction and less impacts to the community. Approximately 2.3 miles of the 6 miles of pipeline go through the City of Watsonville. The remaining portion of the pipeline is in agricultural land.

Q: Did PV Water consider locating the College Lake pipeline in the Pajaro River, on the river levee, or as part of USACE levee projects?

A: The pipeline alignment along the Pajaro River or within the levee options were also evaluated and were deemed infeasible in 2017 and again in 2022. The state Department of Fish and Wildlife, US Fish and Wildlife, the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), and Santa Cruz County Flood Control District Zone 7 all agreed that these routes and type of construction would have detrimental impacts to the environment and posed significant safety concerns for the levee.

Placing the pipe within the levee corridor would leave it vulnerable to high velocities associated with flood flows. The river/creek are dynamic environments that can experience significant scour/deposition during high flow events. In extreme conditions, erosion of bed material could be extreme enough to jeopardize the pipes integrity. Additionally, the environmental regulations of placing a pipe under an ecological resource like the Pajaro River or Salsipuedes Creek, would have extreme regulatory implications for both installation and long term maintenance. Maintenance of a pipeline within their jurisdiction would be much more challenging, time consuming and costly if there were any maintenance issues.

Q: Why not distribute the College Lake water to irrigate crops around College Lake?

A: This option was evaluated and considered. The most benefit of supplemental water deliveries to stopping seawater intrusion occurs when the water is used by coastal growers, allowing those growers to limit groundwater pumping and protect the aquifer from seawater intrusion. This is supported by the PV Water hydrogeological model as well as work from graduate students from Stanford University.

Expanding the Coastal Distribution System to service areas around College Lake would require a significant increase in infrastructure, including new turnouts, valves and pumps. The current Project leverages PV Water's existing infrastructure, which contains over 22 miles of pipeline, Harkins Slough Recharge and Recovery Project and our Recycled Water Facility.

Q: How can I learn more and stay involved?

A: Visit pvwater.org to learn more about the College Lake Project. Subscribe to the PV Water email newsletter at pvwater.org to receive project updates. Also follow PV Water on [Facebook](#) (@pajarovalleywater), [Instagram](#) (@pajarovalleywater), and [Twitter](#) (@PV_Water) for the latest.