PRWRP FAQ

1. What is a Watershed?

A watershed is a land area that channels rainfall to creeks, streams, and rivers, and eventually to an outflow point like reservoirs, bays, lakes and the ocean.

A watershed includes all natural and human-made features, including its surface and subsurface features, climate and weather patterns, geologic and topographic history, soils and vegetation characteristics, and land uses. The watershed for a major river may encompass a number of smaller watersheds that ultimately combine at a common point.[1]

2. What is a Watershed Resilience Program?

A Watershed Resilience Program is a concept developed by the California Department of Water Resources (DWR) to better manage our water resources and prepare our communities for future climate extremes. The goals of a Watershed Resilience Program are to:

- Holistically plan and collaborate across water resource systems at a watershed scale
- Integrate and prioritize equity and inclusiveness
- Analyze climate vulnerabilities/risks and develop adaptation strategies
- Develop and apply performance indicators and metrics to measure, track, and report on outcomes

DWR developed a draft set of 48 watershed boundaries throughout California as the basis for watershed resilience planning. With DWR support and grant funding, five watersheds are piloting the program across the state, including:

- **American River Watershed** in Placer, El Dorado, Sutter, and Sacramento counties
- **Calaveras River Watershed** in San Joaquin, Stanislaus, and Calaveras counties
- **Pajaro River Watershed** in Santa Cruz, Santa Clara, San Benito, and Monterey counties
- **Russian River Watershed** in Sonoma and Mendocino counties
- **Ventura Watershed** in Ventura County

3. What geographic area does the Pajaro River Watershed Resilience Plan cover?

The Pajaro River is the largest coastal river between the San Francisco Bay and the Salinas River Watershed. The watershed is 1,300 square miles and includes portions of Santa Cruz, Santa Clara, San Benito, and Monterey counties. Its large size encompasses a broad range of diverse environments, physical features, and land uses within the watershed.

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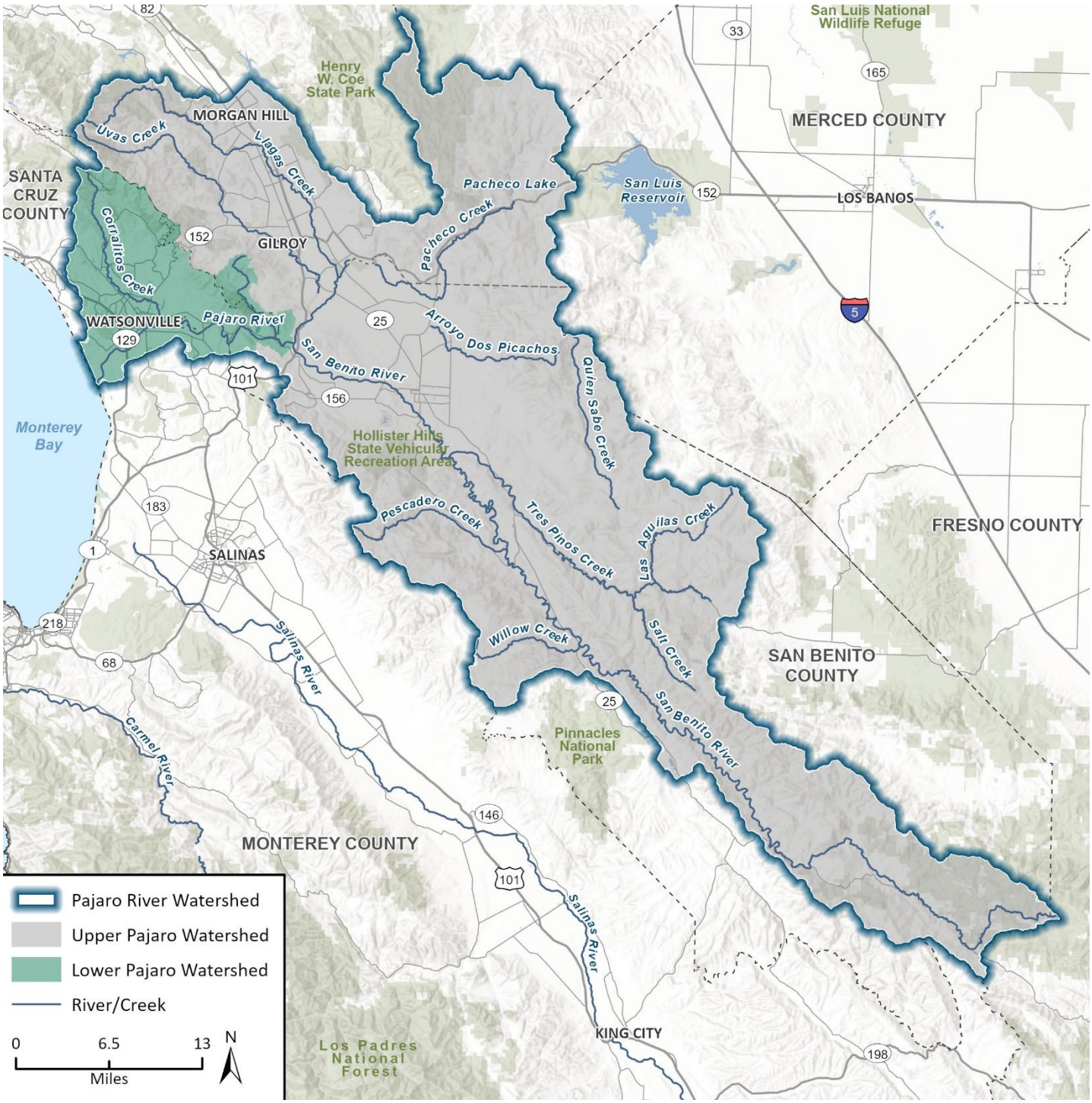
[1] *Watershed Resilience Framework and Toolkit — A Guide to Accelerate Resiliency in California's Watersheds DRAFT*, California Department of Water Resources, accessed February 20, 2025.



4. What specific climate vulnerabilities and risks will the Plan focus on?

- **Extreme Heat**: Periods of significantly higher-than-average temperatures that can lead to reduced surface water availability due to increased evaporation, higher surface water temperatures promoting algal blooms and degraded water quality, and decreased

groundwater recharge, putting further strain on existing water supplies, particularly in regions already experiencing drought.

- **Drought**: Extended periods of low precipitation that negatively impact soil moisture and water resource availability for some activity, group, or environmental sector, which can lead to water shortages, adversely affecting agriculture, water supply, communities, and natural ecosystems.
- **Wildfire**: Any unwanted and uncontrolled fire that burns a natural or developed area, which is often intensified by dry conditions and capable of causing widespread damage to people, property, and ecosystems.
- **Extreme Precipitation and Flooding**: Extreme precipitation refers to instances where the amount of rain experienced in an area exceeds what is typical, either in frequency, magnitude, or both, while flooding is a temporary condition in which normally dry land is partially or completely underwater. These events can damage infrastructure, degrade water quality, and pose safety risks.
- **Sea Level Rise and Storm Surge**: Sea Level Rise refers to the long-term increase in the average height of the ocean, while a Storm Surge is a temporary rise in sea level during a storm, caused by strong winds pushing water towards the shore, creating a significant increase in water level above the normal tide line, often leading to coastal flooding. The combination of rising sea levels and intensified coastal storms increases the risk of coastal erosion, flooding, and damage to coastal infrastructure and habitats.

5. Who is leading the planning process?

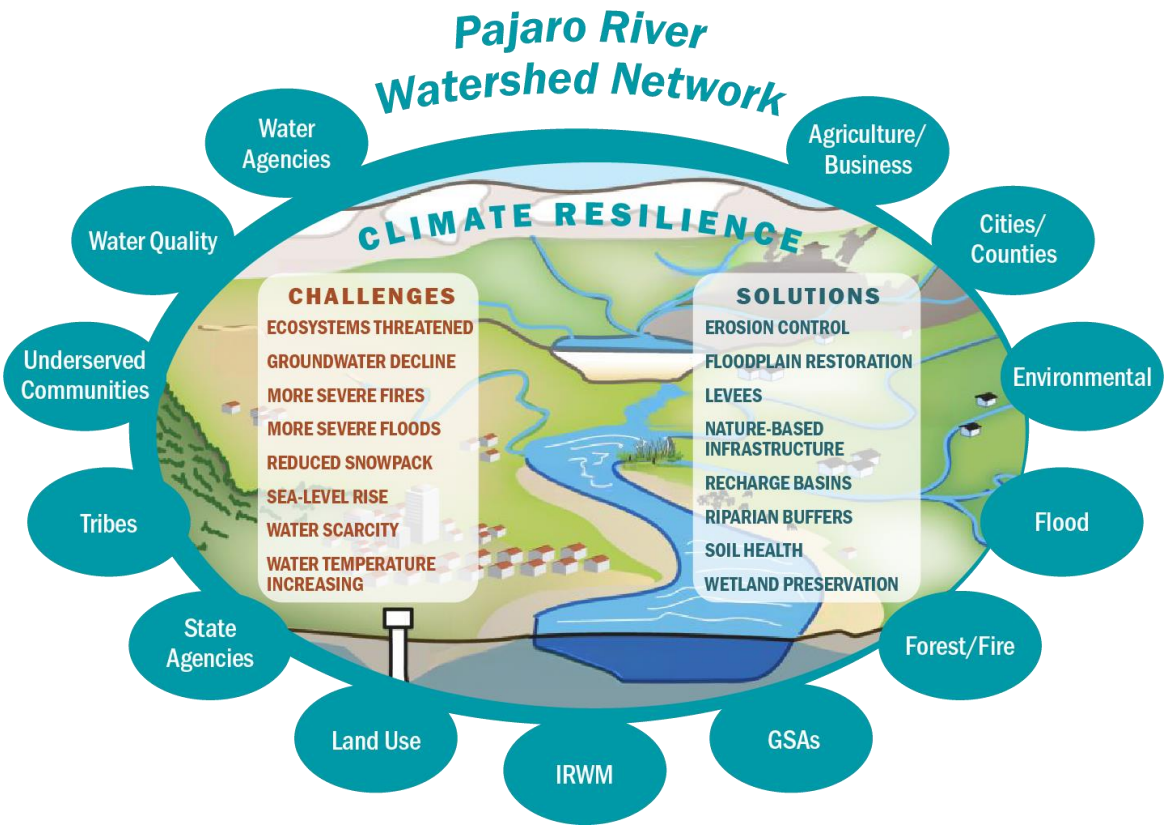
The Pajaro River Watershed Resilience Program is led by DWR's Grant Administrator, Pajaro Valley Water Management Agency (PV Water) and its team of consultants who are directed by an **Advisory Group** comprised of local groups and organizations, which as of February 2025 includes:

- Amah Mutsun Tribal Band and Land Trust
- Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments (AMBAG)
- City of Gilroy
- City of Hollister
- City of Morgan Hill
- City of San Juan Bautista
- City of Watsonville
- Indian Canyon Mutsun Band of Costanoan
- Pajaro Regional Flood Management Agency (PRFMA)
- Pajaro Valley Water Management Agency (PV Water)
- Regeneración
- San Benito County Health & Human Services Agency
- San Benito County Water District (SBCWD)
- Santa Clara Valley Water District (Valley Water)

- The Nature Conservancy (TNC)

6. Who else is involved in creating the Plan?

In addition to the Advisory Group, all members of the community are invited to participate as a part of our broader Watershed Network, which is composed of diverse interested parties representing various interests such as those shown on the graphic below.



7. How can I participate?

Everyone is invited to attend the Public Workshops where input from the community will be collected to inform the Pajaro River Watershed Resilience Plan on the following topics:

- **Workshop #1** – Visioning on March 10, 2025 (In Person)
- **Workshop #2** – Prioritizing Vulnerabilities on June 10, 2025 (Virtual)
- **Workshop #3** – Initial Adaptation Strategies on August 20, 2025 (In Person)
- **Workshop #4** – Prioritizing Adaptation Strategies on October 23, 2025 (Virtual)
- **Workshop #5** – Draft Watershed Resilience Plan on March 3, 2026 (Virtual)

8. Do I need to have specific technical knowledge to participate?

No – everyone is impacted by the changing climate. You are invited to share your priorities, concerns, and knowledge at the Network Workshops, and by calling our contacts on the website.

9. When will the Plan be complete?

A draft of the Pajaro River Watershed Resilience Plan will be available for public review at the March 2026 Workshop.

10. How will the Plan be implemented?

There are no funds specifically identified for implementation of the Pajaro River Watershed Resilience Plan at this time. However, in November 2024, California voters approved Proposition 4, a $10 billion bond measure focused on increasing the State's resilience to the impacts of climate change. We are optimistic that the efforts invested by our Watershed Network and DWR in the Watershed Resilience Program will position the Pajaro River Watershed Network well for Proposition 4 funding when it becomes available. We want to hear from you, our Watershed Network, about organizations you know that may be available to collaborate and/or partner on resiliency projects.

11. What are some of the common terms that may be used in this planning process?

Following is a list of terms that may be used during the PRWRP process. These terms may be refined throughout the process and will be updated accordingly.

- **Adaptive Capacity**: The ability of the system, operations, or management to respond to, with little or no changes in the current system function or operational/management structure, climate hazards and climate change while continuing to provide an acceptable level of performance.
- **Climate Drivers:** The processes, variables, and phenomena in the climate and weather domain that may span over multiple spatial and temporal scales. Primary examples include precipitation and temperature. Changes in climate drivers can result in extreme weather events, or climate hazards, defined below. Changes in drivers are caused by natural climate variability or human-caused climate change. (Zscheischler 2018)
- **Climate Hazard:** An occurrence of a physical event or physical trend, like an extreme heat event, extreme rain event, sea level rise or wildfire, that arises from changes in climate drivers. Hazards are usually the immediate physical precursors to negative climate impacts, defined below (Cal OES 2020, Zscheischler 2018). A climate hazard poses risk to people, services, infrastructure, and/or natural systems in the watershed.
- **Climate Impact:** The immediate felt effect of a climate hazard on the people, services, infrastructure, and/or natural systems. Climate impacts could include flooding of homes, seawater intrusion in groundwater aquifers, habitat and biodiversity loss, and degraded air quality (LAO 2022). For example, if droughts (a climate hazard) are likely to become more frequent and severe, a potential climate impact to farmers is that less water could be available for irrigation.
- **Exposure:** The projected severity of the climate change effect in the area of the population and community assets. The presence of assets, services, resources and infrastructure that could be adversely affected by climate hazards.

- **Resilience.** The capacity of an entity (an individual, a community, an organization, or a natural system) to prepare for disruptions, to recover from shocks and stresses, and to adapt and grow from a disruptive experience (Cal OES 2020).
- **Sensitivities:** The degree to which a species, natural system, community, asset, or other associated system would be affected by climate conditions (Cal OES 2020).
- **Watershed Performance Indicator:** A metric used to track the success of specific actions, projects, or policies in achieving targeted goals. Measures short- and mid-term effectiveness of interventions and implementation progress.
- **Outcome:** The tangible, long-term result of implementing strategies and actions to enhance a watershed's ability to adapt to and recover from environmental and climatic changes. For example, "efficient use of water," or the "ability of people to evacuate or otherwise avoid harm."
- **Indicator:** An observable phenomenon that can be used to monitor progress towards the ability of a system in the watershed to withstand, adapt to, and recover from climate hazards, land use changes, and other environmental stressors (DWR 2024). For example, if a watershed resilience outcome is "efficient use of water" an indicator would be "reuse of water supply."
- **Watershed Resilience Metric:** A watershed resilience performance metric is a specific, measurable value or data point used to evaluate progress toward achieving a watershed resilience performance indicator and outcome. For example, if an outcome is to achieve "efficient use of water," and the indicator is "reuse of water supply," a metric would be "annual volume of recycled water produced."

Terminology References:

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