



# Putah Creek Community Gathering #1 Meeting Summary

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## Meeting Overview

### Meeting Details

**Meeting Date:** Thursday, October 5th, 2023, from 6:30-8:00 pm

**Meeting Location:** In-person at the Winters Community Center, 201 Railroad Ave, Winters, CA 95694

**Public Participants:** 36

**Initiative Team:** 8

**Total Participant Count:** 44 Attendees

### Meeting Objectives

- Help everyone understand emerging Putah Creek water concerns.
- Learn about past and present Creek water use and conditions.
- Share information about Putah Creek Water Management Initiative
- Hear your Creek water concerns and questions.

### Meeting Agenda

6:30 - 6:40 Meeting Purpose & agenda

6:40 - 7:00 Welcome & Introductions

7:00 - 7:15 Putah Creek History

7:15 - 7: 30 Putah Creek Water Trends

7:30 - 7:40 What is the Putah Creek Water Management (PCWM) Initiative?

7:40 - 8:00 Gathering Input

### Meeting Materials

View the Community Gathering #1 [Participant Material Here](#)

View the Community Gathering #1 [Presentation here](#)

## Meeting Notes

### Meeting Highlights

#### **Water Quality and Quantity**

Attendees shared input on the impacts of increasing sedimentation, garbage, waste decreasing water quality, and concerns about future water quantity to meet increasing demands. Some raised questions about issues unrelated to PCWM.

#### **Water Use and Management**

Attendees shared questions and concerns about how decisions are made and the regulatory process for Creek restoration, water use allocation, flow and release contributions, and climate change's impacts on future Creek management.

#### **Recreational and Wildlife Use**

Attendees had input about the Creek's continued use for recreational activities such as fly fishing and kayaking. Additionally, there are reports of decline in wildlife such as turtles and beavers and interests in the Creek becoming a robust wildlife corridor.

#### **Water and PCWM Information**

Attendees want more information on topics such as, creek water quantity, flows, diversions, and quality, Accord amendment feasibility, stakeholder's interests, and the rationale for the PCWM initiative.

### Introduction

Putah Creek Streamkeeper, Max Stevenson, welcomed participants and began by introducing himself and the Lower Putah Creek Coordinating Committee (LPCCC). In the 1990's Putah creek went dry in the summer. Several organizations sued to increase environmental water flows. The litigants signed the Putah Creek Accord to increase additional base and salmon flows. The Accord also established the Streamkeeper position and the LPCCC. The LPCCC and the Solano County Water Agency (SCWA) supervise the Streamkeeper.

The mission of the LPCCC is to:

- protect, monitor, and enhance the resources of lower Putah Creek, within the framework of the Accord, while respecting property rights,
- serve as a forum for dialogue about issues,
- promote synergy among stakeholders in the Creek community.

The LPCCC includes the cities of Davis, Fairfield, Suisun City, Vacaville, Vallejo,

and Winters, Counties of Solano and Yolo, Solano and Yolo Riparian Landowners, Maine Prairie Water District, Solano County Water Agency, Solano Irrigation District, Putah Creek Council, and the University of California, Davis.

Since the Accord began there have been impressive successes in improving Putah Creek. In the Winters Putah Creek Nature Park, thousands of salmon have begun spawning. There has been a total of \$25 Million in Restoration Projects. This success has been accomplished by a community that works together.

However, there are still challenges. Over the last year we have interviewed Putah Creek water users to find out about their concerns. We worked with Ag Innovations to interview over 20 people with various perspectives and insights. We found that people are concerned about diminishing water quantity, uncertain water predictability, fair Creek use, and regulatory compliance. This is why we are meeting tonight and over the next year, to further the needs of Putah Creek.

## Putah Creek History

*Scott Miltenberger, PhD, Historian and Partner with JRP Historical*, presented the history of Putah Creek. Dr. Miltenberger sketched the historical uses and development of Putah Creek up to the Putah Creek Accord, emphasizing the ways the stream has been made to work and been worked. He discussed how the watershed was originally inhabited by the River Patwin people who hunted, fished, and gathered within the riparian corridor. By the late 1800s, Euro-American ranchers and settlers had dispossessed native peoples and had marshaled the watershed largely in the interest of agriculture. Much of this farming focused on crops, although ranching persisted and gravel was mined from the Putah Creek stream bed.

To protect townsfolk and local farms, settlers in the vicinity of present-day Davis re-channelized the creek to the south, making a previously abandoned channel of Putah Creek, the South Fork, into its main channel. Additional flood control work, done by the US Army Corps of Engineers in the late 1930s and 1940s reinforced this channelization. The now-abandoned North Fork was re-developed by the University of California at Davis into its Arboretum waterway in the 1960s, creating an amenity that continues to be enjoyed today.

Greater control over Putah Creek flows, Dr. Miltenberger pointed out, came with the completion of Monticello Dam in 1957. An essential element of the Solano Project of the US Bureau of Reclamation, the dam regulated the stream, preventing devastating flooding events while also providing water to farmers and communities in Solano County via the Putah Creek South Canal and also to the University of California, Davis. Monticello Dam also resulted in the flooding of the town of Monticello as Lake Berryessa filled.

Putah Creek has served as a source of inspiration – as it was for Creedence Clearwater Revival in its song, “Green River” – and as a source of recreation. In addition to the amenities afforded by the UC Riparian Reserve, fishing has also been popular on Putah Creek. It was in fact fish dying in a dry creek bed that sparked the controversy that led to the Putah Creek Accord, Dr. Miltenberger concluded. A drought in the late 1980s precipitated a fish kill at Camp Putah in the UCD Riparian Reserve in Davis that heightened regional awareness of the competing demands that had been placed on Putah

Creek over the past three decades. Negotiations involving Solano County Water Agency, Solano Irrigation District, the City of Davis, UC Davis, and the Putah Creek Council initially failed to result in a settlement that would balance these demands. Only after several years of litigation were these parties able to arrive at an agreement: the 2000 Putah Creek Accord.

## Putah Creek Water Trends

*Max Stevenson, Putah Creek Streamkeeper*, presented Putah Creek water trends throughout the years. He explained that before the Bureau of Reclamation built Monticello dam in 1957, summer flow was irregular and the Creek was often dry in the summer. The ephemeral stream, which was often dry, could not support fish spawning or agriculture.

Dr. Stevenson said after the Bureau of Reclamation finished the Dam, Putah Creek still flowed like other small ephemeral streams in California. This flow meant farmers could install sumps and pumps along the edge of the Creek to provide water for crops.

Beginning in 1970, SCWA released water to the Creek on a fixed schedule. They planned water release to the Creek in “pulses” based on salmon spawning needs. SCWA maintained the Creek as a perennial stream; it had water in it year-round. Even though there was water in the Creek, salmon often could not reach their spawning sites because of barriers in the Creek. Salmon need clear, cool, fast-moving water, with a gravel bottom for spawning.

Dr. Stevenson explained that the Accord requires SCWA to release water at specific rates throughout the year. The Accord also requires SCWA to monitor flows daily in the Creek. And the Accord requires specific spawning flows over the year. This means every day SCWA, and the Streamkeeper monitors releases and flows throughout the lower Creek. Mr. Stephenson explained that there are several places where he and SCWA monitor flows. The Accord specifies where flows are monitored.

## What Is the PCWM Initiative?

*Herb Wimmer, local landowner and farmer* presented the PCWM initiative. PCWM is a collaborative multiyear effort to develop a range of strategies to address Creek water use and management concerns. The world has changed, the world of water has changed, and we in this watershed have to change with it. The goal is to work together to identify water management solutions informed by water users and the community, technical and scientific information, and laws and regulations. SCWA has an obligation to provide environmental flows and the farmers have a right to pump water for irrigation. We need to coordinate these uses.

There are four major goals of PCWM they include:

- supporting Agriculture's needs for water information to plan their operations,
- fair Creek management,
- comply with water regulations,
- maintain environmental flow.

Public communication will be prioritized throughout the year. There will be a series of community engagement opportunities throughout the year, including an informational booth at the Salmon Festival, a second community gathering, a Hydrology Symposium, and multiple focus groups with water users. View the PCWM Fact Sheet for more details.

## Input from the Memories on Putah Creek Activity

During the event, participants had an opportunity to share their memories along Putah Creek. Participants shared a variety of memories from the family favorite swimming hole along the Creek to special moments kayaking on the Creek while sipping coffee and watching the otters relax on the bank. Many expressed the joys of watching the salmon spawn for the first time and reminisced about hikes along the Creek.

## Input Gathered in the Meeting and from the Input Forms

### Questions about the Putah Creek

**Question: Is the Creek a navigable stream? Can you canoe on the Creek?**

*A: Yes, the creek is a navigable waterway.*

**Question: Before the Monticello dam was built, did the salmon swim up to the headwaters?**

*A: Historically, there were salmon before the Monticello dam, but not a lot. The salmon would usually swim up the Sacramento River.*

**Question: It would be helpful if you gave us specific information on the Creek's flows, so we understand the water resources. What are the water flows monthly, seasonally, yearly?**

*A: PCWM initiative can provide more information at the next meetings. However, information about Putah Creek water flows can be found on the Solano County Water Agency's website [here](#).*

**Question: Is the Solano County Water District going to give water to the new Forever California Community?**

*A: This is a future question; the Solano County Water Agency has not been approached about water to the proposed community.*

**Question: How much water goes to making Anheuser Busch beer?**

*A: PCWM will explore this question.*

**Question: Do you anticipate the Creek becoming a robust wildlife corridor?**

*A: PCWM will explore this question.*

**Question: I have been farming on Lake Solano for 30 years and it is filling in with sediment. The Creek is becoming shallower. I am concerned about it. Is there a plan to deal with that?**

*A: PCWM will explore this question.*

**Question: UC Davis has a dump next to the Creek, have people been monitoring the water quality in that area?**

*A: PCWM will explore this question.*

**Question: There is the California National Primate Research Center next to the Creek. It stinks over there. How do they handle the monkey sewage? Is it treated? Have people been monitoring the water quality in that area?**

*A: PCWM will explore this question.*

**Question: Where is the information about how gravel was removed from the Creek to build the Montecillo dam?**

*A: The US Bureau of Reclamation built the dam and recorded this information in their documentation of the Monticello Dam. You can find that source information in the Bureau of Reclamation project notes. If you want more specific details, you will have to find the construction records of the Dam that are in the National Archive in Denver.*

**Question: Water use; How much is allocated to maintaining the fishery, groundwater levels, agricultural needs, and any other demands on the resource?**

*A: PCWM will explore this question.*

**Question: What effect does prior flood control and gravel extraction have on the ecology of Putah Creek and responsiveness of the Creek to changes in releases? How do they affect management of flows, transit time of water and water temperature?**

*A: PCWM will explore this question.*

**Question: Is there enough (water)? How are boundaries drawn and interests chosen to receive a limited resource?**

*A: PCWM will explore this question.*

**Question: Who foots the instream flow contribution for the voluntary agreements/ Bay Delta Plan?**

*A: PCWM will explore this question.*

**Question: Who is clearing the Creek sides?**

*A: PCWM will explore this question.*

### **Questions about the PCWM initiative**

**Question: Why are we doing the PCWM initiative? What are the concerns it is trying to address?**

*A: It is about trying to balance agricultural, fishery, and recreational needs.*

**Question: As the public, what is our role in the PCWM initiative?**

*A: Provide input on concerns, provide ideas to increase creek health, review ideas from others to see if they help the creek.*

**Question: How do you know who the interest groups are for Putah Creek? And how did you know who to interview?**

*A. From people who participated in LPCCC meetings, from people who participated in the Accord process, and from landowners who suggested people to interview.*

**Question: Are the interview findings going to be shared?**

*A. The interviews were confidential but yes, we will share the themes and concerns we heard.*

**Question: How did Ag Innovations get hired to manage the community engagement process for PCWM? Who hired you?**

*A: Ag Innovations worked on the Cache Slough land evaluation project, facilitated flood town halls in 2020, and worked with Solano County Board on an agricultural assessment, we are currently working with Solano County Sustainable Groundwater Management. Solano County was aware of our work on agriculture and water resources.*

**Question: What are the significant issues the PCWM initiative is compelled to respond to?**

*A: Supporting agriculture's needs for water information to plan their operations, Fair Creek management, Comply with water regulation, Maintain environmental flow.*

**Question: Is it possible to amend the Putah Creek Accord?**

*A: PCWM will explore this question.*

**Question: Where can people sign-up to receive notification for PCWM?**

*A: People can [sign-up using this form here](#). This form is also on the [PCWM webpage](#).*

**Concerns & Interests Gathered from Input Forms**

- Sediment in the inter-dam reach has become a major issue.
- The extravagant expenditure of funds spent on rechanneling, when those funds could have and can be spent to add spawning gravel to existing narrow reaches, control invasive plants (based on the Putah Creek vegetation management plan and other non-destructive uses).
- Lack of real-time information on flows and diversions and water quality data for Ag return flows.
- Not enough water for all the use demands.
- Unregulated effluent from farms/creekside landowners.
- What entities are "speaking" for wildlife during this process?
- Future Management considering climate change.
- The lower 13 - 16 miles of Putah Creek.
- We have seen a huge decline in pond turtles, beavers, and water flow since we moved to Winters in 2000.



- Landowners are the essential stakeholders for discretionary projects to enhance habitat. Improving public lands can reduce trespass on private lands.
- All the interests in Putah Creek Water
- We would like a list of different interests from which you have heard.
- Long-term water demands from Putah Creek Projected.