



# Putah Creek Community Gathering #1 - Davis

## Meeting Summary

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### Meeting Overview

#### Meeting Details

**Meeting Date:** Wednesday, January 10, 2024, from 6:30-8:00 pm

**Meeting Location:** In-person at Senior Center, Valente Room 646 A Street, Davis, CA, 95616

**Public Participants:** 47

**Initiative Team:** 8

**Total Participant Count:** 55 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 Welcome

6:40 - 7:00 Introductions

7:00 - 7:15 Putah Creek History

7:15 - 7:25 Putah Creek Water Trends

7:25 - 7:35 What is the Putah Creek Water Management (PCWM) Initiative?

7:35 - 8:00 Gathering Input

#### Meeting Materials

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

View the Davis Community Gathering #1 Presentation [Here](#)

# Meeting Notes

## Meeting Highlights

**Compliance Challenges:** The Putah Creek Accord requires the Solano County Water Agency (SCWA) and the Lower Putah Creek Coordinating Committee (LPCCC) to maintain water flows in Putah Creek and release water during drought for native fish and salmon, as well as cities and farmers who depend on Creek water. The Accord mandates prescribed flows at three compliance points. However, Putah Creek Water Flows are complex. Over the last several years, it has been challenging to meet those requirements because Putah Creek water flow inputs and outputs are complex. The Putah Creek Water Management initiative is developing more efficient and long-term solutions.

**Water Use and Management:** Attendees shared questions and concerns about how SCWA and the LPCCC decide water use allocations, how flow decisions are made, and how the Accord guides water releases. Attendees also discussed the regulatory process for Putah Creek.

**Efficiency, Groundwater, and Impact on Creek Flow:** Attendees noted that agriculture has responded to drought with increased efficiency of irrigation systems. These farm practices have changed how water is pumped from the Creek and how much is pumped. Also, more efficient systems may mean less irrigation water ends up on the Creek. Attendees wondered if the changes in the amount of groundwater, use of groundwater, and new groundwater regulations were influencing Creek flow. LPCCC members agreed these are the kinds of input that will help everyone manage and sustain the Creek's water resources.

**Continued Engagement and PCWM Information:** Attendees were encouraged to stay involved and participate in PCWM activities. The LPCCC meets on the second Thursday of every month at 3 pm. Attendees were encouraged to participate in these meetings in person or virtually. Learn more at <https://www.scwa2.com/pcwm/>

## Introduction

Michael Heather, Assistant Public Works Director, City of Fairfield, welcomed participants. He introduced the Lower Putah Creek Coordinating Committee (LPCCC). 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.

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.

**Andrew Fulks, LPCC Chair**, explained that In the 1990s 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.

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. In interviews last year, the LPCCC found that people are concerned about diminishing water quantity, uncertain water predictability, fair Creek use, and regulatory compliance. People also noted that there should be more communication with all the water users of Putah Creek including farmers, public agencies, and recreational users to ensure environmental flows and fair use of the Creek water.

Each water user has a unique understanding of the Creek's needs and challenges. Water users will also have ideas to sustain the Creek. This is the reason to meet, to understand Putah Creek, and to generate solutions as a community.

## **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. He emphasized the changes in the Creek over time. He explained that 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. They used the Creek and area for 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. The work made a previously abandoned channel of Putah Creek, the South Fork, into its main channel. Additional flood control work 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. Monticello Dam also provides water to farmers and communities in Solano County via the Putah Creek South Canal and to the University of California, Davis. Monticello Dam also flooded 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 an important recreation resource. In addition to the amenities afforded by the UC Riparian Reserve, fishing has also been popular on Putah

Creek. It was fish kill 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 included Solano County Water Agency, Solano Irrigation District, the City of Davis, UC Davis, and the Putah Creek Council ended in a settlement agreement balancing demands in the 2000 Putah Creek Accord.

## Putah Creek Water Trends

**Max Stevenson, Putah Creek Streamkeeper**, reviewed historic water trends on Putah Creek. He explained that before Monticello Dam, the Creek was often dry in the summer. The Creek was ephemeral, like many creeks in the area. The Creek also flooded in Winter, which led to large trees washing out along the banks. After Monticello Dam was built, water managers maintained a natural flow, so the Creek continued to go dry in the summer.

Beginning in 1970, SCWA established a fixed water release schedule. The Creek changed significantly changing it from an ephemeral stream to a perennial stream. With more consistent water in the Creek, it could support agriculture as well as fish. Despite consistent water, Salmon still had trouble spawning. Salmon need unimpaired streams with clear, cool, fast-moving water with a gravel bottom.

After the Accord in 2000, SCWA incorporated pulse flows into the fixed water release schedule. The pulse flows support salmon spawning needs. Dr. Stevenson reiterated that the Putah Creek Accord mandates SCWA to release water at specific rates, monitor daily flows, and ensure the water is flowing to support spawning. The Accord spelled out three monitoring sites to measure flow. To ensure they comply with the Accord SCWA and the Streamkeeper monitor flow, daily, during Salmon spawning.

Mr. Stephenson stressed the importance of efficient water management to balance environmental and agricultural needs.

## Question and Answer

**Question: What is the status of the channel forming process - Southern realignment of Putah Creek?**

*A: The Southern Realignment project is currently on hold. It would be in the Yolo Wildlife area. There was work on this project 2016 - 2017 and is currently on hold.*

**Question: I saw people looking for Salmon in the UCD properties in kayaks. Is that some type of program?**

*A: Yes, they were conducting a Salmon survey using a mark and recapture method. Researchers s is when they tag Salmon carcasses, release them, and try to find them the next day to measure how long it takes for the carcass to disappear. They record a number of measures to help understand Salmon.*

## **Question: What did the Creek flow look like before colonization?**

*A: Putah Creek was very shallow, it dried during the summer and it flooded very quickly in wetter months. Over a millennia the mountains eroded into the fan and the Creek was on top of that deposited soil, creating a small channel.*

## **What Is the PCWM Initiative?**

**Herb Wimmer, a local landowner and farmer** presented the PCWM initiative. Mr. Wimmer explained this is a good opportunity to improve Putah Creek through cooperation and collaboration. Water in California changes frequently. It is impossible to understand the complexity without collaborative efforts. This is the basis of PCWM.

PCWM is a collaborative multiyear effort to develop a range of strategies to address Creek water use and management concerns. 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 must 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 a second community gathering, a Hydrology Symposium, and multiple focus groups with water users.

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

### **Question: If agricultural water users exercise full water rights on the Creek would there be enough water for them to use the water and leave the Creek with enough water for environmental flows?**

*A: There are 200 parcels along the Creek with 72 farming operations. Most farmers do not use Putah Creek water. They use groundwater wells for irrigation. Farmers that pump from the toe drain are primarily using Delta water. If all 72 riparian users wanted to exercise their water rights the water would have to be divided by 72 and everyone would get a very small amount of water. Currently, there are about 20-30 active pumpers on Putah Creek.*

### **Question: Is there a fixed amount of water for agriculture in the Creek?**

*A: Not necessarily, there's a water balance, with the water coming and going in lots of different directions. Some of it is in the ground, being pumped out by farmers, some water is being put in by the water agency and draining in from agricultural drainage. Some water is being pumped in from wells to move it to a different area to get pumped*

*out. Not only is it like a flowing stream, but it could be thought of as a canal because water in some sections is being pumped in and out of the Creek.*

**Question: What is SCWA's requirement to manage compliance flows?**

*A: The Putah Creek Accord requires SCWA to measure water at three compliance points. The Accord mandates how much water there must be at these three places to comply with the Accord. If there is not enough water at those compliance points, SCWA must add water to Putah Creek. Over the last 10-15 years, SCWA has had to add additional water to the Creek to meet the requirements. The PCWM process will help understand when farmers need water and coordinate those flows so that the water balance is fair.*

**Question: What is the problem, what is the purpose of this meeting?**

*A: SCWA must comply with environmental requirements. Over the last 10-15 years, SCWA has not complied with enough water at the compliance points. Historically SCWA has responded by releasing more water from the dam to supplement the Creek's water flow. It is not efficient to add more and more water to meet compliance. We need to further understand the system to come up with a more long-term solution to meet compliance requirements.*

*So far we have learned that there is a need to increase communication with water diverters such as farmers, pumpers, and public agencies. We understand that the water system in Putah Creek is complex. We know that everyone along the Creek has information on water use. We need to learn from them the complexities for water throughout the whole system.*

**Question: How much of the Putah Creek Water goes towards urban use?**

*A: The Putah Diversion Dam and Lake Solano, the reservoir, are east of Winters. From Lake Solano, 85% of Putah Creek water is diverted into the Putah South Canal which runs south to supply cities and farms. The rest of the water flows east towards Winters and then to the Sacramento river.*

**Question: Have we talked to Jay Lund about his routing model? Is it possible to create a routing model that keeps track of all the water that's going in and out of Putah Creek?**

*A: We have not been in touch with Jay Lund on this particular project. To create such a model we would need to begin by having flow measurements. We would need for the majority of the pumps in Putah Creek to have flow meters, this would need to be our first step to develop such a model. The reason we are having this meeting is to understand all the complexity of the system before an accurate model could be created.*

**Question: Will there be flow meters installed?**

*A: We plan to look more into flow measurements. If there were more flow measurements across Putah Creek, there would be better information about flow throughout the year. More flow measuring locations and data sharing would help make the system more efficient and fair for everyone. There would need to be agreements to share water flow data.*

**Participant Comment:** I farmed along the Creek and pumped water from 1985 - 2018. I am retired. I worked with the first working group with Rich Maravich to manage Creek water and I thought it was very successful. I farmed on Putah Creek for almost 40 years. I have not seen much land owner turnover. I used very little water from my rights. Most farmers use groundwater.

The biggest change I have seen is increased use of drip irrigation. I think there has been less pumping in the Creek in the last 10-15 years. Over the years, irrigation systems have gotten so efficient that we are no longer seeing drain water from other irrigation methods going back into the Creek.

*A: Yes, we heard about that change in meetings with the Public Agencies. Irrigators have become so efficient that less water drains to Putah Creek. This is exactly the type of information we need to understand what is happening in the Creek. We acknowledge that we do not have all the answers and must learn from the community along the way.*

**Question: Is one of the goals of this organization to develop a salmon fishery?**

*A: Yes, the Accord goals support salmon spawns. We want to maintain the Creek, in compliance with the Accord, to have successful salmon spawns. The salmon goals are not for commercial production. The goal is to create a sustainable habitat and water system that supports all of the LPCCC goals we talked about earlier in the meeting.*

**Questions: What is the relationship between the PCWM initiative and the Groundwater Sustainability Plan?**

*A: The Putah Creek Watershed Management initiative is focused on improving Putah Creek. However, SCWA and many of the PCWM partners are also working on groundwater sustainability. You can learn more about groundwater sustainability and projects at <https://www.solanogsp.com/>*

**What is the problem east of Mace Road?**

*A: There is a compliance flow measuring point east of Mace Road. SCWA consistently has flow violations at that point. It will not help to focus just on this one area of the Creek. Putah Creek is a complex system and we need to understand the whole system to develop holistic solutions. For example, if too much water is pumped out from the first half of Putah Creek, flows will be significantly affected in the second half of the Creek. There are limitations to how much water can be released to solve compliance violations.*

*The State owns the water that is being released. If SCWA has continued flow violations, the State could begin enforcement actions. However, the PCWM process will be much more tailored to this particular area and these users. There are better solutions in this room than those that federal and state agencies can come up with for trying to solve this problem. That is why we are here.*

## **When is water released into Putah Creek?**

*A: Water releases are mandated by the Putah Creek Accord. However, it varies year by year and by season. Water releases vary in the summer. Water released from the Dam takes about 2 days to make it to the toe drain. If SCWA releases less water for a salmon pulse flow, it may take 4 -5 days to get to the toe drain. This is a factor in the need for communication to ensure that everyone has the water when they need it.*

## **Question: Have the restoration projects worked? Can groundwater measurement be taken into consideration when modeling the Creek flow?**

*A: We will include questions about groundwater and measurements for Putah Creek in our meetings with scientific and technical researchers. We will have meetings with them this spring. We are keeping track of the scientific and technical questions that need to be answered. As we mentioned before, one of the reasons you're here is to help us figure out what kind of scientific-technical information needs to be gathered.*

## **Adjourn**

Participants are encouraged to join us for our Monthly LPCCC meeting, on the second Thursday of every month at 3 pm. We meet in Vacaville but you can also join remotely. We encourage you to join the meeting to stay involved and make sure we have the maximum number of voices we can get. Learn more at

<https://www.scwa2.com/lower-putah-Creek-coordinating-committee/lpccc-agendas/>