

Multibenefit Land Repurposing Program



ANNUAL REPORT 2023

Report developed by Self-Help Enterprises, Environmental Defense Fund, and Environmental Incentives with support from the California Department of Conservation. We thank the Multibenefit Land Repurposing Program (MLRP) block grantees for their valuable contributions to this report.

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Acronym Glossary

CA	California
DOC	Department of Conservation
EDF	Environmental Defense Fund
EI	Environmental Incentives
GSA	Groundwater Sustainability Agency
MALRP	Multibenefit Agricultural Land Repurposing Plan
MLRP	Multibenefit Land Repurposing Program
SGMA	Sustainable Groundwater Management Act
SHE	Self-Help Enterprises
SSE	Statewide Support Entity

Executive Summary

The Multibenefit Land Repurposing Program (MLRP) increases regional capacity for repurposing irrigated agricultural land to uses that reduce reliance on groundwater while providing community health, economic well-being, water supply, habitat, renewable energy, and climate benefits. The program provides funding for regional block grants, tribal grants, and a Statewide Support Entity to provide technical assistance to block grantees and support progress toward program goals.

Key Accomplishments

The California Department of Conservation (DOC) launched MLRP activities in summer 2022. Since then, the program has seen significant progress toward program and block grant goals.

In its first round of funding, the MLRP received 12 applications requesting over \$100M in funding. DOC awarded \$10M block grants to 4 applicants partnering and collaborating with 73 different organizations.

In the second round of funding, the MLRP received 10 applications requesting \$85M in funding. In June 2023, DOC awarded \$8.89M block grants to 4 applicants partnering and collaborating with over 36 different organizations, doubling the number of block grantees and extending the total reach of MLRP partner and collaborator support to over 100 organizations.

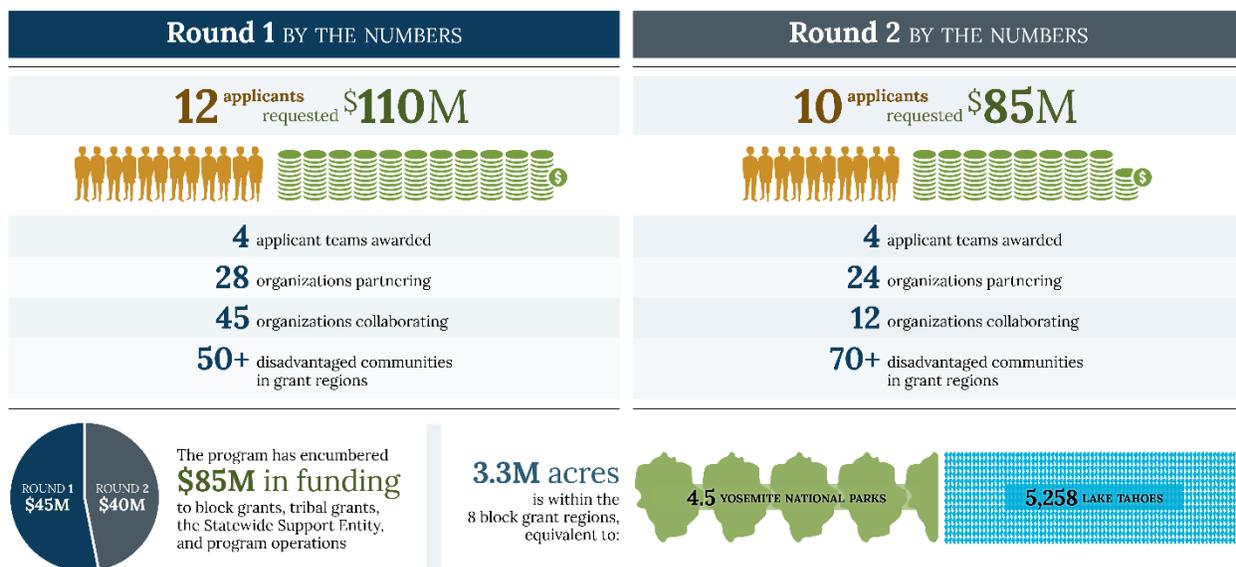


Figure A. Highlighting MLRP participation and engagement by the numbers.

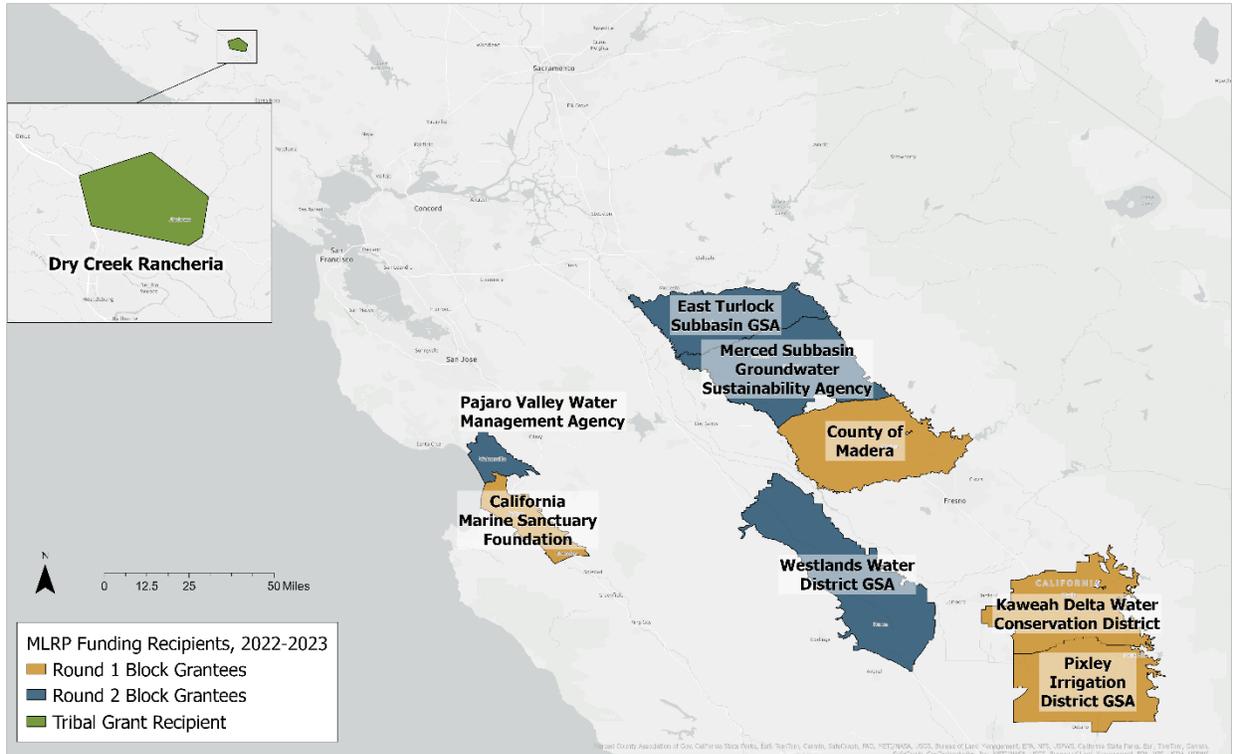


Figure B. Map of funded grant applicants from the first two rounds of program funding.

The MLRP Statewide Support Entity kicked off its efforts with DOC in summer 2022, preparing for the block grantee kickoff in September 2022. Since then, the Statewide Support Entity has supported block grantees by providing monthly peer collaboration and learning engagements, providing tools and resources on topics relevant to grant deliverables, leveraging experts for technical support, and gathering key partners for the Statewide Support Entity advisory committee. The Statewide Support Entity onboarded the round two block grantees into the MLRP Block Grantee Community of Practice at the September 2023 Annual Meeting in Moss Landing, CA.

STATEWIDE SUPPORT ENTITY HIGHLIGHTS

11 MLRP block grantee learning engagements

24 Experts engaged to support block grantees

11 Advisory Committee members committed



Figure C. MLRP Statewide Support Entity highlights.

1. Program Summary

Increasingly frequent and intense droughts, overpumping of groundwater, and climate change are all contributing to a long-term imbalance between water supply and demand in many of California’s agricultural regions. California communities are wrestling with these challenges as they work to implement the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA), which sets a 2040/2042 target for transitioning to sustainable groundwater use.

Bringing groundwater basins into balance and agricultural production in line with water supplies will require significant irrigated farmland acreage to be taken out of production in the coming decades. Experts estimate that up to 900,000 acres of farmland in the San Joaquin Valley alone may need to be fallowed by 2040 to balance groundwater supply and demand.¹ If unmanaged, fallowed fields can emit dust and worsen air quality; host weeds and pests; and adversely impact agricultural economies, rural communities, and ecosystems.

However, there is an alternative: multibenefit land repurposing, the practice of transitioning irrigated land to uses that conserve water and deliver benefits to communities and ecosystems. With public funding, growers can be compensated for voluntarily transitioning formerly irrigated farmland to other beneficial uses such as groundwater recharge, habitat, renewable energy production, tribal land uses, and more.



Figure 1. Transitioning the least viable irrigated agricultural lands to new uses can provide community and environmental benefits.

¹ Escriva-Bou, A., Hanak, E., Cole, S., Medellín-Azuara, J. (2023). *The Future of Agriculture in the San Joaquin Valley*. Public Policy Institute of California. <https://www.ppic.org/publication/policy-brief-the-future-of-agriculture-in-the-san-joaquin-valley/>

Program Overview

The Multibenefit Land Repurposing Program (MLRP) provides grant funding to increase regional capacity for repurposing agricultural land to reduce reliance on groundwater while providing community health, economic well-being, water supply, habitat, renewable energy, and climate benefits. The program provides funding for regional block grants, grants to tribes, and one Statewide Support Entity to provide technical assistance to block grantees and support progress toward program goals. The California (CA) Department of Conservation (DOC) administers the program, supported by an Agency Advisory Committee comprised of representatives from state and federal agencies:

- CA Department of Conservation
- CA Department of Water Resources
- CA Department of Food and Agriculture
- CA Department of Fish and Wildlife
- CA State Water Resources Control Board
- CA Wildlife Conservation Board
- Governor’s Office of Business Development
- CA Strategic Growth Council
- US Natural Resources Conservation Service
- US Fish and Wildlife Service



Figure 2. Multibenefit Land Repurposing Program entities, grant types, and deliverables.

Program Goals

The primary goals of the MLRP are to:

- Support coordinated, regional and basin-scale efforts to achieve groundwater sustainability in critically overdrafted basins and in high and medium priority basins where a state emergency drought declaration has been declared.
- Support long-term repurposing of lands least viable for agriculture and multibenefit opportunities that convert land to less intensive water uses while maintaining natural and working lands.
- Provide short- and medium-term drought relief.
- Support regional efforts to sustain land-based economies that are impacted by groundwater sustainability measures.
- Reduce groundwater use.
- Create or restore wildlife habitat and wildlife connectivity, including seasonal wetland habitat to replenish aquifers.
- Improve groundwater supply, including through groundwater recharge, improved baseflows in rivers and streams, and groundwater supply improvement for fish and wildlife habitat.
- Support nature-based solutions to reduce the impacts of hazards on lives, property, and the economy from overdrafted groundwater basins.
- Provide benefits to disadvantaged communities and socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers.
- Foster partnerships and collaboration among diverse entities to enable regional scale leadership to meet this program's goals.
- Develop scalable, transferable land repurposing models.
- Support farmer, rancher, and farm worker leadership in multibenefit land repurposing strategies and project implementation.
- Provide flexible and efficient program administration so that grantees can lead expeditious and adaptive programs to meet their needs.

DOC and the Statewide Support Entity integrated these goals into program expectations and activities as outlined in the program guidelines. Specifically, MLRP-funded projects must improve groundwater sustainability, and must include at least one other benefit related to community or environmental goals, which includes protecting and restoring biodiversity, expanding access to nature, and building resilience to climate change. The Statewide Support Entity has also developed resources to support block grantees' prioritization of disadvantaged communities and socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers (see Appendix A for a full list of resources provided to block grantees).

Benefits achieved under the MLRP extend beyond the program itself, supporting goals of other state initiatives, including 30x30 California, the California Water Plan, FloodMAR, the Regional Conservation Investment Strategy (RCIS) Program, and more.

Program Status

MLRP funding was initially authorized by the Budget Act of 2021 (SB 170, Ch. 240, Stat. 2021). Program guidelines were developed with stakeholder and partner agency input in late 2021 and early 2022. DOC held stakeholder workshops in November and December 2021 to gather early input on program development from more than 130 participants. DOC then held four public comment workshops in January and February 2022 with approximately 80 attendees to solicit public input on the program’s guidelines. Applications for the first round of funding were accepted in March 2022, with grant awards announced in May 2022 and grant agreements finalized in summer 2022. In February 2023, DOC opened a second round of funding and announced a second set of awards in June 2023. The second round of block grantees began work on grant agreements with DOC in summer and fall of 2023.

In May 2022, DOC awarded funding to the Statewide Support Entity, co-chaired by Self-Help Enterprises (SHE) and Environmental Defense Fund (EDF) with support from Environmental Incentives (EI). The Statewide Support Entity provides support to block grantees as they progress toward their block grant goals and deliverables, and to DOC as the program continues to grow and implement actions to achieve program goals. See Figure 3 below for an overview of the MLRP timeline to date.

Fall 2021	Winter 2021	Spring 2022	Summer 2022	Winter 2022	Spring 2023
California establishes the Multibenefit Land Repurposing Program (MLRP) and allocates \$50M to the program in its first year.	Department of Conservation releases program guidelines based on stakeholder input and opens first application period.	12 regions apply for MLRP funding. 4 regions are awarded \$10M block grants. SHE and EDF selected as Statewide Support Entity.	California allocates an additional \$40M to Department of Conservation for MLRP.	Department of Conservation releases second set of guidelines for public comment period, opens 2nd application period in January.	Program receives 10 more applications for over \$84M in its second funding round. DOC awards four \$8.89M block grants.

Figure 3. Timeline of MLRP implementation from the passage of land repurposing legislation.

The MLRP also has specific tribal set aside funding, providing grants to tribes for planning and implementing land repurposing. DOC has awarded one tribal set aside grant to the Dry Creek Band of Pomo Indians in Sonoma County, with which the Tribe plans to enhance groundwater recharge in the Alexander Valley subbasin to provide groundwater sustainability benefits there and in the Santa Rosa Plain subbasin.

2. Block Grantee Overview & Progress

In May 2022, DOC awarded the first round of \$40M to 4 block grantees: **the California Marine Sanctuary Foundation, County of Madera, Kaweah Delta Water Conservation District, and Pixley Irrigation District Groundwater Sustainability Agency**. These block grantees kicked off their efforts in September 2022 and have since formed teams and begun working towards their block grant goals. A second round of block grantees was awarded funding in 2023.

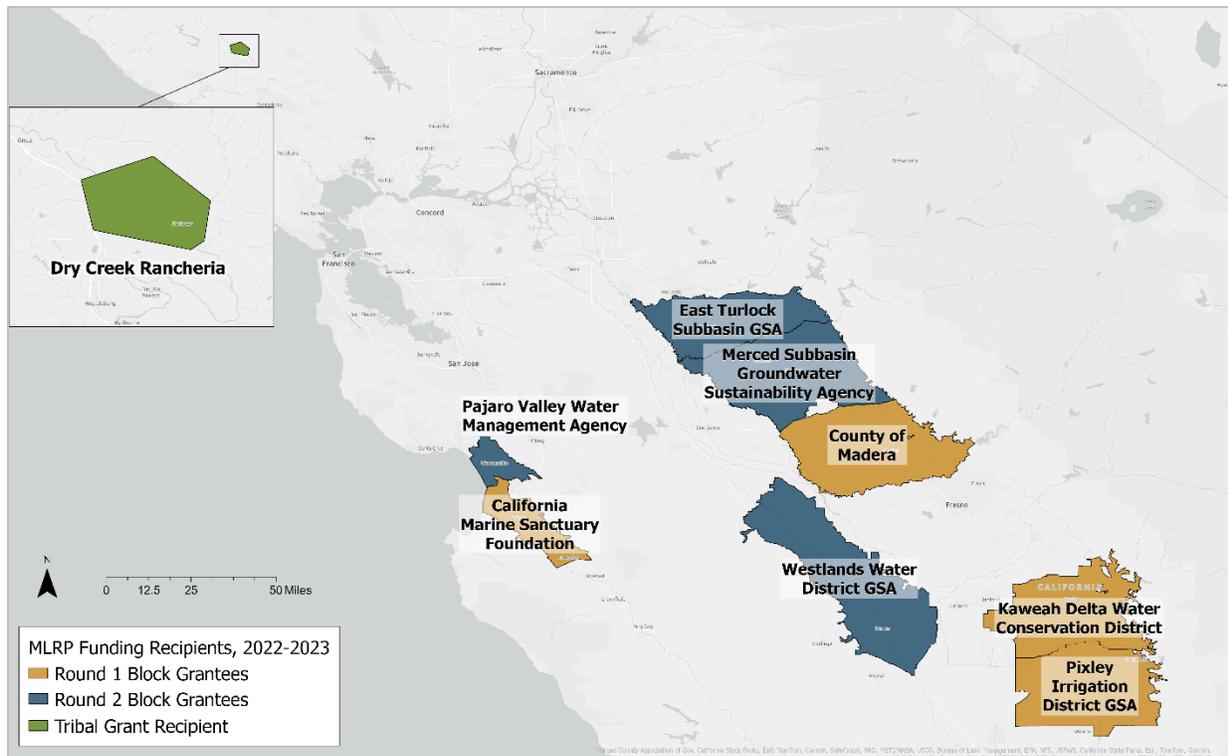


Figure 4. Map of funded applicants from the first two rounds of program funding.

Round 1 Block Grantee Snapshots

Round 1 block grantees are located in the San Joaquin and Salinas Valleys, representing four critically-overdrafted subbasins. All four block grants prioritize a reduced reliance on groundwater, and each one features a set of additional benefits tailored to their region. Block grantees can use their awarded funding to conduct outreach and education, plan and implement land repurposing projects, monitor and report progress toward block grant goals, and more. A brief snapshot of each of these four block grants is provided below, including a summary, initial successes, and key partners.

Lower Salinas Valley Multi-Benefit Land Repurposing Strategy and Phase 1 Project Development

California Marine Sanctuary Foundation

Block Grant Summary

This block grant funds work by a broad coalition of partners from multiple sectors, including disadvantaged communities and tribes, to strategically and voluntarily repurpose the Lower Salinas Valley's least viable agricultural lands to produce multiple water resource benefits. Partners collaborate on planning, developing and implementing strategies to fallow and repurpose agricultural lands for floodplain and habitat benefits. The majority of the funding will be used to acquire easements and fee title to land identified for floodplain setbacks and recharge areas and will facilitate progress toward completing project designs.

Partners

- Salinas Valley Basin GSA
- Central Coast Wetlands Group
- City of Salinas
- Ag Land Trust
- Amah Mutsun Land Trust
- Elkhorn Slough Foundation
- Resource Conservation District of Monterey County
- Monterey County Water Resources Agency
- Castroville Community Services District

“We were really surprised by the amount of support from growers and landowners for the program.”



Initial Successes

- Received strong landowner and grower support
- Formed community and grower committees to gather and incorporate input
- Drafted initial prioritization and selection criteria

Tule Subbasin Multi-benefit Land Repurposing Program

Pixley Irrigation District Groundwater Sustainability Agency

Block Grant Summary

This block grant aims to facilitate strategic land retirement, restore habitat, and protect and enhance water resources throughout the critically overdrafted Tule Subbasin to meet regional economic, environmental, and social needs. It includes planning and implementation within the three priority subregions most in need of land repurposing, as well as a subbasin-wide plan to apply lessons learned from land repurposing in the three priority areas across the subbasin.

The project proposes funding for pilot projects that will be representative of future regional work, such as upland restoration of fallowed lands, as well as additional funding to implement yet to be identified projects. This proposal includes partnerships with a diverse group of stakeholders including water agencies, disadvantaged communities, and environmental groups, that support the coordinated execution of the project.

Partners

- **Tri-County Water Authority GSA**
- **The Nature Conservancy**
- **Audubon California**
- **Sequoia Riverlands Trust**
- **Self-Help Enterprises**
- **SocioEnvironmental and Education Network**
- **Tule Basin Land & Water Conservation Trust**
- **UC Merced**
- **The Tulare Basin Watershed Partnership Network**

“Engaging with K-12 educators has helped us reach communities, and we have teachers and community leaders as the champions of our projects.”



Initial Successes

- **Approved Outreach and Engagement Plan**
- **Established project and evaluation process**
- **Compiled initial ideas for incentives or payments to landowners**

MLRP Grant for the Kaweah Subbasin

Kaweah Delta Water Conservation District

Block Grant Summary

This block grant will result in the selection of multi-benefit land repurposing activities that manage groundwater supply, protect the land-based economy, provide medium- and long-term drought relief, restore wildlife habitat, and provide direct benefits to disadvantaged communities. A competitive project application process will be open to individual landowners and organizations. The team is implementing a broad community engagement approach to solicit projects and inform a multi-benefit agricultural land repurposing plan, through which they will identify which land repurposing strategies make most sense for their region and offer repurposing tools created through MLRP to landowners and GSAs.

The primary goal is to repurpose land with the intent to restore habitat. The block grantee and partners are collaborating with stakeholders representing an array of interests, including farmers and ranchers, disadvantaged communities, and land conservation. Projects selected for implementation will be conducted on lands least viable for agriculture and that contribute to resource connectivity.

Partners

- East Kaweah GSA
- Greater Kaweah GSA
- Mid-Kaweah GSA
- Self-Help Enterprises
- Sequoia Riverlands Trust
- SocioEnvironmental & Education Network
- ValleyEco

“I appreciate the amount of flexibility the Department of Conservation has with the program.”



Initial Successes

- Completed Outreach and Engagement Plan
- Conducted public and keystone stakeholder meetings
- Established a Stakeholder Advisory Committee
- Finalized project prioritization and selection criteria
- Publicly released a competitive solicitation for land repurposing projects

SGMA Agricultural Land Repurposing Program

County of Madera

Block Grant Summary

The Madera block grant incentivizes landowners who are interested in voluntarily repurposing agricultural lands to new uses that save water and create benefits for disadvantaged communities and ecosystems.

Partners are focused on a collaborative approach to engage landowners and residents in the MLRP plan design and process. The block grant team is also striving to make the plan flexible so that it can provide a blueprint for future land repurposing efforts in Madera County and beyond. Key activities include:

- Illustrating the business case for various land repurposing strategies
- Using workshops and surveys to generate input and ideas for various project types
- Building awareness and interest around specific project types and actions that offer multiple benefits to landowners, residents and ecosystems
- Connecting MLRP awards to other funding opportunities

Partners

- **California Farmland Trust**
- **Madera/Chowchilla Resource Conservation District**
- **Madera County Farm Bureau**
- **Madera Ag Water Association**
- **Self-Help Enterprises**

“*We recommend taking time upfront to establish partnerships and a collaborative approach.*”



Initial Successes

- **Completed Outreach and Engagement Plan**
- **Drafted initial project prioritization and selection criteria**

Block Grantee Year 1 Highlights

Round 1 block grantees have made significant progress in the first year of implementing their grants, as highlighted by Figure 5 below. See Appendix B for a full description of required block grant deliverables.

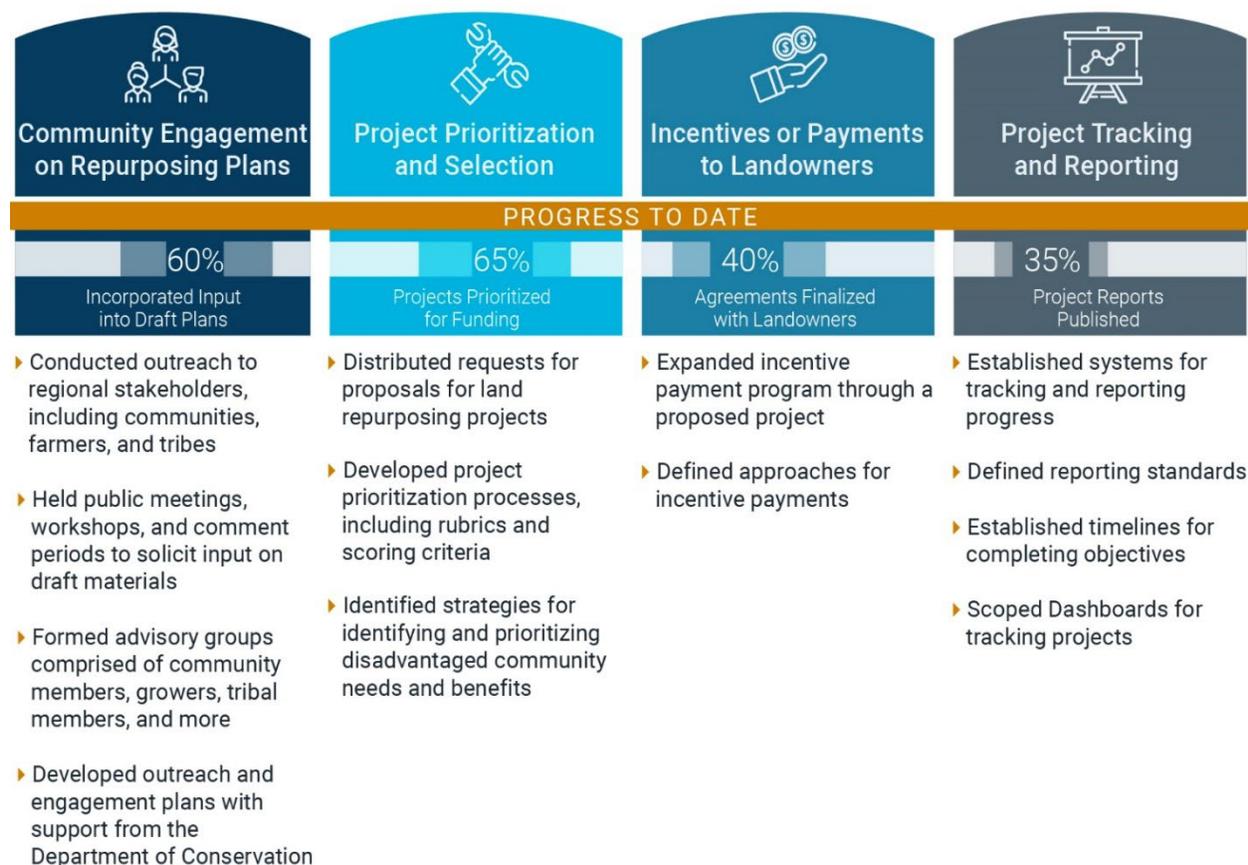


Figure 5. Block grantees made significant progress on grant implementation. The figure above displays block grantees' self-reported progress to date on several eligible block grant activities (through September 2023). The progress is relative to each activity and reflective of block grantees' perspectives on their progress.

In their first year of grant implementation, Round 1 block grantees have:

- Identified and conducted targeted outreach to regional stakeholders, including 13 disadvantaged communities in the Kaweah Subbasin, as well as 50 key stakeholders representing 35 unique entities in the Madera Subbasin.
- Identified disadvantaged communities in their regions and developed outreach and engagement plans for gathering their input on block grant priorities and processes.
- Held public meetings (including 7 meetings with over 50 attendees in the Kaweah and Madera Subbasins), workshops, and comment periods (including 1 in the Kaweah Subbasin) to gather community input on draft materials, such as requests for proposals

for land repurposing projects. Meetings and materials were offered in English and Spanish.

- Developed outreach and engagement plans, with DOC's input to align with program priorities.
- Developed public-facing web pages for sharing information and news and requesting input on block grant activities (block grants with web pages include the [Kaweah Subbasin](#), [Tule Subbasin](#), and [Madera County](#)).
- Worked with DOC and the Statewide Support Entity to develop the appropriate strategies for identifying disadvantaged community needs, lands least viable for irrigated agriculture, and areas supporting connectivity. These concepts will be prioritized in block grant implementation, particularly in projects selected for funding.
- Entered into agreements to compensate their partners and collaborators for bringing their expertise to their grants and established norms and expectations for collaborating.
- Formed community advisory groups representing a diverse set of stakeholders to inform the block grant planning process, including local community members, growers, tribal members, and others.
- Began project development activities under three block grants in Tule, Kaweah, and Lower Salinas Subbasins, with input from communities and DOC.

Round 1 block grantees have made considerable progress on Land Repurposing Plans (which identify and prioritize agricultural land repurposing strategies and projects within block grant regions); project development, permitting, and implementation; partner capacity and support; and outreach, education, and training. Grantees have made the most progress with outreach and engagement to local stakeholders. Block grantees rely on input gathered during the outreach process to inform their Repurposing Plans by capturing the local needs, benefits desired, and priorities for land repurposing.

As of September 2023, repurposing project implementation had not yet begun for any of the block grantees.

Common Challenges in the MLRP's First Year

Program administrators and participants faced several common challenges in the first year of MLRP implementation. Extreme weather and flooding impacting communities across the state² and delayed community outreach efforts in some block grantee regions. Challenges noted by Round 1 block grantees include establishing strong momentum across partners and collaborators, defining team roles and responsibilities, and gathering input from many diverse stakeholders.



Above: Round 1 block grantees discuss progress and challenges during their first year of implementation at the September 2023 Annual Meeting.

Expanding the MLRP: Round 2 Block Grantee Snapshots

In 2023, the program welcomed a second round of four additional block grantees into the MLRP in the Turlock, Merced, Pajaro Valley, and Westside Subbasins.

² California Department of Water Resources. (2023) "Water Year 2023: Weather Whiplash, From Drought To Deluge". https://water.ca.gov/-/media/DWR%20Website/Web%20Pages/Water%20Basics/Drought/Files/Publications%20And%20Reports/Water%20Year%202023%20wrap%20up%20brochure_01?utm_medium=email&utm

Pajaro Valley's Multi-Benefit Land Repurposing Program

Pajaro Valley Water Management Agency

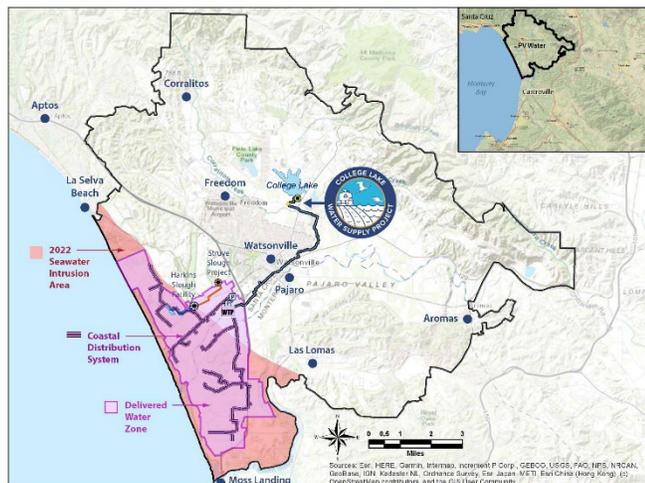
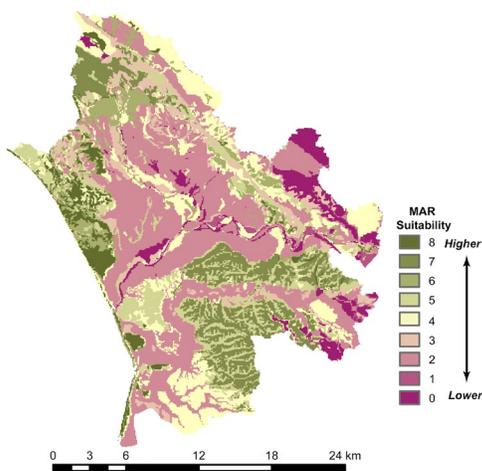
Block Grant Summary

This block grant will support the development of a long-term land repurposing plan to identify and prioritize land repurposing opportunities and outline strategies for implementing multi-benefit projects to sustain water resources and support agricultural viability in the Pajaro Valley. The grant will prioritize implementation of five pre-identified projects, including repurposing 136 acres of marginal agricultural lands using lake water as an alternative to groundwater as well as the development, permitting and design activities for two Recharge Net Metering-managed aquifer recharge project sites and implementation of at least one of the sites to infiltrate at least 100 AFY.

Additional targeted implementation projects include the repurposing of at least 40 acres of frequently flooded or saturated farmland, the acquisition of at least 20 acres of low productivity agricultural land at the confluence of the Salsipuedes Creek and Pajaro River, and construction of a new recharge basin. The block grant team reflects strong partnerships between water, environmental and conservation interests, local government, academia, and tribes.

Partners

- Land Trust of Santa Cruz County & The Nature Conservancy
- Pajaro Regional Flood Management Agency
- Resource Conservation District of Santa Cruz County
- University of California, Santa Cruz
- Watsonville Wetlands Watch



Westside Subbasin Multi-Benefit Land Repurposing Program

Westlands Water District Groundwater Sustainability Agency

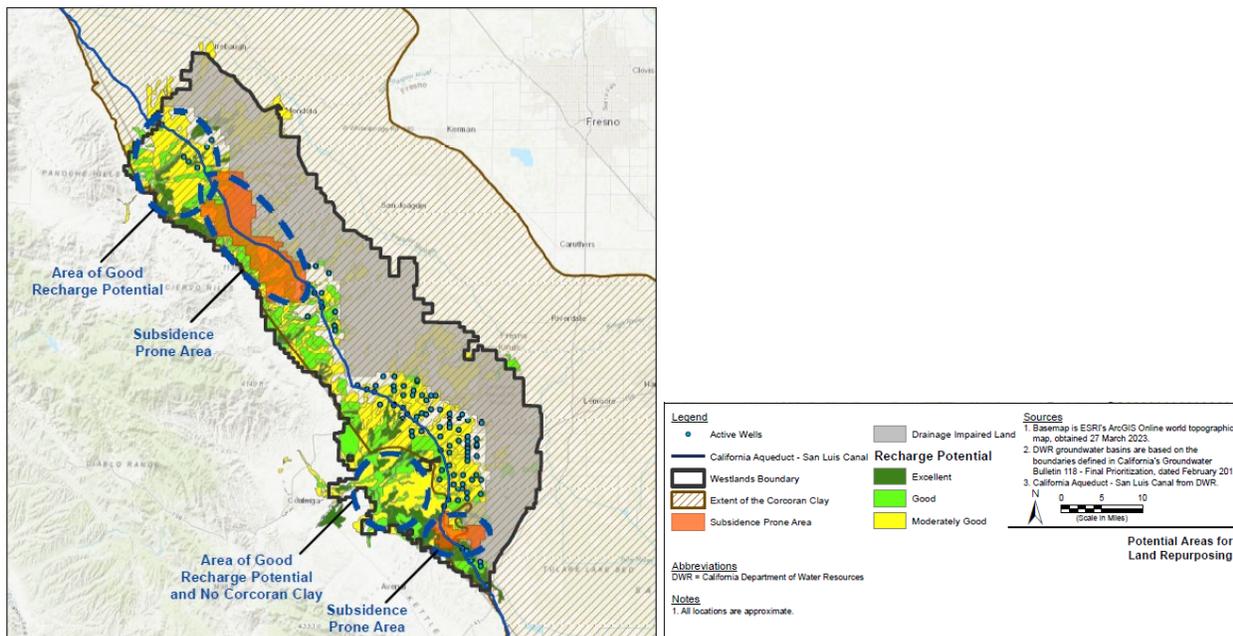
Block Grant Summary

This block grant will expand land repurposing efforts in the Westside Subbasin through an inclusive community engagement process that considers multiple beneficial uses, engages residents and landowners, reduces groundwater use, and supports wildlife habitat to help the Subbasin achieve its sustainability goal as outlined in the Westside GSP.

Plan implementation will include a focus on creation of multi-benefit recharge areas, transitioning irrigated land to dryland farming or non-irrigated rangeland, facilitating renewable energy projects that have an overall net greenhouse gas reduction benefit, creating or restoring wildlife habitat, and/or land and easement acquisitions to facilitate the repurposing of land uses. Outreach, education, and training funds will be used to support community engagement efforts as well as a pilot program to transition farmworkers to other high-skilled jobs, specifically recycled water retrofits and installs to support the City of Huron’s new recycled water ordinance.

Partners

- Civic Well
- LEAP
- Linguistica
- Sequoia Riverlands Trust
- Vista Consulting



Merced Subbasin GSA Multi-Benefit Land Repurposing Program

Merced Subbasin Groundwater Sustainability Agency

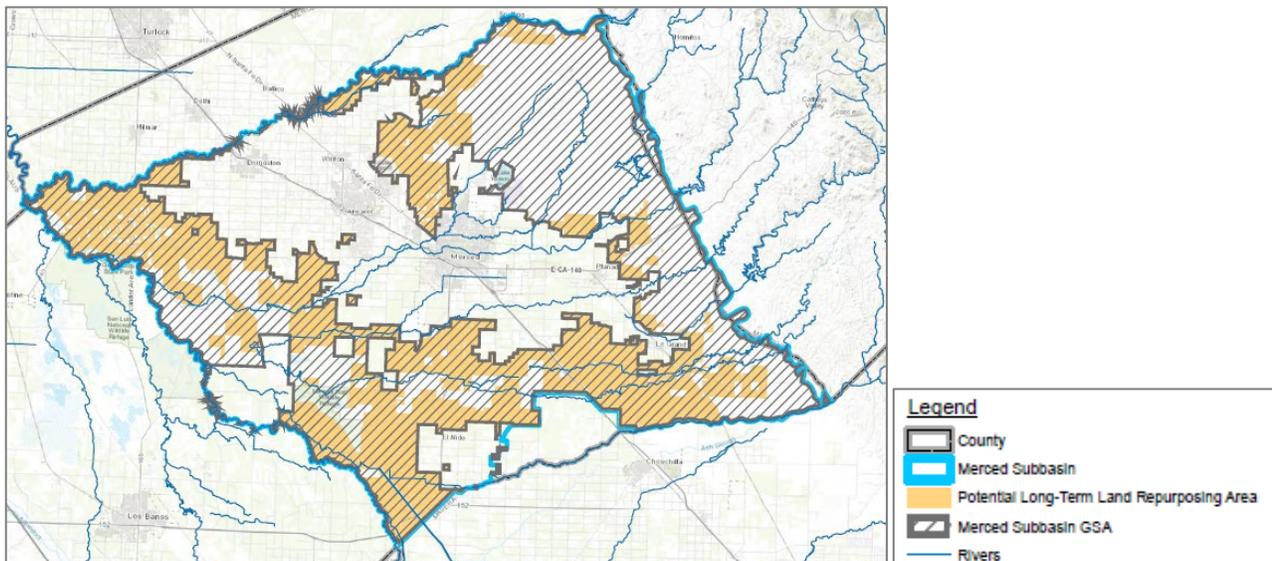
Block Grant Summary

This block grant will support coordinated efforts to build local capacity to repurpose agricultural land and lower groundwater use across the Merced Subbasin. It will address both overall groundwater overdraft in the Merced Subbasin Groundwater Sustainability Agency jurisdictional area as well as specific “hot spots” where groundwater sustainability indicators are severe. It will do so through a variety of repurposing mechanisms using models developed with a diverse set of local partners to maximize benefits and reduce adverse effects.

The block grant will focus on developing long-term land repurposing projects and establishing a wildlife habitat corridor between the Sierra Nevada Mountains and the Merced National Wildlife Refuge. Potential strategies include conversion to regenerative agriculture, habitat restoration, developing renewable energy, and creation of groundwater recharge areas. Incentives to facilitate repurposing may include payments to farmers to repurpose their land, conservation easements, and land purchasing.

Partners

- **East Merced Resource Conservation District**
- **Great Valley Seed**
- **La Paloma Mutual Water Company**
- **Merced National Wildlife Refuge**
- **River Partners**
- **Sandy Mush Mutual Water Company**
- **SocioEnvironmental and Education Network**



Turlock Subbasin Multi-benefit Land Repurposing Program

East Turlock Subbasin Groundwater Sustainability Agency

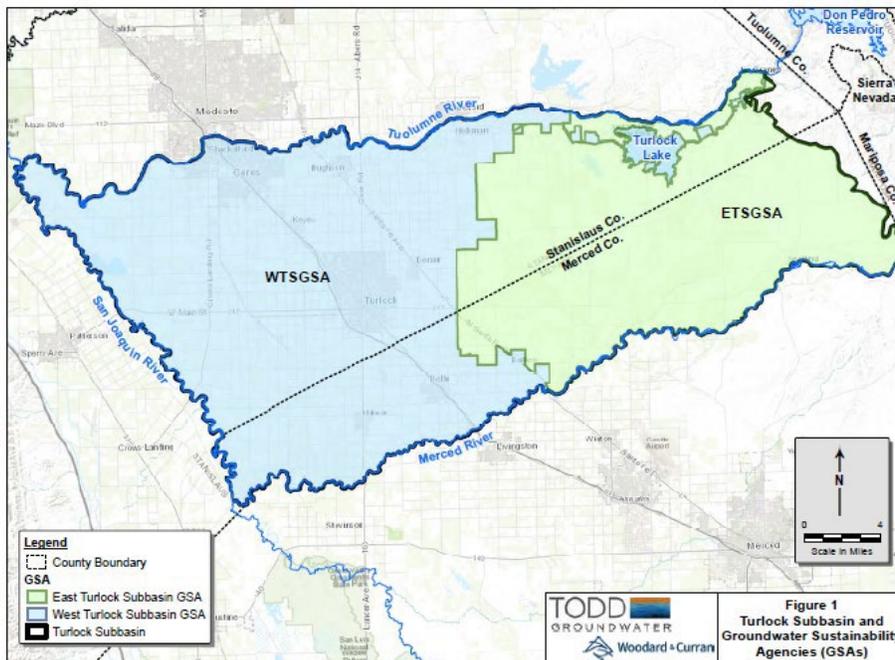
Block Grant Summary

This block grant focus on leveraging prior and ongoing work in the area to further identify land repurposing plan objectives through existing tools, outreach, and collaboration, updating and refining the Recharge Assessment Tool (GRAT) to better simulate recharge and repurposing strategies, identifying opportunities for repurposing, re-cropping, and cover cropping, and identifying opportunities for solar power projects and agrovoltatics. Initial repurposing strategies identified through this proposal include orchard swale rewilding, floodplain reconnection, and recharge storage basins, with a focus on projects around areas where domestic wells are going dry.

The Groundwater Sustainability Agency (GSA) would provide incentive payments for lands enrolled in the program that accept conservation easements or term contracts for land stewardship actions for periods of at least 10 years. Only irrigated lands would be eligible for enrollment. While the project area includes the West Turlock Subbasin and GSA, the implementation of land repurposing strategies will primarily focus on the East Turlock subbasin.

Partners

- **Eastside Water District**
- **Merced and Stanislaus Counties**
- **Sand Creek Flood Control District**
- **Turlock Irrigation District**
- **West Turlock Subbasin GSA**



Year 1 Highlight: September 2023 Annual Meeting

At the September 2023 Annual Meeting, Round 1 block grantees reflected on progress to date and Round 2 block grantees participated in onboarding sessions to learn more about the MLRP and their expectations going forward as members of the block grantee community of practice. Round 2 block grantees also heard reflections and recommendations from Round 1 block grantees from their first year of grant implementation. Round 2 block grantees noted that this peer learning was incredibly valuable as they begin initial efforts to form their teams and plan their block grant activities.



Above: Photos from the September 2023 Annual Meeting in Moss Landing, CA.

3. Tribal Grant Funding Overview & Progress

In its first round of funding, MLRP made \$5M available for projects led by tribes. Tribes were invited to apply for funding to plan for, develop, or implement multibenefit agricultural land repurposing projects that address two or more project outcomes. Applications are accepted on a rolling, non-competitive basis. In Round 2, an additional \$2.44M was made available for this purpose, increasing the total set-aside to \$5.69M.

To date, DOC has received one application for a tribal set-aside project. The **Dry Creek Rancheria Band of Pomo Indians** were awarded \$1,753,000 in May 2023 for the planning and development of a groundwater recharge project. See snapshot below for more details.

Dry Creek Rancheria Groundwater Recharge Project

Dry Creek Rancheria Band of Pomo Indians



The Dry Creek Rancheria Band of Pomo Indians, in partnership with local landowners, agencies, and nonprofits are working to replenish the local groundwater system by annually diverting 5,000 acre-feet of high winter flows from the Russian River through a network of underflow wells in the Alexander Valley and applying those waters to agricultural land when the commercial crops are dormant. The effort has multiple locations adjacent to the Russian River and throughout the Alexander Valley Subbasin. The diversion efforts will increase seepage supply to the Russian River to help provide local baseflows that support agriculture, domestic water uses, and endangered and threatened coho and steelhead fisheries.



Partners include farmers, agencies, and nonprofits. The farmers are providing access to their property for construction of pipe infrastructure and recharge zones. Partner agencies will bring regulatory and resource management resources and include DWR FloodMAR, the North Bay Water District, National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board, Sonoma County Farm Bureau, Sonoma County, and Sonoma Water. The DWR FloodMAR program is providing \$7 million for construction and initial planning for the project. Nonprofit partners include Trout Unlimited and Sonoma Alliance for Viticulture and the Environment.

4. Program Administration Highlights

Since the MLRP's inception in 2021, DOC has engaged a wide variety of stakeholders, advisors, technical support providers, and the public to receive input on MLRP design and administration. See Figure 3 for full timeline of MLRP implementation.

DOC has convened an Agency Advisory Group to help guide the direction of the MLRP as it is implemented. The Agency Advisory Group, which has generally met quarterly since October 2021, is comprised of the California Department of Water Resources, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, California Wildlife Conservation Board, California Department of Food and Agriculture, Governor's Office of Planning and Research, Governor's Office of Business Development, Natural Resources Conservation Service, US Fish and Wildlife Service, and the State Water Resources Control Board. This group has been integral in the development of the MLRP, application reviews, applicant interviews, technical guidance, and information sharing.

DOC also developed and released program guidelines based on stakeholder input in Winter 2021. Between October 2022 and September 2023, DOC hosted a public comment workshop on a second, updated set of Guidelines, which was attended by 32 participants following minor revisions to the program guidelines, as well as one application workshop, which was attended by 46 participants. Public comments were reviewed with the Agency Advisory Group and considered for incorporation on a case-by-case basis. On April 13, 2023, DOC attended the DWR Tribal Summit to provide information on MLRP and distribute a newly developed MLRP flyer to summit attendees.

The MLRP Statewide Support Entity

A critical piece of MLRP administration comes from the Statewide Support Entity. In May 2022, DOC selected a joint application from non-profit organizations Self-Help Enterprises (SHE) and Environmental Defense Fund (EDF) to co-chair MLRP's Statewide Support Entity, with critical support provided by Environmental Incentives. Together, these organizations provide technical assistance and facilitate communication and collaboration necessary for block grantees to meet MLRP goals. Specifically, the Statewide Support Entity is responsible for:

1. Coordination of Grant Recipients
2. Peer-Learning Facilitation
3. Grant Recipients Resources Facilitation
4. Communications
5. Community Engagement
6. Capacity Building and Technical Assistance
7. Monitoring and Outcomes Reporting

The specific responsibilities of the Statewide Support Entity include hosting monthly meetings with grantees, organizing learning events, creating guidance materials and resources to support grant implementation, and offering guidance to support block grantee engagement activities.

A key area of focus of the Statewide Support Entity is to support block grantees with meaningful engagement of historically underserved groups, such as small farmers, farmers of color, disadvantaged communities, and tribes, to ensure that these stakeholders can shape the direction of the program. Additionally, the Statewide Support Entity works to ensure that planning and project outcomes benefit an array of stakeholders in overdrafted groundwater basins.

Block Grantee Community of Practice Support

The Statewide Support Entity facilitates the Block Grantee Community of Practice, which enables block grantees to better understand which MLRP strategies are working, which are not, and why. The Block Grantee Community of Practice is a forum for collective learning that creates a shared vision of strategic, inclusive, and multibenefit land repurposing. It provides space for MLRP block grantees to learn from each other, from experts, and from regional partners on specific issues, and brainstorm creative solutions to problems as they arise.

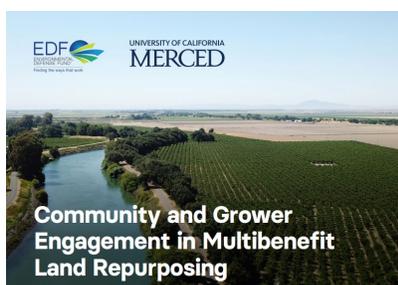
The Statewide Support Entity facilitates learning across block grantees through monthly meetings, during which participants can connect with peers to brainstorm solutions to shared challenges, connect with the Statewide Support Entity and DOC to ask questions related to grant implementation, and learn from presentations covering special topics (such as meaningful engagement of disadvantaged communities, tribes, and growers; alternative land uses; and community buffer zones). Round 1 block grantees have emphasized the benefits received from these meetings, including the presentations from experts and time connecting with peers on shared challenges.

Table 1. Monthly meeting topics and speakers

MONTH	TOPIC	SPEAKERS
November 2022	Introducing the Community of Practice	DOC and Statewide Support Entity
January 2023	Communications and Messaging on Land Repurposing and Water Issues	DOC and Statewide Support Entity
February 2023	Drafting your Multibenefit Agricultural Land Repurposing Plan	DOC and Statewide Support Entity
March 2023	Community Outreach and Engagement	Sonia Sanchez (SHE), Vicky Espinoza (The Nature Conservancy), Allison Jolley (The Watershed Center)
April 2023	Building Community Resilience to Climate Extremes with MLRP	Dezaraye Bagalayos (Allensworth Progressive Association), Tekoah Kadara (Allensworth Community Development Corporation), Abby Hart (The Nature Conservancy), and Ross Clark and Jenny Balmagia (Central Coast Wetlands Group)

MONTH	TOPIC	SPEAKERS
May 2023	Incorporating Habitat into MLRP Planning	Abby Hart (The Nature Conservancy), Scott Butterfield (The Nature Conservancy), Ross Clark (Central Coast Wetlands Group), Xerónimo Castañeda (Audubon), Maggie Blankinship (River Partners)
June 2023	Agency Funding Fair	Melinda Kelley (DOC), Shannon Lucas (Wildlife Conservation Board), Eliza Munger (GrizzlyCorps), Dylan Wilder (US Fish and Wildlife Service), Nancy Wahl-Scheurich (CA Resource Conservation Districts), Derek Schlea (Limnotech), Brandon Bates (Natural Resources Conservation Service)
July 2023	Creating Community Buffer Zones in MLRP Planning & Spotlight on Madera	Dr. Angel S. Fernández-Bou (Union of Concerned Scientists) and Madera County
August 2023	Working Lands under MLRP	Ted Toombs (EDF), Caity Peterson (Public Policy Institute of California), Stuart Woolf (Woolf Farms)
September 2023	2023 Annual Meeting: Pause-and-Reflect and Round 2 Block Grantee Onboarding	DOC and Statewide Support Entity

In support of the Block Grantee Community of Practice, the Statewide Support Entity has provided dozens of resources that have been produced by both the Statewide Support Entity and partner organizations on community engagement and outreach, block grant development and management, land repurposing strategies, and general program outreach materials. A few key resources block grantees have found helpful are called out below (see Appendix A for a full list of resources provided to block grantees through September 2023).



Community and Grower Engagement in Multibenefit Land Repurposing

Outlines best practices for meaningfully engaging community members and small-scale growers in land repurposing plans and projects. [Click here](#) to view the guide and its summary on the EDF website.



Bilingual Multibenefit Land Use Alternatives Flyer

Alternative land-use project options eligible under MLRP with a call to participate in the MLRP Community and Grower Survey.

Programa de Reutilización de Tierras de Beneficios Múltiples Plantilla de Encuesta para la Comunidad y los Productores

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Accesibilidad del Idioma	3
Traducción de Encuestas	3
Terminología Estandarizada y Jerga Reducida	3
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Plantilla de Encuesta Comunitaria	5

MLRP Community and Grower Survey Template

A customizable survey with guidance to gather meaningful input from communities to support regional land repurposing planning. Available to block grantees in English and Spanish.

Block Grantee Collaboration Space

The Statewide Support Entity developed the Block Grantee Collaboration Space for block grantees to share and access learning resources, ideas, challenges, lessons learned, and best practices as they implement their MLRP grant. The Collaboration Space also serves as a place where block grantees can access important event dates and details, such as meeting logistics and materials, and resources produced or compiled by the MLRP Statewide Support Entity, such as template outreach materials or guidance documents.



Round 1 block grantees have highlighted the collaboration space as a useful resource for navigating grant implementation. Block grantees most frequently access the Resource Library and monthly meetings pages; 66 different users (including block grantees, the Statewide Support Entity, and DOC staff) have viewed the Resource Library over 350 times and the Meetings and Events page over 90 times since tracking began in September 2023.

When asked about their use of the Collaboration Space and the materials accessed on the website, half of the block grantees surveyed said they find the Collaboration Space very or extremely useful, and nearly all block grantees surveyed (85%) said they find the resources on the site at least moderately useful. Over three quarters of the block grantees would like to see more content and resources developed for the website in the next year of MLRP activities.

Statewide Support Entity Implementation Partners

Based on block grantee needs and interests, the Statewide Support Entity leverages experts in various fields as Implementation Partners to provide specific technical assistance to block grantees and entities applying for repurposing funding. Current Statewide Support Entity Implementation Partners include The Nature Conservancy and the Union of Concerned Scientists, with additional Implementation Partners likely to be brought on in the future.



The Nature Conservancy, with support from the Statewide Support Entity, developed the Community and Grower Survey template and guidance to support block grantees as they plan for and gather meaningful stakeholder input in land repurposing planning. The Nature Conservancy, partnering with the Statewide Support Entity, also developed an [English](#) and [Spanish](#) MLRP Overview video posted to YouTube to provide a general overview of the program, its goals and initial progress, and information on how to get involved in MLRP land repurposing efforts. Block grantees, DOC, the Statewide Support Entity, and program partners can share this video as part of their general outreach efforts.



The **Union of Concerned Scientists** presented strategies for incorporating community buffer zones in land repurposing at a monthly block grantee meeting in July 2023. Additionally, the Statewide Support Entity and the Union of Concerned Scientists are working together to develop project prioritization guidance to support block grantees as they plan for and prioritize projects for land repurposing.

The Statewide Support Entity will leverage existing and new Implementation Partners in 2024 and beyond to meet the changing needs of block grantees as they implement their block grants. Activities planned for 2024 include a field trip to Capinero Creek near the Pixley National Wildlife Refuge, led by The Nature Conservancy, to highlight ways to incorporate habitat into land repurposing projects.

Statewide Support Entity Advisory Committee

The Statewide Support Entity elected to form an Advisory Committee to provide a range of perspectives and expertise that will help ensure that the Statewide Support Entity is appropriately providing resources and guidance to block grantees that will allow them to achieve the broad goals of MLRP. The Advisory Committee meets bi-annually or annually, and periodically reviews materials produced by the SSE to provide high-level input related to program implementation, connect grantees to other funding opportunities and planning

initiatives, and advise on specific aspects of the program. Members include representatives from organizations focused on environmental conservation, working lands, disadvantaged communities, and tribes (see Figure 6 below).



Figure 6. SSE Advisory Committee members represented by their associated organization logos (not represented by logo here is the participation of Baldwin Moy, a community member of Madera County, and Yaynicut Franco, a member of the Wukchumni Tribe)

5. Looking Ahead

The Department of Conservation (DOC), Statewide Support Entity, and block grantees look forward to continued progress toward program and regional goals in 2024 and beyond. With the welcoming of a second round of block grantees in 2023 and significant interest in future funding opportunities, DOC and the Statewide Support Entity anticipate that the MLRP will make significant impacts to water, land, and community resilience across the state in the coming years. In Year 2, the MLRP will build on the collaboration and progress made in the first year, focusing on the following key areas of implementation.

Expanded Resources for Block Grantees

In 2024, the Statewide Support Entity will continue to integrate Round 2 block grantees into the MLRP Block Grantee Community of Practice to build a cohesive community of practitioners implementing land repurposing block grants. Regular Block Grantee Community of Practice meetings will expand to feature a new set of learning topics to support block grantees as they move through implementation of their grants, including topics requested by block grantees at the September 2023 Annual Meeting. The Statewide Support Entity and its Implementation Partners will also provide special trainings, field trips, and additional guidance materials.

Project Development, Implementation, and Monitoring

Round 1 block grantees are in the process of identifying land repurposing projects and are preparing to select and fund these projects beginning in 2024. To support this work, the Statewide Support Entity and DOC will provide guidance on project prioritization and scoring criteria, effective monitoring methods, and appropriate reporting processes across all block grant regions. DOC will also review projects selected for funding by block grantees to ensure alignment with program guidelines and priorities using a project review framework before providing individual project funding approval.

Program Demand and Future Funding

There is strong interest in and need for continued MLRP funding. In Round 1, 8 of the 12 regions that applied for funding were unsuccessful due to limited funding availability (representing over \$100M in funding requested and only \$40M available for block grants). The numbers were similar in Round 2: 6 of the 10 regions that applied were unsuccessful with a total of \$85M in funding requested and only \$35M available for block grants. Continued program funding would help meet the extremely high demand for land repurposing, contributing to the achievement of important SGMA benchmarks and strengthening efforts to transition California to more resilient land and water systems.



Above: Members of the MLRP Block Grantee Community of Practice, Statewide Support Entity, and DOC at the 2023 Annual Meeting in Moss Landing, CA

This first Annual Report of MLRP activities demonstrates the early focus on community input and engagement and the emphasis on inclusion and collaboration to strengthen regional land repurposing efforts.

This report as well as future reports can be found on DOC's website at www.conservation.ca.gov/dlrp/grant-programs/Pages/Multibenefit-Land-Repurposing-Program.aspx. For more information, please contact DOC's MLRP staff at mlrp@conservation.ca.gov.

Appendix A. Resources Provided to Block Grantees

The table below provides a comprehensive list of resources and tools provided to block grantees by the Statewide Support Entity. These resources and tools support block grantees as they plan and implement block grant activities, and were identified as priorities by block grantees during annual and monthly meetings.

Table A1. Resources shared with block grantees.

RESOURCE	DESCRIPTION
Monthly Meeting Syllabus	Topics for block grantee meetings facilitated by the Statewide Support Entity and focused on peer learning and collaboration, including special topics relevant for grant implementation.
Block Grantee Collaboration Space	Website for block grantees to share and access learning resources, ideas, challenges, lessons learned, and best practices. More details provided in the section below.
Block Grantee Community of Practice Charter	Living, iterative document to guide and be a reference tool for members of the MLRP block grantee community of practice (CoP).
Solar Energy and Groundwater in the San Joaquin Valley	Considers solar energy as an alternative for fallowed lands in the San Joaquin Valley. Developed by the Public Policy Institute of California.
MLRP Overview Flier	Handout in English and Spanish with an overview of the MLRP and a section customizable to each block grantee region.
Community and Grower Engagement in Multibenefit Land Repurposing	Outlines best practices for meaningfully engaging community members and small-scale growers in land repurposing plans and projects.
Advancing Strategic Land Repurposing and Groundwater Sustainability in California	Outlines practical and creative approaches to support the development of regionally coordinated land repurposing strategies.
Bilingual MLRP Presentation	Overview of MLRP, with English and Spanish text on each slide.
CaliWaterAg, Vicky Espinoza's Trilingual YouTube channel	Videos related to water sustainability and management in English, Spanish, and Hmong.
SGMA Glossaries (English & Spanish)	Glossary of water and SGMA-related terms with plain language definitions.
Water Words Alternatives	Living, iterative list of jargon, or "wonky" words (and simple alternatives) used in water resource management. Developed by the Water Hub.
Audience Profile Worksheet	Worksheet developed by the Water Hub to help identify audience perspectives to tailor outreach messaging.
The Future of Agriculture in the San Joaquin Valley	Updates a 2019 Public Policy Institute of California report to include updated water supply and agricultural land use data and provides strategies to offset water scarcity.
Linguistica Interpreting & Translation	Interpretation and translation services include Spanish, Hmong, Punjabi, and Arabic.

RESOURCE	DESCRIPTION
Best Practices for DAC Engagement	A starting point for best practices block grantees should consider when engaging disadvantaged communities in planning and project development efforts to meaningfully incorporate DACs in land repurposing efforts and meet program requirements.
Other DOC Funding Programs: SALC	Provided program details
Wildlife Conservation Board Funding Programs	Provided contact information
GrizzlyCorps Funding Program	Provided contact information
US Fish and Wildlife Service Funding Programs	Provided contact information
Limnotech Funding Programs	Provided contact information
CA Association of Resource Conservation Districts Funding Programs	Provided program details
Natural Resources Conservation Services Funding Programs	Provided contact information
Community and Grower Survey Template (in English and Spanish)	A customizable survey with guidance to gather meaningful input from communities to support regional land repurposing planning.
Multibenefit Land Use Alternatives Flyer (English and Spanish)	Alternative land-use project options eligible under MLRP with a call to participate in the MLRP Community and Grower Survey.
Water, environment, and socioeconomic justice in California: A multi-benefit cropland repurposing framework	Proposes a multibenefit framework to repurpose cropland in buffers inside and around rural disadvantaged communities located in the Central Valley.
DWR Groundwater Recharge Mapping Tool	Developed by the Department of Water Resources and partners which can support grant teams as they develop their Repurposing Plans and identify potential projects.
DWR On-Farm Recharge Methods Manual	Provides observations and lessons learned from implementing on-farm recharge, including methods to enhance recharge, avoid crop health problems, manage recharge events, and minimize nutrient leaching.
DWR Central Valley Groundwater Recharge Incentives and Strategies	Can help water districts, GSAs, and their technical consultants design and implement effective multi-benefit recharge programs and projects. These summarize necessary considerations, publicly available tools, and examples to design new or refine existing recharge and incentive programs that address the specific needs and priorities in a subbasin.
Media Resources Folder	Photos featured in the folder provide examples of land repurposing alternatives.

Appendix B. MLRP Block Grant Deliverables

Block grant deliverables ensure block grant activities support MLRP goals and the goals identified in each block grantee's scopes of work.

Block Grant Deliverables Required by MLRP

Multibenefit Agricultural Land Repurposing Plans ("Repurposing Plans"). Block grantees can develop Repurposing Plans concurrently with other activities, such as conducting outreach to communities, tribes, farmers, and growers. Repurposing Plans identify and prioritize agricultural land repurposing strategies and projects within block grant regions. They can estimate project benefits (e.g., reduced groundwater demand), support land-based economies, reflect strong regional support and collaboration, and contribute to resource and habitat connectivity.

Land Repurposing Project Development and Permitting. Project development and permitting must generate implementation-ready projects that repurpose agricultural lands and provide benefits to disadvantaged communities.

Land Repurposing Project Implementation. Projects must meaningfully benefit disadvantaged communities, are conducted on lands that are least viable for irrigated agriculture, and contribute to resource connectivity (e.g., habitat connectivity, renewable energy distribution, etc.).

Partner and Collaborator Capacity Support. Mechanisms to support the capacity needs of partners must achieve the deliverables of the grant and meet program goals. The ability to support partner and collaborator capacity directly enhances the effectiveness of collaboration on program activities, and improves program outcomes.

Outreach, Education, and Training. Conducting outreach, education, and training facilitates and builds capacity to implement the above activities. Targeted outreach and engagement of farmers, disadvantaged communities, and tribes support an enhanced understanding of regional needs, increases regional support for repurposing strategies, and builds a foundation from which a collaborative stakeholder structure can successfully support the block grant implementation.

Monitoring. Monitoring projects funded by MLRP to ensure defined conservation outcomes from projects have been achieved and maintained for the agreed upon duration of the benefit. Effective project monitoring will be critical to assess the impacts from program activities.