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PV Water Launches Landmark Groundwater Rebate Program
Water customers to “run their meters backwards”

Watsonville, CA – The Board of Directors of the Pajaro Valley Water Management Agency (PV Water) has approved a program for Recharge Net Metering, the first of its kind in California, as part of a comprehensive effort to improve groundwater conditions in the Pajaro Valley. The five-year pilot program will begin in October 2016, and operated as a partnership between PV Water, staff from the University of California, Santa Cruz (UCSC), and the Resource Conservation District of Santa Cruz County (RCD).

The Recharge Net Metering (ReNeM) program will create financial incentives for landowners to infiltrate (put into the ground) some of the storm water that currently flows from hillslopes, roads, and fields during large rainstorms, helping to replenish underlying aquifers. Working with willing landowners, projects will be placed in locations where conditions for infiltration of storm water are especially favorable. "Over the next five years, we hope to create eight to ten working projects, each contributing around 100 acre-feet per year of infiltration into the ground," explained Chris Coburn, Executive Director of the RCD. One acre-foot is about 326,000 gallons of water, enough to satisfy the domestic needs of two families of four for a year.

A formula will be applied to calculate the rebate. Initially, the rebate will be 50% of the unit water cost that is charged by the Agency to customers as an augmentation fee for water pumped from wells. The rebate will be applied against water fees for the following year. "We will measure the inflows for each project and then subtract the infiltration that would have occurred on that land without the project. The rebate provides an incentive for landowners to keep projects working so that they can receive rebates year after year," said Andrew Fisher, professor of Earth and Planetary Sciences at UCSC.

"There used to be more recharge in the past when less of the landscape had been modified for towns and roads and agricultural fields and when rainfall events were not so intense," explained Fisher. If successful, this program can serve as a model statewide.

There will be meetings later this year at which interested land owners can request to have their properties evaluated for inclusion in the pilot program. The initial program will be limited in scope, as each project requires funding for design, construction, instrumentation, and evaluation. Fisher and Coburn hope that the initial eight to ten projects, with one or two added for each of the next five years, can help to test the program as a proof-of-concept.

PV Water is a public agency whose mission is to protect and preserve the water resources within the agency's jurisdiction, generally the greater coastal Pajaro Valley.

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