

Cuyama Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency Standing Advisory Committee Meeting

November 1, 2018

Meetings Minutes

Cuyama Valley Family Resource Center, 4689 CA-166, New Cuyama, CA 93254

PRESENT:

Jaffe, Roberta – Chair
Kelly, Brenton – Vice Chair
Alvarado, Claudia
DeBranch, Brad
Draucker, Louise
Furstenfeld, Jake
Post, Mike (*telephonically*)
Valenzuela, Hilda Leticia
Beck, Jim – Executive Director
Hughes, Joe – Legal Counsel

ABSENT:

Haslett, Joe

1. Call to Order

Chair Roberta Jaffe called the Standing Advisory Committee (SAC) to order at 4:00 p.m.

Chair Jaffe reported that Santa Barbara County Water Agency's Water Resources Program Manager Matt Young was present telephonically and available as a technical advisor to the SAC.

2. Roll Call

Hallmark Group Project Coordinator Taylor Blakslee called roll of the Committee (shown above).

3. Pledge of Allegiance

The pledge of allegiance was led by Chair Jaffe.

4. Approval of Minutes

Cuyama Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency (CBGSA) Executive Director Jim Beck presented the September 27, 2018 SAC minutes. A motion was made by Committee member Jake Furstenfeld to adopt the minutes and seconded by Committee Member Louise Draucker. A roll call vote was made, and the motion passed.

5. Groundwater Sustainability Plan

a. Groundwater Sustainability Plan Update

Woodard & Curran (W&C) Project Manager Brian Van Lienden provided an update on Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) activities, which is included in the SAC packet.

1. GSP Schedule and Outline

Mr. Van Lienden presented a GSP component slide, along with a GSP outline, to assist the Committee in understanding the GSP development process.

Chair Jaffe asked if the Counties need to approve the GSP prior to final CBGSA adoption. CBGSA Executive Director Jim Beck said yes and he expects CBGSA participants to receive authorization from their governing Boards prior to CBGSA Board adoption.

Chair Jaffe asked when the missing components of the released chapters and sections will be completed. Mr. Van Lienden said when the GSP public draft is released. He stated the SAC and Board will have an opportunity to review and comment on the GSP public draft prior to adoption.

Vice Chair Brenton Kelly arrived at 4:22 pm

W&C Senior Hydrogeologist John Ayers provided an update on the Tritium study that was performed by the USGS. Mr. Ayres reported that water with Tritium in it is typically considered younger water due to the atmospheric accumulation of Tritium caused by nuclear testing in the 1960s and 70s. Mr. Ayres demonstrated how Tritium is not always a reliable test of determining if water recovery is occurring from older water aquifers.

Ms. Wooster said USGS worked with Santa Barbara County to test for water quality. Prior to testing, she said they pumped the well multiple times. Mr. Ayres said when taking a proper water sample, water is typically purged three volumes of the casing volume, but this amount is not enough to affect Tritium levels.

Landowner Steve Gliessman said the reason the Tritium study arose was because they primarily wanted to know the age of water. Mr. Ayres said old water can be present and accessed for a really long time, and if you are pulling up old water, new water can be sucked down to the well perforations.

Landowner Ann Myhre said the reason new water does not reach the bottom of the basin is because it is full. Mr. Ayres stated there is recharge occurring in the Basin and W&C is running a model to figure out how much.

Chair Jaffe asked if we are interested in the age of the water because of the potential heavy

metals being drawn up and the effect on water quality. Mr. Ayres said we do not have nearly enough data to determine this because water quality changes by depth and location. He said the basin's data issue is a supply issue. Mr. Ayres recommended making groundwater levels the main focus of the conversation. He reminded the group that other issues, such as water quality, need to be addressed, but we need to understand groundwater levels and how to stabilize them first.

Cuyama Valley Family Resource Center Executive Director Lynn Carlisle asked if Mr. Ayres thinks Tritium and the age of water is an issue. Mr. Ayres said he does not think it is a factor since the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) is about regional water management and the Tritium study focuses on a few localized wells. Mr. Ayres stated the presence of Tritium does not mean deep well percolation is not occurring.

UC Santa Barbara Associate Professor of Sociocultural Anthropology Casey Walsh asked if we are tracking the Vadose zone. Mr. Ayres said we have not tracked the Vadose zone because it is very expensive, and those costs could be avoided by tracking groundwater levels.

Vice Chair Kelly thanked Mr. Ayres for the Tritium presentation. He asked where percolated water is accounted for and if it is called recharge within the water budget. Mr. Ayres replied the water budget is being calculated by the numeric groundwater model, in which represents physical conditions and various factors within the basin. The model estimates how much water is being pumped, along with storage capacity.

2. Sustainability Discussion

Mr. Beck reported that Management Areas were discussed last month at the September 27, 2018 SAC meeting with Mr. Ayres present. At the October 3, 2018 Board meeting, several Board members had questions regarding management areas and the need for them.

Mr. Beck informed the group that the basis for management areas is for setting different thresholds for different regions. Mr. Ayres commented that management areas and sustainability thresholds are so intertwined that we need to talk about them simultaneously. Mr. Ayres reported that if your groundwater levels are below the minimum threshold, you are experiencing undesirable results. Minimum thresholds are set using a rationale to reach a quantitative threshold and this occurs at each monitoring well. He stated that minimum thresholds are applied to representative wells in the monitoring network. He reported that 49 out of 88 wells are representative wells.

Chair Jaffe said the representative wells in Cottonwood Canyon are located in the riverbed but are functioning significantly different from nearby wells. Mr. Ayres said he can look into it and make a change if appropriate. Mr. Ayres said if one representative well is not perfect, that is not a big deal because the California Department of Water Resources (DWR) does not encourage management of a discrete portion of the basin as they relate to individual monitoring wells. Mr. Beck commented that representative wells can be changed in the future if a need is determined.

Vice Chair Kelly asked if there are only six wells in the Ventucopa area in the monitoring network section. Mr. Ayres said the wells located in the Ventucopa area are the only ones being provided by Ventura County in 2017.

Ms. Myhre said there are only four wells being used as representative wells in the San Juan basin. These wells were tracked for 20 years and she said their water levels should not move by more than 25 feet. She reported her well decreased by as much as 100 feet in a year, but her overall deviation was only 12 feet. She recommended management areas because of the complexity of the Cuyama basin.

Ms. Carlisle asked why five years of storage was chosen for the Margin of Operational Flexibility. Mr. Ayres said five years is the approximate length of a drought period, however this is a subjective value that can be changed.

Mr. Walsh asked if the same rationale is needed for every representative well. Mr. Ayres said no and that is why they want to use management areas.

Ms. Wooster asked if the threshold can be set with how much water is in each well and Mr. Ayres said that is possible. Mr. Ayres commented that using the shallowest well method for setting thresholds does not work as well in canyons or areas with elevation changes.

3. Update on Management Areas

Mr. Ayres provided background on why the recommended management areas were suggested last month. He said setting thresholds based on the same rationale does not make sense if the conditions are different. He reported that he chose the term “management areas” because DWR defines the use of management areas for setting different minimum thresholds and measurable objectives. Mr. Ayres stated we can use any term where we apply threshold rationales. He said he can narratively describe the separate monitoring areas if areas delineated on a map are of concern to the CBGSA Board.

Mr. Beck asked Mr. Ayres to address why they want to use management areas for setting thresholds as opposed to setting thresholds for each of the 49 representative wells. Mr. Ayres said setting thresholds for each well would be a very challenging and expensive process, and he would anticipate a number of cases where they would have to be calculated estimates.

Committee members Claudia Alvarado and Hilda Leticia Valenzuela left at 6:00 pm

Mr. Ayres reported that management areas were generally selected where land use and conditions were similar.

Ms. Wooster said there is a lot of concern about setting management areas in the central basin

since new development is occurring in the Ventucopa area and punitive actions may be enforced in the central basin to restrict pumping. Mr. Beck said those are valid issues that will need to be discussed in the near future with the Board.

Ms. Myhre said the use of the term “management areas” is semantics and maybe we can use a different term.

Mr. Young read the DWR Management Areas definition and disagreed with W&C’s interpretation of their purpose, since in his interpretation, DWR’s definition implies different operations may occur with management areas.

Ms. Carlisle asked if there is potential that the GSP can be produced by 2020 without management actions, and Mr. Beck replied that management actions will be addressed in the GSP.

Ms. Myhre said the term management areas should be used over threshold regions to be in sync with other GSAs and DWR’s terminology.

Mr. Beck said W&C needs direction from the Board on management areas because this decision will impact the schedule. Mr. Ayres presented several options for potential threshold regions and reported that they preferred option D, which is illustrated on page 56 of the SAC packet. This would separate the basin into six regions for the purpose of setting rationales for determining minimum thresholds and measurable objectives.

Vice Chair Kelly said he generally agreed with Option D, however he commented that there are significant data gaps in the river corridor of the Ventucopa area. Mr. Ayres agreed that additional monitoring is needed in the Ventucopa area.

Committee member Furstenfeld agreed with W&C’s approach.

Chair Jaffe asked for clarification on why the westside of the basin was broken into two areas. Mr. Ayres said they looked at the shallowest wells within the area, and to be protective of dewatering those shallow wells, they separated the deep and shallow wells into two areas. This will allow a separate methodology to incorporate the conditions in the uphill area and the area downhill. If conditions uphill were to deteriorate while land use remains consistent, then we know the thresholds downhill are too low and potentially affecting them.

Chair Jaffe asked if the western region was kept all the same, could the minimum threshold be set at 2015 levels. Mr. Ayres said in 2015 groundwater levels in the western basin were about 20 feet below the surface, which is not significantly undesirable.

Ms. Wooster commented that if you start new farming operations you cannot expect levels to stay the same, so using 2015 conditions as a minimum threshold does not make sense.

Mr. Gliessman said their well levels have been decreasing in the last couple years but have not for years prior which, to him, indicates some connectivity. Mr. Ayres said he will present an overview of a spike of water moving down the Cottonwood Canyon he found in the data at next month's SAC meeting he thinks can explain Mr. Gliessman's observation of water level changes.

Ms. Wooster said we do not know if we will manage these areas differently in the future but there is a need to figure out the data first. Mr. Beck said because the term management areas is emotionally charged, he thinks threshold regions or sub-regions should be used. Mr. Ayres clarified that each region will have the same rationale for determining representative well sustainability thresholds.

Ms. Carlisle asked what thresholds will be applied to each representative well. Mr. Ayres said he will present recommended thresholds for the SAC to review, which will ultimately go to the Board for approval.

Chair Jaffe said the well measurements from their wells have not been included in the Data Management System. Mr. Van Lienden said W&C included all the data received. He said every well in the western basin could be made as a representative well if the CBGSA Board would like to do that.

Ms. Wooster said she is concerned with putting the Russel Fault area in the central basin region threshold. Mr. Ayres said he is comfortable that we will be able to come up with a solution to present an appropriate rationale for determining thresholds across the basin.

Chair Jaffe suggested making two motions: 1) support threshold regions, 2) direct W&C to use threshold region boundaries.

1) Vice Chair Kelly made a motion to recommend threshold regions be adopted. The motion was seconded by Committee Member Furstenfeld and passed unanimously. Committee member Post was not able to participate at this time in the meeting and therefore, roll call was not needed.

2) Vice Chair Kelly made a motion to direct Woodard & Curran to use Option D to develop preliminary threshold numbers. The motion was seconded by Committee Member Draucker and passed unanimously.

b. Discussion on Monitoring Networks Chapter

Mr. Ayres provided an overview on the Monitoring Networks and what that chapter includes.

Mr. Kelly asked what the certainty of the model is given the data gaps. Mr. Van Lienden said the model will be composed initially with the data we have, but as we move forward we will gather more data.

Chair Jaffe said there are many groundwater dependent ecosystems in the canyons and it is important that we keep that in mind.

c. DWR Technical Support Services Update

Mr. Beck reported that the memo is in the SAC packet and could be discussed if there are any questions.

d. Technical Forum Update

Mr. Beck reported that the memo is in the SAC packet and could be discussed if there are any questions.

e. Stakeholder Engagement Update

Mr. Beck reported that the memo is in the SAC packet and could be discussed if there are any questions.

6. Groundwater Sustainability Agency

a. Report of the Executive Director

Mr. Beck reported the December SAC meeting will likely conflict with the Christmas Holiday schedule and we will need to move those dates.

b. Board of Directors Agenda Review

Mr. Beck reported that the memo is in the SAC packet and could be discussed if there are any questions.

c. Report of the General Counsel

Nothing to report.

7. Items for Upcoming Sessions

Nothing to report.

8. Committee Forum

Nothing to report.

9. Public comment for items not on the Agenda

Nothing to report.

10. Adjourn

Chair Jaffe adjourned the meeting at 7:51 p.m.

I, Jim Beck, Executive Director of the Cuyama Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency, do hereby certify that the foregoing is a fair statement of the proceedings of the meeting held on Thursday, November 1, 2018, by the Cuyama Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency Standing Advisory Committee.

Jim Beck

Dated: November 29, 2018