

Cuyama Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency
Board of Directors Meeting

January 15, 2025

Meeting Minutes

PRESENT:

Directors

Bantilan, Cory – Chair
Yurosek, Derek – Vice Chair
Albano, Byron – Treasurer
Anselm, Arne – Secretary
Jackson, Steve
Klinchuch, Matt – Alternate
Reely, Blaine – Alternate
Williams, Deborah
Wooster, Jane
Young, Matthew
Zenger, Katelyn

Staff

Beck, Jim – Executive Director
Blakslee, Taylor – Assistant Executive Director
Dominguez, Alex – Legal Counsel
Hughes, Joe – Legal Counsel
Van Lienden, Brian – Woodard & Curran

ABSENT:

None

1. Call to Order

Cuyama Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency (CBGSA) Chair Cory Bantilan called the meeting to order at 2:02 p.m.

2. Roll Call

Ms. Bianchi called roll (shown above) and informed Chair Bantilan that there was a quorum of the Board.

3. Pledge of Allegiance

The pledge of allegiance was led by Chair Bantilan.

4. Meeting Protocols

Mr. Blakslee provided an overview of the meeting protocols.

5. Election of Officers

Chair Bantilan reviewed the positions that are up for elections, which include the board chair, vice chair, treasurer, and secretary.

There was no discussion or public comments on this item.

MOTION

Director Albano made a motion to keep the current slate being Director Bantilan as Chair, Director Yurosek as Vice Chair, Director Albano as Treasurer, and Director Anselm as Secretary. The motion was seconded by Director Reely. A roll call vote was made and the motion passed.

- AYES: Anselm, Albano, Bantilan, Jackson, Klinchuch, Reely, Young, Yurosek, Zenger
- NOES: None
- ABSTAIN: None
- ABSENT: Wooster, Williams

6. Standing Advisory Committee Meeting Report

Meeting Date: January 9th, 2025

Submitted to the CBGSA Board of Directors on January 15th, 2025 By Brenton Kelly, SAC Chair
The Standing Advisory Committee met at the Family Resource Center in a hybrid format, with five Committee Members present in-person and two on the conference line with none absent. GSA Staff Taylor Blakeslee and legal counsel Alex Dominguez were present, and they were joined by Grace Bianchi, and W&C Staff on the call. Several stakeholders were in the room and on the video conference.

Public Comment was made by Robbie Jaffe with the Introduction of the newly formed Small Farmer and Rancher Network.

“Over the past few months, a network of Cuyama Basin small farmers, ranchers and small pumpers has been formed. We are funded through the technical assistance funding for small farmers under DWR and we are operating under the auspices of the Cuyama Valley Family Resource Center and the Cuyama Valley Community Association.

Our overall purpose is to have the voice of the small pumpers be represented in both the GSP and the adjudication processes with specific results that address the concerns and needs of small pumpers. Our organization has, and will continue to, meet regularly in order to understand the needs of Cuyama residents and collectively present our needs to the GSA. To date we have established a steering committee of six Cuyamans, held three community meetings and have formed partnerships with Dudek Engineering for technical assistance and with a legal clinic at UC Davis Law School, the Small Farmer Water Justice Clinic for legal guidance. We hope to work collaboratively with the GSA as we highlight the impact of policy considerations on small pumpers. We are available as a resource to the GSA and we hope you will listen to our concerns as we strive to represent the voices of small pumpers in the Cuyama Valley.”

The SAC Committee elected to continue with Brenton Kelly as Chairperson and elected to pass the Vice Chair position to Joe Haslett. The SAC unanimously recommends these Committee Members to these Officer positions for approval by the GSA Board.

The SAC then spent almost an hour on a very informative presentation and discussion which had been requested by the SAC last year re: Non-Irrigated Land Classification and Model Use.

The SAC very much appreciates the time and effort that the W&C team put into the presentation and the attention to our inquiry.

We were shown how sources for Historical Data were very sparse and infrequent. Only half of the years since 1996 (14 of 28) had Land IQ data estimates for the Historic Use calculations, and little to no ground truthing was done until very recently, and private access issues prevent most effective drive-by assessments. The statewide accuracy of 98% for Land IQ is encouraging but may not accurately reflect the diverse high desert conditions across our basin. The Committee was generally supportive of using property owner data whenever appropriate.

Committee Member Caulfield questioned the actual Cuyama ground truthing numbers? Specifically, How many ground-truth events have occurred and how many are planned? Approximately how many acres have been ground-truthed? Where has the ground-truthing generally occurred? and Have you been coordinating with landowners to access properties, or have you been restricted by public access roads? We understand that Taylor has passed those requests to the appropriate Land IQ staff for a response.

Committee member Jaffe was appreciative of the explanation of how now there is a distinction between Idle Land and Non-Irrigated active dry farming operations, when there did not use to be. Committee Member Jaffe feels strongly that there are many small and de minimis producers in the Basin that are sustainable examples and should be recognized in the Basin and in the model. Jaffe chose to use Cuyama Homegrown as an example of a highly productive local food provider and de minimus farm. Classifying these types of working lands as Non-Irrigated is neither true or provides much needed recognition for existing water-saving farming systems in the Valley..

Chair Kelly suggested that it would be helpful to distinguish within the category of Native Vegetation, between those lands being worked as Range Land and Wild Lands, both being very different types of Non-Irrigated Lands with different consumptive use. It was also suggested that perhaps the category for citrus could be replaced with cannabis.

Stakeholder Adam Lofgren asked if the model had any consideration for Irrigation efficiencies? The rest of this SAC report can be given as those items come up on this agenda.

11. a) Discuss and Take Appropriate Action on Variance Findings and Direction on Setting Final CMA Groundwater Allocations for 2025-2029

The SAC was unable to review the Ad hoc Committees recommendations by meeting time and therefore felt unable to make specific Variance application recommendations. The distinction was made between simply considering technical discrepancies and the need to consider other reasonable exceptions such as a minimum allocation or a minimum % of impact to the total allocation. A late-coming small family farm is not the cause of the overdraft and should not be put out of business when they use less water than the margin of error in the modeled calculations.

Committee Member Caulfield said that while the Variance Process gives an opportunity to address any data discrepancies between the modeled historical use calculations and actual land use data, it does not give an opportunity to address the issues of equity. Where is the opportunity to consider the value of families living in and contributing to the ecology of the Valley? To consider equity not just equality. Taylor reminded the Committee that the GSA had chosen not to consider a minimum allocation or a tiered approach, and that he does not think they will change the Policy.

Committee Member Jaffe acknowledges her frustration as she remembers the individual

exemption that the GSA was willing to give to the big new Harvard vineyard by allowing over a hundred feet of groundwater elevation draw down to insure that business success and now a small farmer's insignificant request is considered unjustified and unfair. She feels that small farmers are getting squeezed out of consideration. She thinks that Lewis Farm is an example of the need for a small farm exemption because the variance is well within the margin of calculated error.

Committee member DeBranch expressed concern that it could be difficult to determine small from large and that it was not the job of the GSA to choose winners and losers based on their size.

The Committee heard briefly from representatives from two of the other Variance Applicants. Chair Kelly returned to the equity issue and said it comes down to scale and how a smaller operation is impacted worse by a straight % cutback than a big operation, quite quickly to the point of non-viability and bankruptcy. This is a SGMA component not currently being included. The Family farm is a beneficial Use of the highest order needing greater protections. Equity needs to be taken into account when some operations are using less water than the margin of error within Modeled calculations, but a standard cut could mean certain failure for these small operations, especially the family farms. Kelly also felt that the investments in perennial crops should be considered differently than that of annual crops.

Without the Ad hoc Recommendations to consider and with more than an hour's discussion, no SAC Recommendation was made for any specific Applicant, but was the following motion was made:

Motion: Made by Jaffe and seconded by Haslett

The SAC recommends that in addition to considering the technical data discrepancies in the variance applications, the GSA should consider the amount of the Variance and what is the impact of that % on the total Allocations of the CMA.

The motion passed with one NO vote from DeBranch who thought this was a step backwards and will send everything back to the drawing board.

11. b) Discuss and Take Appropriate Action on GSA Project Prioritization / Schedule

The SAC was asked for any edits to this list of projects.

Chair Kelly asked if the item A,3 Deep Percolation Study could also include an isotope survey and age dating with the goal to help understand how groundwater water moves horizontally in the Basin. Kelly also recognizes the need to explore the deep infiltration rate. How long does it really take for any available surface water to get down through over 400 feet of unsaturated 'Vadose Zone'? It is Kelly's understanding that the Model absurdly assumes this is an instantaneous event.

Vice Chair Haslett suggested that consideration be made for the emerging best practices for stormwater catchment and rangeland prescriptive burn/graze. He suggests collaboration with other organizations in the Santa Maria Watershed with low-cost nature-based projects across the basin. Process Based Restoration and Beaver Dam Analogues have been shown to improve groundwater elevations. Intensive prescriptive grazing and controlled burning has been used to improve groundwater conditions. Chair Kelly announced that Quail Springs has been approved for a CalFire Grant with the Ventura County Resource Conservation District as a prescribed burn site in the near future.

Chair Kelly was grateful to see the Tiered Allocation Approach (e.g. Minimum Allocation) and said this would be a priority of the SFAR network.

Committee member DeBranch stated that he was not in favor of a tiered approach to

allocations, and he felt that the Carry Over and Water Market projects needed to happen as Basin Wide Policies.

Committee member Lewis suggested that Cropping Factors could be considered as an alternative to exclusively relying on Historic Use when land use is transitioning to lower consumptive perennials.

Stakeholder Lofgren questioned the distinction between the Ranking Criteria. A definition and specific example would be helpful. For instance, what is the difference between the Impact and the Importance of a project? Is Impact the same as equity?

11, c) Discuss and Take Appropriate Action on Stormwater Capture Surface Water Rights Analysis

Legal Counsel Alex Dominguez presented a verbal report of the unpublished Draft Analysis. We were told that the State has not made the determination that the Cuyama River is fully appropriated yet by the down river water rights adjudication of the Santa Maria Basin. Staff believe that theoretically in one out of every ten years there may be 9000 Acre Feet available to divert. The required Permits are challenging, expensive and not assured. The funding for this type of project may require a Prop. 218 type vote. The estimated project cost has put a very high price on any additional acre feet of recharge.

Chair Kelly asked if a Management Area would need to be formed like a Benefit Assessment District to address that the only potential benefit would be to the region of presumed enhanced recharge. Dominguez responded that it would be more likely that everyone in the Basin would pay for the Project and the allocations would then reflect the benefit from any additional recharge that might be added to the Sustainable Yield.

Vice Chair Haslett suggested that a greater return on investment would be gained from Natural Systems Science projects like Process Based Restoration efforts that could look like GDE enhancement projects and would also serve the stormwater catchment goals of enhancing recharge.

An unofficial SAC temperature read on the viability of this project continues to be rather cold. The remaining items of the meeting were reports with very little accompanying discussion. The SAC Adjourned at 8:42

Respectfully submitted, Brenton Kelly
SAC Chairperson

7. Report from Auditors on Fiscal Year 2023-2024 Audit

Shannon Webster from Daniells Phillips Vaughan presented the financial audit report for 2024, highlighting increased assets and liabilities and a recommendation to strengthen internal controls over the cash receipts process.

Director Yurosek asked for a more detailed explanation of the recommendation to the agency.

Ms. Webster responded that the agency lacks proper segregation of duties in the cash receipts process, creating a risk of financial misstatements. She recommended assigning segregating duties or implementing oversight controls to improve accountability.

Mr. Blakslee responded that the auditor has made this recommendation annually but noted that current financial services keep operations streamlined. He added that if the board wants to explore ways to improve segregation of duties, staff can look into potential options.

Director Yurosek asked CBGSA staff to look into the financial impact of segregating duties.

CONSENT AGENDA

8-10. Consent Agenda

Chair Bantilan asked if any Directors wanted to move any of the consent items out to discuss in more detail.

MOTION

Director Yurosek made a motion to approve the consent agenda item nos. 8-10. The motion was seconded by Director Young. A roll call vote was made and the motion passed.

- AYES: Anselm, Albano, Bantilan, Jackson, Klinchuch, Reely, Williams, Young, Yurosek, Zenger
- NOES: None
- ABSTAIN: None
- ABSENT: Wooster

ACTION ITEMS

11. Groundwater Sustainability Plan Implementation

a. Discuss and Take Appropriate Action on Variance Findings and Direction on Setting Final CMA Groundwater Allocations for 2025-2029

Mr. Beck reviewed the purpose and background of the variance process that was used to set final allocations for the central management area (CMA) in 2025-2029.

Mr. Blakslee reviewed the variance request process which included creating an ad hoc consisting of Directors Anselm, Albano, Young, and Jackson. He provided an overview of the variance timeline, and the steps used to update allocations. He reported that there were five (5) variance requests received.

Legal Counsel Alex Dominguez noted that while the ad hoc committee focused on technical requests, few of the variance requests also had legal implications challenging the GSA's authority to alter or determine groundwater rights. He added that the GSA addressed this in response letters, clarifying that while the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) does not authorize the GSA to determine groundwater rights, it does give the GSA the authority to impose groundwater allocations, as outlined in the GSP.

Mr. Blakslee provided an overview of the dairy use calculation used for the Cuyama Dairy variance request. He provided a detailed summary of proposed allocations adjustments for variance requesters. He reported that staff recommends the board approve the ad hoc variance recommendations, update the 2025-2029 allocations, and distribute allocations to landowners. He noted that the variance requests resulted in approximately 600 acre-feet (AF) of additional estimated water use for the historic

period, which resulted in a 1.5% decrease in all CMA allocations.

Chair Bantilan opened the floor for variance requesters to repeal their ad hoc recommendation to the board.

Stakeholder Morteza Touriey, representative of Daria Trust, stated only 200 acres of his 320 acres is farmable, which is the reason he requested an increase in allocations. He added that he was not able to provide additional information due to fire evacuations.

Stakeholder David Lewis asked when Stakeholder Morteza Touriey received his response letter. Stakeholder Morteza Touriey responded that he received the ad hoc letter on January 14, 2025.

Stakeholder David Lewis advocated on Stakeholder Morteza Touriey's behalf, stating that did not have adequate time to prepare a reasonable argument.

Mr. Blakslee and Mr. Dominguez explained that they met with most of the variance requesters and draft response letters were sent to requesters before the interviews. Following the interviews, additional analysis from Land IQ was conducted to finalize the technical information. They added that the timeline was tight.

Stakeholder Steve Gliessman expressed frustration that the ad hoc recommendations were not provided at the SAC meeting on January 9, 2025.

SAC Chair Brenton Kelly provided the SAC report, which is included in the board packet.

A Stakeholder from Tulare County commented that the GSA did not provide enough time for requesters and the board to review the response, and it could raise transparency issues.

Vice Chair Yurosek responded that the board received the ad hoc response letters at the same time as the public.

Stakeholder Ella Boyajian commented that the board exists to apply a humanistic approach, not just a technical and legal approach. She urged the board to consider that the Lewis family received the information the day prior and questioned whether the board should be voting on it today.

Stakeholder Blaine Morris commented that the timeline and approach may not be working for everyone, including the board also recently received the information.

Chair Bantilan closed the floor for public comments on Daria Trust and opened it to the board.

Director Reely asked how the recommendation changed after the initial draft.

Director Young (on the ad hoc committee) responded that the variance process was designed to assess whether Land IQ inaccurately estimated water usage during the historical years. The Daria variance request claimed that Land IQ underestimated water use, prompting a review that found the water usage was higher than initially estimated, increasing from 61 acre-feet to 71. However, the request was for the entire parcel, including undeveloped land, to be allocated water, which deviates from the policy of allocating based on historical use. The ad hoc committee, based on updated Land IQ data, recommended this allocation.

Legal Counsel Alex responded that once variance requests are submitted, staff and the ad hoc review the request, staff meets with the ad hoc, and then the ad hoc meets with the variance requester. Following the requester meetings, the ad hoc meets with staff to analyze the findings and additional information from the variance requesters.

Director Young commented that landowners have expressed concern in late timeline for growers to plan for the fall, but stakeholders are expressing that there is not enough time to review the data. If the process is delayed, then allocations are delayed until March.

Director Albano acknowledged the need for better policies but noted that the variance process focuses on the technical implementation of the GSP and it is not the appropriate venue for policy changes.

MOTION

Director Yurosek made a motion to follow the ad hoc recommendation to update the historic use with Land IQ crop mapping for Daria Trust, resulting in an increase in their allocation from 61.71 acre-feet (AF) to 71.50 AF. The motion was seconded by Director Albano, a roll call vote was made and passed unanimously.

- AYES: Albano, Anslem, Bantilan, Klinchuch, Jackson, Reely, Williams, Wooster, Young, Yurosek, Zenger
- NOES: None
- ABSTAIN: None
- ABSENT: None

Chair Bantilan opened the floor for comments on David Lewis’s variance request.

Stakeholder Karen Lewis urged the board to reconsider their variance request and make exceptions for individual circumstances. She and her husband had invested heavily in their ranch. She explained that without a better water allocation, they would have to stop maintaining their trees, which will have significant financial impacts on their family. She commented that their neighbors with the same amount of acreage have 140 AF, while they have 24-acre feet. She added that the allocation percentage of David Lewis represents 0.6% of allocations in the Central Management Area (CMA).

Stakeholder David Lewis argued that the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) was meant to regulate large agribusinesses, not harm small farmers like himself. He challenged the accuracy of the model, pointing out that its 10% margin of error exceeds his requested variance of 0.6% of the total allocation.

Stakeholder Tatiana Barlow expressed concern about the board making a decision on the variance request when the directors had only received the information yesterday. She questioned the fairness of voting on something with such limited time to review the information, and asked how the board could vote with a good conscience given the short notice. She suggested that both the board member and the variance requester were at a disadvantage due to the late information.

Stakeholder Robbie Jaffe expressed strong concerns about the board's inability or unwillingness to assess the margin of error in the groundwater model against the minimal impact of the Lewis family's water use. She emphasized that the decision was not just technical but a life-altering one for the family, particularly given the long-term investment required for permanent tree crops. She added that small farmers were not responsible for the basin's overdraft and that variances should account for that. She urged the board to approve the Lewis family's original water allocation request, as it would have little impact on the basin's sustainability but immense consequences for the family.

Stakeholder Ella Boyajian argued that the board should take a humanistic approach. She noted that small farmers like the Lewis family use a negligible amount of water compared to large pumpers. She emphasized that granting the variance won't harm sustainability but will protect a responsible, small-scale farm.

Stakeholder Jake Furstenfeld expressed frustration that the board is targeting a small family farm instead of addressing the real water overuse problem caused by large pumpers. He commented that small, sustainable farms are the future of Cuyama.

Stakeholder Kathleen March advocated for granting the Lewis's variance request. She commented on the unfair treatment of small farms like Lewis Farms, highlighting the disparity in water usage regulations between large growers and small farms. She urged the board to revise how variances are managed to prevent destroying small farms.

Stakeholder Amanda Lewis commented to take a humanistic approach to deciding on the variance request. She emphasized that their small family farm is at risk.

Stakeholder Christopher Mallard commented he supports David Lewis and his variance request. He added that SGMA grants the board discretion to approve variances without undermining sustainability. He asked the board to review the variance request and follow the SAC recommendation.

Stakeholder Ferial Sadeghian commented that denying the variance doesn't just impact one family but threatens the entire community.

Stakeholder Megan Harrington commented that this process is not fair, and she is in support of David Lewis's variance request.

Stakeholder Brenton Kelly emphasized the importance of community engagement at both the Board and SAC. He noted that there are two vacancies on the SAC. He highlighted additional policy considerations for future board discussion, including the need to accurately reflect small-scale extractions within the model, recognize and support family farms and local residents as valued community members, and explore incentives for low-water-use crops and sustainable land practices. He commented that these concerns have been repeatedly raised by stakeholders but have not yet been fully addressed in policy discussions.

Chair Bantilan closed the floor for public comment and opens it up for board discussion.

Director Wooster compared that this is a difficult decision for the board. She expressed frustration that the community didn't speak up when the board adopted a steeper glide path. She acknowledged that the Lewis family is in a tough position due to a lack of historical use but notes that no concrete solutions have been proposed. She urged community members to participate and offer suggestions on policy issues at SAC and board meetings.

Director Anselm (on the variance review ad hoc) commented that the variance process is similar to other GSAs that he works with. He explained that today's discussion was limited to technical corrections. He commented on the need for broader policy discussions on variance options in the future.

Director Young asked David Lewis about his past and projected water usage, noting that his pumping has been increasing, and he has requested additional water for expanding his orchard.

Stakeholder David Lewis responded that he pumped around 70 AF in 2024, and he would pump double the water in 2026 and 2027 as his trees mature. He estimated about 3.5 AF per acre when his trees are mature.

Director Albano commented that it would not be fair to provide exceptions for small farmers and not large pumpers. He added that the water in the basin has been declining for a long time, and Davis Lewis planted a permanent crop in 2015 in a critically over drafted basin. He commented that the board has tried to create policies and pointed out that de minimis users using less than 2 AF are not responsible to report. He commented that the solution is in the board policy, not the variance process. He commented that this is not sustainable under SGMA and growing pistachios is not sustainable long-term. He added that small farmers have a lot of alternative options to make money. He commented that providing the exemption for the small farmers without technical justification is something that he does not support.

Stakeholder Tatiana asked how David Lewis could put energy into farmers markets if they are not able to grow crops.

Legal Counsel Alex Dominguez commented that he is guided by the policy that the board has adopted. The allocation methodology was developed over years, and it would be more appropriate to make comments during the policy discussions at past public meetings. He added that the current focus is on the variance process as previously approved, and deviating from the policy without proper procedure could expose the board to litigation and potential Brown Act violations.

Chair Bantilan commented that there are options to continue pumping but it is subject to additional charges for over pumping. He suggested that the board could potentially develop a water market as a short-term bridge, allowing landowners to share allocations.

Legal Counsel Alex Dominguez explained that SGMA authorizes water trading and carryover of water for up to five years. Some GSAs have also allowed landowners to sell their unused water allocation, though the specifics can be more limited in different areas.

Director Young asked if there is a potential short-term bridge to provide water to farmers that have had significant use cuts.

Mr. Blakslee commented that water markets would have to be within the CMA.

Legal Counsel Alex Dominguez responded that staff can be directed to develop short-term water markets.

Chair Bantilan explained that the board could direct staff to add water markets on the next agenda under agenda item 11b.

Director Wooster commented that there is a difference for water markets with planted crops vs crops that have not been planted.

Director Reely asked if the technical justification was the only consideration during the variance process.

Legal Counsel Alex Dominguez responded that the ad hoc committee's directive was to focus solely on technical aspects of the variance requests. When requesters raised legal or policy-based issues, they were told those were board-level decisions. He noted that he would not feel comfortable changing policy immediately and he suggested a potential options for a motion include: Not take action on the variance request, Direct staff to bring back proposed provisions, or Outline specific steps to address the underlying policy concerns

Director Reely commented that this policy has had unintended consequences on small

farmers such as David Lewis. He suggests that the board should consider policy to address impacts on small.

Mr. Beck. suggested that the board consider directing staff to develop an interim water market to address the Lewis family's issues for the current year. He noted that developing a full water market by March is unrealistic, and he recommended working with an ad hoc group to create a short-term solution that could also help other landowners in similar situations.

Chair Bantilan expressed concerns that deviating from the established policy might open the board to litigation.

Legal Counsel Alex Dominguez stated that the action deviates from existing policy and could lead to litigation.

Director Albano asked about the difficulty to develop a simple water trading policy that allows private parties to trade water subject to board approval to provide short-term relief for landowners in need.

Mr. Beck responded that a temporary water market could be developed quickly to address immediate water shortages for landowners with permanent crops. He suggested that a simple structure could be implemented for emergency relief.

Director Wooster commented on the long-term challenges of managing water allocation in the valley, noting that many farmers are already preparing for the reality of water shortages. She commented that these issues will inevitably cause harm and need to be addressed.

MOTION

Director Reely made a motion to grant a one-year variance (for 2025) of up to 120 AF for David Lewis to continue his current farming practices and give time for the Board to consider policies to address these issues on a long-term basis as soon as possible. The motion was seconded by Director Anselm, a roll call vote was made and passed with 51%.

AYES:	Anslem, Klinchuch, Reely, Williams, Young
NOES:	Albano, Bantilan, Jackson, Wooster, Yurosek, Zenger
ABSTAIN:	None
ABSENT:	None

Stakeholder Dan Raytis, representative of the Hoekstras (Cuyama Dairy), stated that they have reviewed the land IQ information and recommendation. They agree with and accept the recommendation, appreciating the committee's recognition of the landowner-provided data. He noted that the dairy water use was not included in the previous model. He thanked the committee and board for their work.

MOTION

Director Young made a motion to follow ad hoc recommendation to update the historic use with Land IQ crop mapping for Hoekstra Dairy Farms, resulting in an increase in their allocation from 393.40 AF to 677.20 AF. The motion was seconded by Director Anselm, a roll call vote was made and passed unanimously.

AYES: Albano, Anslem, Bantilan, Jackson, Klinchuch, Reely, Williams, Wooster, Yurosek, Young, Zenger
 NOES: None
 ABSTAIN: None
 ABSENT: None

Chair Bantilan open the floor for public comments on the Kern Ridge Variance request. There were no comments or discussions on this item.

MOTION

Director Young made a motion to follow ad hoc recommendation for Kern Ridge. The motion was seconded by Director Albano, a roll call vote was made and passed unanimously.

AYES: Albano, Anslem, Bantilan, Jackson, Klinchuch, Reely, Williams, Wooster, Yurosek, Young, Zenger
 NOES: None
 ABSTAIN: None
 ABSENT: None

Stakeholder Tilden Kim spoke on behalf of Sunrise Olive Ranch. He commented that they received their final recommendation at 1:47 AM. He commented that Mr. Markman sent correspondence to Mr. Blakslee in response to receiving the ad hoc recommendation. He asked that the board delay board decision on Sunrise variance and let GSA technical staff meet with Sunrise technical staff to review. He commented on the 40% reduction in Sunrise Ranch’s water allocation over two years, which could severely impact their operations. He requested postponing the variance decision to allow technical staff to meet and reconcile the discrepancies.

Brian Van Lienden commented that the numbers provided by their technical consultant were close to the numbers provided by the model. He noted that the discrepancy doesn’t affect the variance request because the model’s historical estimates from 1998-2017 were generally close to actual reported usage, and the ranch is receiving more water than its current usage.

Director Young commented that the model is underestimating the water usage for more recent years, which is a technical issue that should be addressed in the future. He added that the variance request didn’t seem to require changes based on the current reported data.

Mr. Van Lienden clarified that the reduced allocation for Sunrise Ranch was due to changes in estimates for evapotranspiration and the increasing number of users. He

confirmed that the allocation would continue to decline according to the glide path, meaning future reductions were expected.

MOTION

Director Young made a motion to follow ad hoc recommendation for Sunrise Olive Ranch to not change their allocations. The motion was seconded by Director Anselm, a roll call vote was made and passed unanimously.

- AYES: Bantilan, Jackson, Williams, Wooster, Yurosek, Zenger Albano, Anselm, Klinchuch, Reely, Williams, Young,
- NOES: None
- ABSTAIN: None
- ABSENT: None

b. Discuss and Take Appropriate Action on GSA Project Prioritization/Schedule

Mr. Beck provided an overview of the project prioritization agenda item. Mr. Blakslee added that staff is looking for direction on which projects or actions are most important to develop a schedule for 2025-2029 and for any feedback on the process.

SAC Chair Brenton Kelly provided the SAC report on this item, which is included in the board packet.

Stakeholder Guy Lingo commented that the UC Davis could be a good resource for the GSA to help provide information about lists projects or add projects to the list, which is a free source.

Director Wooster responded that the clinic should reach out to the GSA to present information.

Stakeholder Karen Lewis requested that the water market item is considered high priority.

Director Jackson commented that the board should look at the entire basin and reduce impacts on current landowners. He thinks there should be restrictions on new wells moratorium, he would like no new owners add wells but if a landowner needs to replace a well then allow that. He asked to look at add basin-wide management.

Director Wooster asked the board to think about what the GSA’s goals are before coming up with a priority list. She requested the following projects be included 1) age-date water, 2) stop further development, 3) examine difference in water properties throughout the basin, 4) create a 3D image of the basin, 5) infiltration rate and 6) allocate water fairly.

Director Anselm commented it would be helpful to provide more information for each project so provide clarity on the goal if they would increase the sustainable yield.

Director Albano commented that water markets in the CMA, water markets and policy in the Ventucopa MA, and water markets and policy basin-wide.

Director Yurosek commented that it is difficult to prioritize projects if the policies are not basin-wide. He would like to establish policies basin-wide. Manage the entire basin to develop policy for basin-wide and then determine allocations in the basin.

Director Wooster suggested an analysis of basin-wide management. She added that she has not seen a map of well data in the basin.

Chair Bantilan asked to add analyze basin-wide management to the list.

Director Albano commented that there is no management policy.

Mr. Blakslee clarified that staff intend to work with an ad hoc to determine what the projects will look like.

Director Williams asked for C.4. to be removed from the list because it is not something staff needs to work on.

Legal Counsel Dominguez commented that the board can provide feedback on the project list in an email.

There is consensus to remove projects that have no votes but provide directors with the opportunity to state their case for including the project.

Mr. Beck suggested having one ranking criteria.

Director Young asked if the SAC's ranking will be provided to the board prior to voting. Mr. Blakslee responded that staff could provide SAC results prior to board ranking the projects.

There was a board consensus to add all projects recommended by the SAC.

c. Discuss and Take Appropriate Action on Stormwater Capture Surface Rights Analysis

Legal Counsel Alex Dominguez presented the legal and technical challenges of pursuing a storm water capture project, including the need for permits and funding. A legal memorandum was provided in the board packet. He reviewed the technical analysis completed by Woodard & Curran. He provided an overview of the

Director Wooster asked if there is anyone with water rights on the river rather than a tributary.

Legal Counsel Dominguez responded that we are not adversely affecting any downstream users and the federal government, but the existing water rights owners can deny application to request water. If we can receive the permit and start construction, it would be too late for the government to take away water rights

Director Wooster asked if there were any water rights users on the Cuyama River. Mr. Van Lienden responded that there were a few people on the Cuyama River.

SAC Chair Brenton Kelly provided the SAC report on this item, which was included in the board packet.

Stakeholder Guy Lingo commented that there have been discussions on new wells and if that became a consideration, he would like to remind the board what has been previously voted on.

REPORT ITEMS

12. Administrative Updates

a. Report of the Executive Director

Nothing to report.

b. Report on Fiscal Year 2025-2026 Budget Schedule

Mr. Blakslee briefly reviewed the 2025-2026 budget schedule.

c. Report on Water Year 2024 Annual Report Schedule

Mr. Blakslee briefly reviewed the water year 2024 annual report schedule. He noted that the land use forms are voluntary, so if forms are not provided, the GSA will default to the land use provided by Land IQ.

d. Report of the General Counsel

Nothing to report.

13. Technical Updates

a. Update on Groundwater Sustainability Plan Activities

Mr. Van Lienden noted that updates on GSP Activities, which is provided in the Board packet.

b. Update on Grant-Funded Projects

Mr. Van Lienden provided an overview on grant-funded projects, which is provided in the board packet.

c. Update on October 2024 Groundwater Conditions Report

Mr. Van Lienden briefly reviewed the October Groundwater Conditions Report, which is provided in the Board packet.

Director Wooster asked for staff to look into well 586.

14. Report of Ad Hoc Committees

Nothing to report.

15. Directors' Forum

Director Young introduced Walter Rubalcava, who will be his alternate on the CBGSA.

Director Wooster asked about directors discussing amongst each other on certain issues.

Legal Counsel Dominguez responded that directors cannot canvas more than quorum, which includes forwarding emails

16. Public comment for Items Not on the Agenda

Stakeholder Jim Wegis asked if the irrigated water allocations are specific to the parcel.

CBGSA staff responded that allocations remain with the parcel.

17. Correspondence

Mr. Blakslee reported the correspondence received and distributed to stakeholders.

CLOSED SESSION

18. Closed Session

At 6:34 PM, the Board adjourned to closed session. At 6:55 PM, the Board returned from closed session at which time Legal Counsel reported to the public that there was no reportable action.

19. Adjourn

Chair Bantilan adjourned the meeting at 6:55 PM.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE
CUYAMA BASIN GROUNDWATER SUSTAINABILITY AGENCY

Chair: *Cory Bantilan*
[Cory Bantilan \(May 28, 2025 08:28 PPT\)](#)

ATTEST:

Secretary: _____