

Cuyama Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency Board of Directors Regular Meeting

March 5, 2025

Meeting Minutes

PRESENT:

Directors

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

Staff

Beck, Jim – Executive Director
Bianchi, Grace – Project Coordinator
Blakslee, Taylor – Assistant Executive Director
Dominguez, Alex – Legal Counsel
Van Lienden, Brian – Woodard & Curran

ABSENT:

Anselm, Arne – Secretary
Williams, Deborah

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.

Mr. Blakslee briefly introduced George Pereza, CBGSA's point of contact from the Department of Water Resources (DWR).

5. Standing Advisory Committee Meeting Report

SAC Chair Brenton provided the report for the Standing Advisory Committee (SAC) meeting on February 27, 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 all members present, four in-person and three on the conference line with one member abstaining due to the Brown Act timing of posting notice of a remote location. GSA Staff Taylor Blakeslee was joined by Grace Bianchi in the room, with Brian Van Lienden and Alex Dominguez on the call. One stakeholder was in the room and several others were on the video conference. The meeting lasted 3 hours.

A Public Comment was made by Dave Lewis on behalf of his family in gratitude and appreciation for everyone in the community and on the GSA who showed support for the Lewis Farm Variance consideration.

The Cloud Seeding presentation from Frank McDonough of DRI was delayed to later in the meeting when he could be available.

Shortly before the end of the meeting SAC members had several questions for GSA legal counsel, Mr. Dominguez. Community concerns were raised about the GSAs withdrawal of their Expert Witness to present and defend the GSP when considering the Sustainable Yield in the Adjudication lawsuit. Respectfully, Mr Dominguez was not able to provide any direct comments about closed door deliberations, but he tried to assure that the interests of the GSA were to protect the GSP.

Committee Member Jaffe expressed concern that there have not been any current updates to the adjudication resource page on the CBGSA website. Robbie says people in the valley need to know these resources, they need to have access to updated information. Mr. Dominguez responded that a bill was passed in 2024 that required GSAs to provide specific information to the public. He added that Cuyama Basin was already in Adjudication when the law passed and was thereby excused from needing to comply with the posting requirements. Jaffe asked if the GSP has been presented to the Judge for consideration of the Sustainable Yield? Mr. Dominguez at first said he did not know, but thought that it had and he will have to check to be sure.

During the meeting the Committee made only formal motions to approve the minutes and the Annual Report. In addition to in-depth discussions, many considerations were made as recommendations for the GSA and I will endeavor to present a helpful synopsis of the array of stakeholder feedback.

10.) Update on Cloud Seeding Study by Desert Research Institute

Committee member Haslett asked about verification. Frank McDonough explained the method of trying to measure the rainfall at the target spot and an unseeded control spot. He acknowledged that verification is a challenge, but the numbers suggest an effect of 5-15% increased precipitation is possible.

Committee member Lewis observed that the most favorable years for cloud seeding were during wet years, which are not when additional rain would be needed or frequent in Cuyama. He did not think it would be financially responsible to support this project.

Stakeholder John Caufield requested staff reevaluate the estimated cost per acre feet for the ground program that reflects the generator life span and noted that the estimated cost is in 2025 dollars.

The biggest concern seemed to be the worry that the extra rain would simply run off and go to Twitchell since there is no capture and storage system in the Valley. Brian Van Lienden did mention that some of it may go back into the groundwater, but again, without deep percolation studies and age dating of the water in the deep aquifers that are being pumped, there is no evidence that the water is actually recharging the productive aquifer.

The SAC remains in general agreement with a consensus to recommend that the GSA board **does not pursue** this project at this time. Keeping it on the list, if even at the bottom, will keep all future options open and is aligned with our updated GSP project list.

12, a) Discuss and Take Appropriate Action on Water Year 2023-2024 Annual Report

Chair Kelly asked for some explanation of the water elevation contour maps. Where is the Cuyama River on the map and why does it look like all the groundwater is moving north out of the Basin instead of downstream or into the central cone of depression? Mr. Van Lienden explained the limitations of how the contours are extrapolated and that there are monitoring wells north of the Cuyama River and that it would be helpful to show the Cuyama River on this map.

Committee Member Jaffe asked about the five wells that exceeded their Minimum Thresholds. She notes that there is no explanation for why they are dropping or what will be done about it. There is no explanation of why there are such fewer exceedances this year than last year when 21 wells exceeded their thresholds! One might assume from this Report that conditions have recently improved dramatically, but Mr. Van Lienden responded that the well levels have not changed significantly and the shift in monitoring well status was due to the resetting of minimum thresholds approved by the board in the new GSP.

The **motion to approve the Annual Report** passed unanimously with one abstention.

12,b) Discuss and Take Appropriate Action on GSA Project Prioritization/Schedule

The SAC generally supports the process and method used to generate this list and the rankings. There was some concern about overburdening staff with too many big projects in the busy first year. Blakslee expressed Staffs' confidence in the scheduled workload. It was suggested that several projects (like hydrologic model update studies) could be combined and pushed out for a couple of years when grant funding is secured. The SAC encourages the urgency for some workable resolutions to the CMA management policies for the smaller farmers.

Committee member Jaffe stressed the importance of a robust and open process for the consideration of Water Markets and Carryovers. Even if they start small and simple they should be given the time to be thoughtfully developed.

Committee member Lewis was in favor of Preliminary Investigations or Feasibility Studies as part of any major projects. Blakslee confirmed that the next step was to put a price tag on all prioritized projects for the upcoming budget development process.

Vice chair DeBranch suggested accelerating the schedule for Expanding Allocations outside the CMA because it had the highest ranking and asked why the SBCF study was prioritized when it got the lowest rank? Mr. Blakslee responded that the SBCF Investigation was included in the 2025 schedule to understand flow across the fault and the impacts to CMA and Ventucopa. He explained that looking into expanded allocations outside the CMA and Ventucopa were scheduled following the SBCF investigation once new and conclusive information is collected.

While most SAC members were in favor of developing a tiered allocation approach and/or minimum allocation policy, DeBranch was not in favor of ever considering a tiered approach.

Chair Kelly recognized the technical need for better understanding of the SBC Fault before expanding allocations to Ventucopa. He also sees the importance of various Basin Understanding studies that could greatly inform the model, such as Geo-chemical fingerprinting and age dating of pumped water.

Committee member Gaillard asked about the remaining cost for completing the SBC fault study and staff said they thought they could finish the study this year for around \$60,000 and that it would inform Ventucopa hydrology. The SBC Fault is a hydrologically impactful feature and should be better understood before management actions are taken in Ventucopa.

Stakeholder Adam Lovgren suggested that the Water Market policy was very important, and that it is likely to be complicated. He said most water markets are in basins with surface water supplies. Not as much is known

about groundwater only water markets. He thought any initial CMA water market policy should be developed with the consideration of expanding to basin wide in the future.

Stakeholder Jake Furstenfield spoke in support of finishing the SBC Fault study. We have spent a lot of money there already and haven't solved the puzzle yet. It would be a shame to push back the study at this point if it will benefit the understanding of that region. We have to know the technical reasons for any expansion of allocations outside the CMA.

Committee member Jaffe supports keeping the tiered allocation policy at the top of the priority list. The discussion then moved to the bottom of the list and what to do with the low-ranking priorities.

Committee Member Haslett commented that there are no water enhancement projects included in the high priority list, and that most projects focus on reducing water use and not on increasing water availability. He suggested that C.8. Groundwater Dependent Ecosystems Enhancement and C.10 Irrigation water runoff studies should be moved to this fiscal year.

Stakeholder John Caufield recommended that projects be binned into categories such as: What to do with what we have right now, and What can we do to make it better in the future?

Chair Kelly was in favor of reconsidering the ranking of lower priority projects annually during the budget development process and suggested Option B; to consider all items annually during the budget development period so that they don't slip from sight and can be brought forward in later budgets. A straw poll backed the proposal to review the list annually. Consensus was reached.

The remainder of the agenda was Technical and Administrative Updates with little to no discussion, except for the discussions with Legal Counsel regarding the Adjudication reported in the intro.

CONSENT AGENDA

6-9. Consent Agenda

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

Mr. Blakslee noted a correction to be made to the minutes.

Director Jackson asked about the payments receivable in the January 2025 financial report. Mr. Blakslee responded that the large amount is from unpaid groundwater extraction fees, which will receive payment from the county tax roll.

Director Wooster noted a correction to be made in the minutes from January 15, 2025.

MOTION

Director Jackson made a motion to approve the consent agenda item nos. 6-9. The motion was seconded by Director Albano. A roll call vote was made and the motion passed with 78%.

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

ACTION ITEMS

10. Update on Cloud Seeding Study

Frank McDonough from Desert Research Institute (DRI) provided an overview of the cloud seeding study that was done in the Cuyama basin. He reviewed two methods of cloud seeding, the expected increase in precipitation, and costs.

SAC Chair Brenton Kelly provided the SAC report on this item.

Director Reely asked what the increased precipitation would be in inches. Mr. McDonough responded it is approximately 10% of the precipitation.

Stakeholder Jeff Shaw asked if the Santa Barbara County seeding program was affecting Cuyama Basin. Mr. McDonough responded that the existing project in Santa Barbara County was not impacting the headwaters of Cuyama Basin.

MOTION

Director Reely made a motion to accept the SAC’s recommendation not to consider the cloud seeding study at this time. The motion was seconded by Director Wooster, a roll call vote was made and passed with 78%.

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

11. Groundwater Sustainability Plan Implementation

a. Discuss and Take Appropriate Action on Water Year 2023-2024 Annual Report

Mr. Van Lienden provided an overview of the Annual report for Water Year 2023-2024, reviewing the changes in the annual report, changes in groundwater storage, groundwater conditions, and salinity conditions. Mr. Van Lienden noted that the annual report includes an explanation of the changes in the monitoring wells from the previous annual report.

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

Chair Bantilan opened the floor for public comment.

Stakeholder Christopher Mouward asked about the report to be evaluated by DWR. Mr. Van Lienden clarified that the periodic evaluation uses the updated model.

Mr. Blakslee acknowledged Christopher's email about budget number discrepancy. He stated that staff and the technical team is still looking into clarifying the water budget number question and will provide a response shortly.

Stakeholder Adam Lovgren acknowledged the recent change in minimum thresholds and noted that the updated values better align with the observed well observed in his area, making them a more reasonable and realistic benchmark for sustainability.

Mr. Van Lienden noted that the minimum threshold does not go lower than the well protection depth.

Director Wooster noted that the minimum threshold is 58 feet, which is the exact depth of well 114.

Mr. Blakslee clarified that the GSP that when a well falls below minimum threshold, then the adaptive management process kicks in and an ad hoc is formed to determine actions to get to sustainability.

MOTION

Director Jackson made a motion to approve submittal of the annual report, subject to the review of periodic evaluation water budget discrepancy. Director Yurosek seconded, a roll call vote was made and passed with 60%.

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

b. Discuss and Take Appropriate Action on 2024 Central Management Area Allocation Use

Mr. Blakslee provided an update on the 2024 Central Management Area (CMA) Allocations. He reported that as a whole, the CMA has used only 57% of their allocation, however the report does not include Duncan Farm’s use in 2024.

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

Mr. Blakslee provided an overview of the methods to determine the project prioritization list and schedule. He reported that staff are looking for board feedback on the projects and initiatives to be discussed for 2025-2029.

Director Wooster asked how irrigation study is related to the model updates. Mr. Blakslee responded that the irrigation study is grouped with model updates draft schedule because the study would provide more detailed information on irrigation methods in the basin, which would be included the next model updates.

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

Director Jackson asked how much money has been spent on the fault investigations to date. Mr. Blakslee responded that \$280,000 was budgeted for the faulty investigation and nearly all of the budgeted amount was spent.

Director Albano asked about the goals of the Santa Barbara Canyon Fault study, if the goal is to determine the extents of the fault or understand flow across the fault.

Mr. Beck responded that the goal today is to provide direction on projects to move forward with before staff determines cost.

Director Albano asked if the model is assuming flow across the eastern edge of the fault.

Mr. Van Lienden responded that the Santa Barbara Canyon Fault (SBCF) determined the fault was not where previously thought. The edge is a limitation to the model. The model shows that flow does not go through, but it does not predict flow past the eastern border.

Director Young commented that there should be clear definitions of each project and that the allocations outside of the management area. His understanding of the allocations outside of the management was it was for the board to determine if allocations are needed outside of the management area.

Director Reely commented that the SBCF is to improve the model, and it would be more efficient to do it during the other model update initiatives.

Director Young asked if there is a point in doing the SBCF study if it is not used for updates.

Director Jackson commented that the landowners in the CBWD are impacted the most and that allocations outside the management area should be a priority.

Director Albano asked what data is needed to determine Ventucopa allocations.

Mr. Van Lienden responded that the model is the best tool to determine allocations. He added that the fault line area impacts the two-foot change in the basin.

Director Albano commented that it would be more important to determine the flow of the fault.

Stakeholder Brenton Kelly commented that he would like to see the board explore the SBCF investigation before deciding on allocations in Ventucopa.

Stakeholder Jake Furstenfeld commented that it is important to get the additional data to that the model, but also consider the people living in the area before making decisions.

Stakeholder Jim Wegis commented that the model is not accurate and should not be used.

Stakeholder Christopher Mouwad commented that the UC Davis Small Farmer clinic provided a letter to the GSA regarding collaboration with the clinic.

Director Albano commented that the GSA has determined action to get sustainable within the CMA, but the GSA should consider sustainability within the basin. Encourages staff to outline technical requirements for certain projects/initiatives.

Director Jackson commented that the items should be addressed basin wide.

Director Young suggested a few changes to the projects, specifically, that basin-wide moratorium in wells and prevent future development/use should be grouped together. Suggested Water markets can be referred to ask water changing water trading in the CMA

Director Wooster suggested that staff potentially allow land use change, as long as there are no changes in the water use.

Director Zenger commented that during the budget ad hoc she suggested that the board not consider projects with less than a priority of five.

Chair Bantilan comments in favor of a cut off for projects ranked under five should not be considered at this time.

Director Young commented that staff doesn't need to explore projects scheduled in 2027.

Director Albano commented that the board should follow staff's recommended schedule.

Director Zenger pointed out that item B.10 was not included in the draft schedule, but it was ranked as 5.

Mr. Blakslee clarified that the expanded allocations included in map and the item B.10 consider allocations outside the current MA represents.

Mr. Beck commented that the discussion is to determine budget components. He recommended the board look at the project list annually.

MOTION

Director Jackson made a motion to direct staff to further investigate items scheduled in the fiscal year 2025-2026 as presented by staff, with the inclusion of B.10 and come back with preliminary budget and present to the board in May; then items with less than rank 5; then consider lower ranked projects annually during the budget development process. The motion was seconded by Director Reely, a roll call vote was made and passed with 78%.

AYES: Albano, Bantilan, Jackson, Klinchuch, Reely, Wooster, Young, Yurosek, Zenger

NOES: None

ABSTAIN: None

ABSENT: Anslem, Williams

d. Discuss and Take Appropriate Action on Fiscal Year 2025-2026 Budget Components

Mr. Blakslee provided an overview of the Fiscal Year 2025-2026 Budget Components; he noted the added and removed items from the previous year's components.

There were no comments on this item.

e. Consider Fee Equity

Mr. Beck briefly discussed fee equity, which is revisited each year. The board decided not to consider fee equity changes at this time and will revisit the issue next year.

f. Discuss and Take Appropriate Action on Landowner CIMIS Station Installation Proposal

Mr. Blakslee provided an update on CIMIS Stations in the basin and reported a new proposed site on Sunridge Nurseries’ property. He also reviewed the station installation quote from Cuyama Orchards and that staff is looking for approval of the quote.

MOTION

Director Young made a motion to approve the CIMIS installation quote proposal. The motion was seconded by Director Wooster, a roll call vote was made and passed with 71%.

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

12. GSA Administration

a. Discuss and Take Appropriate Action on GSA Insurance Renewal

Mr. Blakslee provided a brief overview of the GSA insurance renewal and reported a 26% increase in the insurance policy cost (from \$17,000 to \$21,785).

MOTION

Director Albano made a motion to approve the GSA insurance renewal. The motion was seconded by Director Reely, a roll call vote was made and passed with 71%.

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

b. Discuss and Take Appropriate Action on Financial Controls Policy

Mr. Blakslee provided an overview of the financial controls policy and presented three options: keeping the current process, changing payments to the Bakersfield office, or including a board member (specifically the treasurer) for management oversight. He reviews the potential options for the Financial Controls Policy. Mr. Beck commented that options two and three would increase costs.

MOTION

Director Young made a motion to keep current financial controls policy process. The motion was seconded by Director Jackson, a roll call vote was made and passed with 64%.

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

REPORT ITEMS**13. Update on Farm Unit Modification Application Process**

Mr. Blakslee provided an overview of the farm unit process and process and reported that the ad hoc discussed developing a simply application form for board approval and recommended considering the policy when the problem arises.

14. Update on Potential Non-Reporting Pumpers

Mr. Blakslee briefly reviewed the methodology approved to identify potential non-reporting pumpers and the preliminary list of non-reported pumpers is short. He noted that they are now using Land IQ irrigated footprint data.

15. Administrative Updates**a. Report of the Executive Director**

Mr. Blakslee provided an overview of the budget to actuals for the GSA and for consultants for 2024 and 2025.

b. Report of the General Counsel

Nothing to report.

16. Technical Updates**a. Update on Groundwater Sustainability Plan Activities**

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

b. Update on Grant-Funded Projects

Mr. Van Lienden briefly provided an overview on grant-funded projects, which is provided in the board packet. He noted that the public comment portal is open to provide comments on the Updated GSP and Periodic Evaluation.

Director Albano asked when newly added wells will be in the Data management system. Mr. Van Lienden responded that measurements will be included soon.

c. Update on January 2025 Groundwater Conditions Report

Mr. Van Lienden briefly reviewed the January Groundwater Conditions Report, which is provided

in the Board packet. He reported that three wells have moved above the minimum threshold since October.

Director Albano asked if there is an easier way to identify wells on the data management System. Mr. Van Lienden responded that there will be a “go to well” button on the DMS updates.

17. Report of Ad Hoc Committees

Nothing to report.

18. Directors’ Forum

Director Yurosek asked if reporting information is provided to the board and requested that historic pumping information be provided for all parcels and landowners.

Director Young asked if staff can also provide reported pumping.

The board requested that staff to provide estimated historical ET and reported pumping data for all parcels.

19. Public comment for Items Not on the Agenda

Stakeholder Christopher Mouwad emphasized the potential of the valley and CBGSA's ability to uplift the community by considering small farmers in policy. He stated the UC Davis Small Farmer’s Water Justice clinic is ready to assist. He suggested considering small farmers from the start might reduce the need for variances later. He added that the clinic sent letters requesting collaboration on legal research regarding small farmer inclusion and recommending minor, achievable actions for the GSA.

20. Correspondence

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

CLOSED SESSION

21. Closed Session

At 5:25 PM, the Board adjourned to closed session. At 6:36 PM, the Board returned from closed session at which time Legal Counsel reported to the public that there was no reportable action.

22. Adjourn

Chair Bantilan adjourned the meeting at 6:36 PM.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE
CUYAMA BASIN GROUNDWATER SUSTAINABILITY AGENCY

Chair: *Cory Bantilan*
Cory Bantilan (Jun 19, 2025 16:44 PDT)

ATTEST:

Secretary: _____