

Cuyama Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency Board of Directors Meeting

July 9, 2025

Meeting Minutes

PRESENT:

Directors

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

Staff

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

Absent

Williams, Debbie

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

Mr. Blakslee 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. Standing Advisory Committee Meeting Report

Meeting Date: June 26th, 2025

Submitted to the CBGSA Board of Directors on: July 9th, 2025

By: *Brenton Kelly, SAC Chair*

Two weeks ago on June 26th, the Standing Advisory Committee met at the Family Resource Center in a hybrid format, with 5 members present, 3 in-person and two on the conference line from the remote locations that were posted on the agenda. GSA Staff Taylor Blakeslee was joined by Grace Bianchi in the room, with Brian Van Lienden and Alex Dominguez on the call. There were three public stakeholders present in the room, and several stakeholders were online. The meeting lasted just under 3.5 hours.

A Public Comment was made by Committee Member Dave Lewis regarding the GSA policy for the potential enforcement of penalty fees for pumping more groundwater than was allocated. In his case, he is allocated 12.39 AF for 2026. At the first tier of the penalties he would incur a \$250.00/AF penalty for over pumping by <5% or just 0.62 AF, above which he would be fined \$500/AF. And he would trigger legal action for pumping more than 2.5 AF (20% of 12.39) over his allocation. On the other hand, Bolthouse could over-pump by 720 AF and stay at the lower tier of enforcement (5% of a 14,402.51 AF allocation for 2026), and could potentially overpump 2880 AF before any legal action could be taken. Mr. Lewis asks what is the equity of that policy.

The SAC would like to express gratitude to Legal Counsel Alex Domingues for providing a brief update on the status of the Groundwater Adjudication lawsuit as we enter Phase III around Water Rights and Allocations. He said this is the time for 'Discovery Orders' to prove any property rights to groundwater. Mr. Domingues urged all property owners to engage with their legal representative and participate in the proceedings to protect any rights to groundwater.

Most of the meeting involved SAC feedback to Staff with some straw poll votes on ideas and concepts of ideas. I will endeavor to summarize the spectrum of opinions and viewpoints and I can bring those up as they are presented in this meeting.

11.b) Approve CIMIS Station Landowner Agreement

It was generally agreed that the Agreement looked good enough and that any further improvements would not be worth the time and effort to work through the process. Appreciation was expressed for the cooperative efforts made by all parties to this agreement, especially those landowners who have agreed to the installation of these important facilities that will benefit the whole basin.

11.c) Discuss and Take Appropriate Action on the Plan and Timeline to Evaluate Allocations in the Ventucopa Management Area

Committee Member Haslett asked how the "Analysis of GW Levels/Water Budget" would be performed and whether it involved any additional data collection. Brian Van Linden responded that the analysis would be done to determine if the Model is currently adequate or not and whether additional data would be needed to develop allocations in the Ventucopa Area. As expressed in the GSP, the need for greater understanding of the hydrology of the Ventucopa Management Area has been recognised for many years. The region responds dramatically with seasonal fluctuations, not seen in the CMA. The groundwater elevations fluctuate annually but have not experienced the 100's of feet of declines as seen in the CMA for decades.

11.d) Discuss and Take Appropriate Action on Identifying Regions to Use for Evaluating Expanded Allocations and Overview and Evaluation Plan and Schedule

Committee Member Haslett expressed that most areas outside the CMA are not in overdraft, and most areas don't even have much water to be developed anyway. He feels that the 5 regions approach is taking too broad of an approach and needs more distinction. He is in favor of 5 or more regions.

Committee Member Gaillard agreed, but stressed that other areas outside the CMA may well be overdrafting without limits. He referenced the new cannabis operation on Salisbury Canyon Ranch that is new large scale irrigation on former unirrigated rangeland. He felt that surely this would impact the CMA and the Sustainable Yield.

Committee Member Lewis asked how something like that could be permitted. Mr. Blakslee responded that previously there was a Governor's order that required permitting to be approved by GSA, but that order has been lifted. It was recognised that this is an example for how local regions could become out of balance and why the whole Basin needs regionally sensitive management. Gaillard is in favor of the 5 region approach.

Committee Member DeBranch stated that the data show that all subregion boundaries within the basin are interconnected as one single basin and should be managed that way. He stressed that cuts to the CMA alone will not get the basin to a Sustainable Yield and suggested that there is an "eyeopening" amount of overdraft outside the CMA.

Committee Member Lewis agreed with DeBranch that the Basin is one collective 'bucket', and should be managed without subregions.

Committee Chair Kelly is in favor of a regional nuanced approach to basin wide management. He pointed to the 2015 USGS Cuyama Study that used 9 sub-regions to address the unique characteristics of the Basin. Figure 2-19 on page 2-47 of the Basin Setting Chapter of our current GSP shows the value of these subregions. It recognises, for instance, that the Sierra Madre foothills on the south edge of the basin behave differently than the CMA. Now we have proof from the Aerial Magnetic Resonance data that the aquifer is thicker in some places and thinner in others, coarse grained in some places and fine grained in others. This helps to explain why groundwater production is limited regionally. This is also why only some regions are responsible for the overextraction of groundwater and other regions are in balance or even contributing to the groundwater in storage.

Stakeholder Tristan Zannon commented that in the Ventucopa area the aquifer was much thinner and it was difficult to overpump without the well going dry.

11.e) Discuss and Take Appropriate Action on the CMA Allocation Exchanges Policy (i.e. Water Market)

Committee Member Giallard believes that this is going to be a “big mess” if it is done poorly but shares the urgency to create the opportunity for someone like Dave Lewis to get the water they need to stay viable. He is in favor of a simple exchange policy among neighbors. He asked what tools are available for environmental protections. He is concerned that the GW monitoring network outside of the CMA is not robust enough to count on the Minimum Thresholds alone.

Committee Member Haslett was in favor of a simple “Free Market” approach, but was concerned that this was all premature and possibly irrelevant due to the adjudication proceedings.

Committee Member Lewis had concerns for the price of water and how it could be regulated or manipulated. Given the binary choice he was in favor of a ‘Turnback Pool’.

Committee Member DeBranch thought that a water exchange policy would be an important tool moving forward from the Sustainable Yield in 2038, but thought it was premature at this point. He was in favor of a “Free Market” approach.

Chair Kelly shares Mr. Giallard’s concern for how a trading policy would impact the Basin as a whole. Because there is not an irrigation district in this basin and water can not actually be transferred, this simply means moving the pumping around. We have learned recently that the groundwater moves very slowly through the aquifer. The biggest changes in the new Model outputs are due to the adjustment to transmissivity. Moving the pumping in the wrong direction could make the overdraft worse.

The straw poll for Trading System Types was Free Market for 4, and Turnback Pool for 1.

The Committee had many opinions regarding the details of some of the Trading Rules. For 3.b. How much can be traded; the SAC was split: 3 for only trading the SY and 2 for the entire allocation.

For 3.c. Trade Limitations; DeBranch thought there may be value in limiting exchanges within proven hydrogeologic areas (3,c,i). Chair Kelly was in favor of all the limitations especially concerning distance and gradient (3,c,ii & iii). The SAC was in favor of the GSA charging landowners for any staff time involved in the exchanges.

4 out of 5 committee members supported 4.a. Protections for Small Users. The technical details of this policy are not clear yet but the need for small user protections is.

Tracking/Transparency; It was noted that the GSA has previously given direction to develop a simple accounting system. Chair Kelly asked how this policy would be effected by the Farming Unit policy which was essentially already allowing for unregulated, untracked and non-transparent water exchanges among some property owners. This would appear to be problematic and the answer from Staff was

inconclusive.

11.f) Discuss and Take Appropriate Action on CMA Carryover Policy

Committee Member Giallard was not in favor of a carryover policy at this time. Committee Member Lewis was in favor of a carryover policy and thought it was a good way of rewarding those that stayed under their allotment. Committee Member DeBranch is in support of a carryover policy but, like the exchange policy, he thought it might be premature to do only in the CMA. Committee Member Haslett and Chair Kelly thought that for the sake of the health of the Basin, a carryover policy should only be considered once pumping has been reduced to a Sustainable Yield.

11.g) Discuss and Take Appropriate Action on Revising Sustainable Management Criteria at Opti Well No. 118

The SAC is in agreement that the nearby well (Opti well #12) is erroneous and the Minimum Threshold for the Representative Well Opti #118 should be revised to 72 feet below ground level.

11.h) Discuss and Take Appropriate Action on Replacing Well 608 in the Representative Monitoring Network

The SAC is in agreement that Representative Well Opti 608, which was destroyed last year, should be replaced in the Monitoring Network with the new nearby well and be given the same Sustainability Criteria that 608 had.

*Respectfully submitted,
Brenton Kelly
SAC Chairperson*

6. Elect a Secretary

Chair Bantilan provided an overview of this item and noted that since the Ventura director left, the GSA needs to appoint a new secretary.

MOTION

Director Young made a motion to elect Director Young to Secretary. The motion was seconded by Director Jackson. A roll call vote was made and the motion passed with 67%.

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

CONSENT AGENDA

7-9. Consent Agenda

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

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 67%.

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

ACTION ITEMS

10. Director Participation at SAC Meetings

Chair Bantilan provided background on director participation at SAC meetings.

Director Wooster commented that attending SAC meetings is an opportunity to hear community perspectives, and correct errors.

Director Higbee agreed and noted that he had attended the last SAC meeting to provide clarification on the non-reported pumpers item in which some of his land was included under.

Legal Counsel Alex Dominguez explained that directors may ask clarifying questions at SAC meetings but must avoid extended discussions that could create a quorum and trigger Brown Act concerns.

Director Jackson noted that clarifying questions had been helpful in the past and that his attendance has been more informal participation.

Director Young suggested identifying when a quorum of board members is present at SAC meetings to ensure compliance.

Director Albano emphasized distinguishing between Brown Act compliance and informal etiquette.

11. Groundwater Sustainability Plan Implementation

a. Approve CIMIS Station Setup Costs Presented by Sunridge Farms

Mr. Blakslee presented a proposal to install a CIMIS station at Sunridge Nursery with an estimated cost under \$63,000, which would be fully funded by a grant.

Sunridge Nurseries Representative, Adam Lovgren, provided a brief overview of the quote.

Director Albano added that there are plans for two stations, one at his property and one at Sunridge Nursery, and emphasized the value of having both for basin coverage.

MOTION

Director Jackson made a motion to approve the CIMIS Station Setup Costs Presented by

Sunridge Farms. Director Young seconded, a roll call vote was made and passed with 78%.

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

b. Approve CIMIS Station Landowner Agreement

Mr. Blakslee presented the standard CIMIS agreement provided by the Department of Water Resources (DWR), explaining that execution of the agreement is required for installation of CIMIS stations. He noted that legal counsel had reviewed the agreement and recommended approval.

Legal Counsel Alex Dominguez asked Director Albano to abstain from voting due to conflict of interest. He added that legal feels comfortable moving forward with this agreement.

Director Wooster asked if the landowner has approved of the agreement. Mr. Blakslee responded that the agreement hasn't approved of the agreement yet, however there is limited ability to change the agreements from DWR.

Legal Counsel Alex Dominguez responded that landowners would need to sign access agreements and that DWR may accept minor changes. Any substantive modifications would need to return to the Board for approval.

Director Young commented that in his experience, DWR rarely changes terms in these types of agreements, so he did not anticipate issues.

MOTION

Director Young made a motion to approve execution of the CIMIS Station Landowner Agreement. Director Wooster seconded, a roll call vote was made and passed with 71%.

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

c. Discuss and Take Appropriate Action on the Plan and Timeline to Evaluate Allocations in the Ventucopa Management Area

Mr. Beck reviewed prior Board budget direction from March and May 2025 to evaluate expanding allocations into the Ventucopa Management Area (VMA). He emphasized this is a multi-step process and the purpose of today's item was to outline the approach.

Mr. Van Lienden outlined proposed process: (1) review and analyze existing groundwater

data, (2) evaluate the adequacy of the model in Ventucopa, and (3) compare measured and modeled water levels.

Mr. Blakslee highlighted November Board meeting where the Board will need to provide recommendations as to whether the allocations need to take place based on the analysis and information, or do they recommend additional data gathering.

Director Young asked how allocation decisions would be reflected in the Annual Report timeline.

Mr. Beck clarified that the Board could approve allocations, and annual report could outline the progress on Ventucopa separately and that the Board's direction in November would inform us what is included.

Director Wooster asked whether existing data had already been analyzed and expressed concern about relying too heavily on a model that has known limitations in Ventucopa. Mr. Van Lienden responded that while data has been reviewed, the next step is a formal adequacy check.

Mr. Beck explained that Woodard & Curran will compile existing data in Ventucopa to help the Board decide by November whether conditions are sufficient for an allocation decision or if a different approach is needed.

Director Jackson questioned whether the basin is being managed to sustainable yield, noting that only the Central Management Area has strict allocations while other areas continue higher pumping, creating an uneven approach to sustainability.

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

Stakeholder Jim Wegis commented that the model is faulty, and it does not capture how water really moves in Ventucopa. He added that the GSA shouldn't make decisions until the Santa Barbara Canyon Fault study is finished.

Stakeholder Marvin Rayhe commented that past agricultural expansion and water quality issues should be acknowledged but argued that pumping in Ventucopa has little effect on the CMA because no water crosses the Santa Barbara Canyon Fault.

Stakeholder Andrew Wright expressed concern about fairness and long-term impacts of allocations on small landowners and residents.

Stakeholder Adam Lovgren emphasized that further study is needed, particularly in Ventucopa, to validate local observations with data and clarify uncertainties about groundwater flows and pumping impacts.

Director Albano questioned Land IQ's data in Ventucopa, noting past heavy irrigation and recent hydrographs that suggest long-term declines, unlike the clear overdraft shown in the

Central Management Area. He referenced the hydrograph for Well 62, which shows steep recent declines and questioned whether cuts are needed.

Mr. Blakslee explained that the GSP found the model inadequate for implementing pumping reductions in Ventucopa due to limited data, but new monitoring wells, stream gauges, and meters are now being added to improve information.

Director Jackson emphasized that the basin must be managed as one interconnected system, raising concerns about how much water from Ventucopa recharges the CMA and emphasizing the need for the model to quantify that connection rather than treating areas as isolated.

Director Wooster suggested that any evaluation of Ventucopa should include all irrigated acres rather than focusing only on a portion of the area.

Director Higbee commented that the discussion exemplifies that more information is needed.

Director Young reminded the group that the Ventucopa area identified is a starting point and the final management area will be defined through broader analysis of wells, parcels, and regional groundwater conditions.

Stakeholder Ann Myhre compared Ventucopa to Salinas, questioning whether stopping farming would meaningfully recharge groundwater, noting it could take centuries for water to move across the fault and still not resolve the problem.

Mr. Blakslee agreed that there needs to be more specific timeline/ schedule for delivering and delving into data.

The Board directed staff to proceed with the proposed process to assess data and model adequacy in Ventucopa. Staff will return in September with a schedule that incorporates the Santa Barbara Canyon Fault results.

d. Discuss and Take Appropriate Action on Identifying Regions to Use for Evaluating Expanded Allocations and Overview and Evaluation Plan and Schedule

Mr. Blakslee introduced the item, explaining that the GSP currently includes allocations only for the Central Management Area (CMA) and Ventucopa. Staff were directed in July to present options for addressing pumping in other parts of the basin. Mr. Van Lienden presented three possible approaches.

Director Wooster expressed confusion over differing management area maps and questioned why the focus isn't placed solely on irrigated lands, since non-irrigated property is not contributing to the problem.

SAC Chair Kelly provided the SAC report on this item.

Chair Bantilan opened the floor for public comments.

Stakeholder Robbie Jaffe emphasized focusing on irrigated areas, noted past detailed geological analyses, and recommended adopting option three.

Chair Bantilan closed the floor for public comment.

Director Wooster objected to including farming units together with the CMA, stating that farming units already have allocations and should be treated separately.

Director Young expressed support for including farming units in the analysis, reasoning that because they already have allocations, their inclusion ensures consistency in management.

Director Albano noted that management area boundaries may shift as the model is updated and cautioned against locking into a structure too early. He suggested focusing on major pumping areas critical to basin sustainability, using a hydrologic approach and applying adaptive management only where local issues arise.

Chair Bantilan supported the analysis but stressed that Ventucopa must be addressed first, as it is the next logical candidate for management before considering other areas.

Director Jackson emphasized that the basin must be managed as a whole and the need to prevent new irrigation on previously unirrigated land in this critically over drafted basin.

Mr. Blakslee states that there would be a need to describe the Impacts to beneficial uses and users to take policy action against a user outside of the basin.

Director Young commented that broader policy analysis could be useful but best to have a tighter focus on Ventucopa at least for the short-term technical analysis.

e. Discuss and Take Appropriate Action on the CMA Allocation Exchanges Policy

Mr. Blakslee provides background on Board direction to explore the potential for an allocation exchange (water market) within the Central Management Area (CMA). He noted that staff are looking for feedback on policy points for the potential allocations exchanges.

SAC Chair Kelly provided the SAC report on this item.

Chair Bantilan opened the floor for public comment.

Stakeholder Adam Lovgren sked questions about eligible areas and urged that trading remain within each party's allocation to ensure basic compliance before expanding features; he cautioned that grouping unlike areas could mask localized effects.

Stakeholder Robbie Jaffe brings up concerns about defining what protection for small users means. She noted that Fox Canyon water market closed because trading was happening outside of the market. She expressed concerns that this could occur if this water market is based on it.

Stakeholder Tristan Zannon from Tri County Pistachio supported a common pool system to ease trades, citing problems with long-term yield calculations and upstream purchase limits. As a perennial grower with a major investment already facing a 32% cut, he stressed the need to secure water now rather than wait for perfect policy. He added that he could not file request for allocation variance.

Director Albano asked if a variance request can be brought to the board for next year's allocation.

The Board then worked through the draft policy considerations:

- Trade Volumes (3b): Director Albano proposed allowing trades up to 200 AF of a landowner's allocation. Other Directors discussed the role of the Board in approving trades, noting that a standard transfer form could be applied for all participants.
- Free-Market Approach: Directors generally agreed that simple, no-cap free-market trades are preferable at this stage, rather than adding complex restrictions.
- Trade Timing (3d): There was general support for the idea of approving trades up to five years in advance.
- Administrative Fee (3e): Directors agreed to defer discussion of administrative fees.
- Protections for Small Users (4): Directors noted this is primarily a buyer's market; no cap on trades was proposed unless extenuating circumstances arise.
- Tracking and Transparency (5): Directors agreed to use the existing allocation spreadsheet, with trades summarized for public reporting.
- Approval Process (6): Directors supported requiring a basic transfer form signed by both parties, with little or no Board approval required for individual trades.

f. Discuss and Take Appropriate Action on CMA Carryover Policy

Mr. Blakslee provides background regarding interest in considering the carryover policy elements of interest.

SAC Chair Brenton Kelly gives SAC committee report on this item.

There were no public comments on this item.

Board goes through each element to discuss and decide on way forward:

- Director Albano: Not ready for carryover policy.
- Director Jackson: On the fence; could see both pros and cons.
- Director Young: Not hearing a big need for this policy.
- Director Wooster: Agree, not big need.
- Director Yurosek: Need a policy, but basin-wide through the adjudication process.

Stakeholder Tristan Zannon commented that if there is a carryover policy, then he is interested in buying.

The Board decided not to adopt a carryover policy at this time and to reconsider the issue in the next fiscal year.

g. Discuss and Take Appropriate Action on Revising Sustainable Management Criteria at Opti Well No. 118

Mr. Van Lienden provides background and overview on Well No. 118 violating Minimum Threshold. He recommended removing this well, which would bring the MT to 72 feet DTW based on deepest historical value.

There were no public comments on this item.

MOTION

Director Young made a motion to remove the shallow well and readjust the MT to 72 ft. Director Jackson seconded, a roll call vote was made and passed with 60%.

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

h. Discuss and Take Appropriate Action on Replacing Well 608 in the Representative Monitoring Network

Mr. Van Lienden provides background and overview of well 608, which was destroyed in early 2024.

There was no public comment on this item.

MOTION

Director Albano made a motion to replace well 608 with a nearby monitoring well to continue groundwater level measurements. Director Jackson seconded, a roll call vote was made and passed with 60%.

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

REPORT ITEMS

12. Administrative Updates

a. Report of the Executive Director

Mr. Blakslee provided an overview of the budget to actuals through June 2025 and reported that the program overall is on budget through end of the year.

b. Report of the General Counsel

Nothing to report.

13. Technical Updates

a. Update on Groundwater Sustainability Plan Activities

Mr. Van Lienden noted that the finalized Fault Investigation Report is complete and posted on the Cuyama Basin website.

b. Update on Grant-Funded Projects

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

c. Quarterly Groundwater Conditions Report

Mr. Van Lienden briefly provided an overview of the groundwater conditions. Well 618 and well 610 under MT. MT for 618 will be adjusted as approved by the Board, while Mr. Blakslee mentions that they will come back to the Board with SOP or next steps regarding an ad-hoc to investigate Well 610.

14. Report of Ad Hoc Committees

Nothing to report.

15. Directors' Forum

Director Albano suggested following up with Jim Strandberg regarding Director Higbee's comments about Santa Barbara/Kern cooperation.

16. Public comment for Items Not on the Agenda

Stakeholder Adam Lovgren raised equity concerns for future allocation expansions, asking whether the Board will wait until then to create protections or begin developing adaptable policies now. He asked if the board would wait until then to figure out what works or work up a policy now that can be adapted as the expansion takes place.

17. Correspondence

There was no correspondence received.

CLOSED SESSION

18. Conference with Legal Counsel- Existing Litigation

At 5:45 PM, the Board adjourned to closed session. At 5:53 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 5:53 PM.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE
CUYAMA BASIN GROUNDWATER SUSTAINABILITY AGENCY

Chair: *Cory Bantilan*
Cory Bantilan (Sep 16, 2025 12:45:21 PDT)

ATTEST:

Secretary: *Matt Young*
Matt Young (Sep 8, 2025 16:20:00 PDT)