

# Cuyama Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency Board of Directors Meeting

March 4, 2026

## Meeting Minutes

### **PRESENT:**

#### Directors

Jackson, Steve – Chair  
Anselm, Arne – Vice Chair  
Bantilan, Cory – Treasurer  
Young, Matthew – Secretary  
Ellsworth, Mark  
Grant, Brian  
Reely, Blaine – Alternate  
Richardson, Kyle  
Williams, Debbie  
Yurosek, Derek  
Zenger, Katelyn

#### Staff

Bianchi, Grace – Hallmark Group  
Blakslee, Taylor – Executive Director, Hallmark Group  
Hughes, Joe – Legal Counsel  
Van Lienden, Brian – Woodard & Curran

#### **1. Call to Order**

Cuyama Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency (CBGSA) Chair Cory Jackson called the meeting to order at 12:35 p.m.

#### **2. Roll Call**

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

#### **3. Pledge of Allegiance**

The pledge of allegiance was led by Chair Jackson.

#### **4. Meeting Protocols**

Ms. Bianchi provided an overview of the meeting protocols.

#### **5. CLOSED SESSION**

The board went into closed session at 12:40 p.m. to discuss the following items.

##### **a. Conference with Legal Counsel – Public Employment (Gov. Code section 54957)**

Title: General Counsel

##### **b. Conference with Legal Counsel – Existing Litigation**

Pursuant to Government Code section 54956.9(d)(1)

- a) Bolthouse Land Company, LLC, et al v. All Persons Claiming a Right to Extract or Store Groundwater in the Cuyama Valley Groundwater Basin (BCV-21-101927)

## 6. Standing Advisory Committee Meeting Report

*Meeting Date: January 8, 2026*

*Submitted to the CBGSA Board of Directors on January 14, 2026*

*By: Brenton Kelly, SAC Chair*

*The Standing Advisory Committee met at the Family Resource Center in a hybrid format, with two Committee Members present in person, three on the conference line, and two members absent. GSA Staff Taylor Blakeslee and Project Coordinator Grace Bianchi were present, and they were joined by Brian Van Lienden on the call. One stakeholder was in the room, with many more on the video conference.*

*During public comment on items not on the agenda, Committee Member Dave Lewis reiterated his concern that the current Allocation Methodology, which is based exclusively on historic groundwater extraction of a farm, is unfair to small farmers and does not support the best interests of the majority of beneficial users in the basin.*

*The SAC meeting lasted three hours and included discussion and review of GSP implementation. The Committee also conducted a high-level review of the FY 2026–2027 budget and provided recommendations, including approval of the Annual Report.*

### **10.a) Discuss and Take Appropriate Action on DWR Review of GSP and Periodic Evaluation**

*Committee Member Jaffe asked if staff was surprised by any of DWR's comments. Mr. Blakeslee responded that he was surprised by the number of comments and noted that most requested clarification or justification for policy-level items, including changes to minimum thresholds, lack of nitrate and arsenic monitoring, subsidence SMC methodology, and timing of incorporating new dedicated monitoring wells into the model.*

*Chair Kelly asked about incorporation of metered pumping data into the groundwater model. Mr. Van Lienden responded that the model simulates long-term historical and projected conditions and uses metered data for calibration rather than as direct inputs. Chair Kelly also asked whether the model will better reflect which wells irrigate specific fields. Mr. Van Lienden stated that this information is used when available, but assumptions are required in cases such as farming units.*

*Committee Member Gaillard asked whether DWR oversees GSA governance or Board composition and expressed concern about lack of local representation. Mr. Blakeslee responded that DWR focuses on SGMA compliance and does not weigh in on Board composition. Concern was expressed regarding reduced local family farm representation and influence from corporate plaintiffs in the adjudication.*

*Stakeholder Jane Wooster asked whether the model is more accurate for small irrigators. Staff indicated this may be the case. Mr. Van Lienden explained that single-well fields provide clearer data, while multiple-well operations introduce more uncertainty.*

### **10.b) Discuss and Take Appropriate Action on Potential Areas of Overdraft Outside the Central Management Area**

*Mr. Blakeslee stated that land use and well permit data are still being compiled and are not yet available. He noted that groundwater elevation changes indicate slight increased pumping in the Ventucopa and Ozena areas.*

*Chair Kelly disagreed with this interpretation. He referenced hydrographs showing groundwater levels rising 90 feet and declining 20 feet, and raised concern that the Annual Report map understates issues in some areas while overstating others. He cited Opti Well 99, where groundwater levels declined over 80 feet before partial recovery, resulting in a net decline of about 30 feet. He emphasized the need to evaluate long-term trends rather than short-term seasonal changes.*

*The Committee acknowledged that seasonal fluctuations are common and not always indicative of overdraft, but long-term declines should be treated as a concern.*

**10.c) Discuss and Take Appropriate Action on FY 2026–2027 Strategic Plan and Budget Components**

*The SAC reviewed next year’s budget priorities and provided input.*

*Committee Member Jaffe noted that two-thirds of the budget ad hoc committee are new to the GSA and that budget development would benefit from historical context. She expressed concern about the adjudication line item and emphasized the need to present strong technical data in court. She also prioritized improvements to the allocation exchange policy and evaluation of a variance pool.*

*Committee Member DeBranch stated that past budgets relied heavily on grant funding and recommended prioritizing essential data collection and regulatory compliance over higher-cost studies.*

*Chair Kelly asked whether costs could be reduced by using water quality data from the Irrigated Lands Program.*

*Stakeholder Byron Albano confirmed that agricultural wells already report water quality data through that program and suggested the GSA use this data to supplement monitoring and reduce duplication. He recommended coordination with Central Coast Water Quality Preservation, Inc.*

**10.d) Discuss and Take Appropriate Action on Water Year 2024–2025 Annual Report**

*Committee Member Jaffe asked whether a 24,000 AF reduction in groundwater storage is a concern. Mr. Van Lienden stated that dry conditions and increased pumping contributed to the decline, but long-term trends remain within expected variability. Staff noted the challenge of reversing long-term trends. Some SAC members expressed concern that ongoing declines are treated as acceptable.*

*Chair Kelly stated that the report does not fully reflect ongoing overdraft conditions and declining well levels. The SAC approved the Annual Report following a motion and second.*

**11.a.i) Report on 2025 Basin-wide Groundwater Use, 2025 CMA Allocation Compliance, and CMA Groundwater Allocation Exchanges**

*Committee Member DeBranch asked about differences between modeled and reported pumping. Staff clarified that the difference results from water year versus calendar year reporting periods.*

*Mr. Blakeslee reported that two landowners exceeded their allocations and may face penalties. Committee Member Haslett suggested waiving penalties for one landowner due to prior allocation errors.*

*Committee Member Jaffe noted that despite a 10 percent reduction in pumping, only 58 percent of allocations were used. She suggested using unused allocations to support a variance pool or exchange program.*

*Committee Member DeBranch stated that the unused allocation gap will narrow over time.*

*Chair Kelly stated that available allocations should support exchanges, but current policy limits transactions. The SAC and stakeholders expressed frustration that the GSA is not facilitating allocation exchanges.*

## CONSENT AGENDA

### 7-9. Consent Agenda

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

Mr. Blakslee noted that the payment of bills included costs for CIMIS station installations, which exceeded initial estimates but remained within budget capacity.

#### **MOTION**

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

AYES:	Anselm, Bantilan, Ellsworth, Grant, Jackson, Richardson, Reely, Williams, Young, Yurosek, Zenger
NOES:	None
ABSTAIN:	None
ABSENT:	None

## ACTION ITEMS

### 10. Groundwater Sustainability Plan Implementation

#### a. Discuss and Take Appropriate Action on DWR Review of GSP and Periodic Evaluation

Mr. Blakslee provided an overview of the Department of Water Resource’s review of the Groundwater Sustainability Plan and Periodic Evaluation. He explained that staff categorized comments as clarifications, additional information, technical analysis, or policy issues, and that a formal response is due July 31, 2026, with Board approval anticipated in May.

SAC Chair Brenton Kelly provided the SAC report.

Director Anselm asked whether DWR has increased its focus on beneficial users. Mr. Blakslee responded that while this has always been a priority under SGMA, DWR appears to be placing greater emphasis on it in recent reviews.

Director Reely asked about nitrate testing under agricultural programs. Mr. Blakslee responded that data is collected through existing programs but is not comprehensive across all monitoring wells.

Director Yurosek asked if the board will have another opportunity to approve the response to DWR. Mr. Blakslee responded that the response to DWR will be brought to the board for approval in May.

**b. Discuss and Take Appropriate Action on Potential Areas of Overdraft Outside the Central Management Area**

Mr. Blakslee reviewed the background regarding the evaluation of potential areas of overdraft outside the Central Management Area (CMA). He reviewed the initial assessment of groundwater pumping, groundwater levels, and land use / well permitting. He noted that staff will return with the evaluation in May.

Mr. Blakslee also requested Board direction on improving timely groundwater use reporting, noting delays in receiving required data.

Director Grant asked whether the Agency has authority to impose late fees. Legal Counsel Hughes confirmed that the Agency has that authority.

Director Williams expressed support for implementing late fees to improve compliance.

Director Young suggested more frequent reporting, such as quarterly submissions, to improve consistency.

Chair Jackson directed staff to prepare options for the board at the upcoming meeting.

Stakeholder Byron Albano commented that more frequent reporting would increase burden on landowners and expressed preference for late fees instead.

Director Anselm noted that increased reporting frequency would also increase staff workload and costs.

SAC Chair Kelly provided the SAC report on this item.

Director Yurosek expressed concern about unmanaged increases in pumping outside the CMA and suggested that this reflects limitations in current management tools.

Stakeholder Casey Walsh noted discrepancies between hydrographs and mapped groundwater level changes and questioned the use of color classifications.

Stakeholder Byron Albano stated that the term “overdraft” may be misleading when describing short-term groundwater level changes.

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*The board re-entered closed session at 3:30 p.m. and resumed regular session at 4:00 p.m.*

Mr. Blakslee reported that a motion was made by Director Yurosek and seconded by Director Williams to retain Hanson Bridgett for General and Adjudication Counsel, subject to clearing any conflicts and negotiating the best fee for that contract.

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Stakeholder Byron Albano asked for the lead attorney’s name. Mr. Blakslee responded that it is Claire Collins.

Stakeholder Lynn Carlisle asked about the conflict review process. Legal Counsel Hughes explained that conflicts are identified and resolved as part of standard legal procedures.

**c. Discuss and Take Appropriate Action on FY 2026-2027 Strategic Plan and Budget Components**

Mr. Blakslee provided an overview of the fiscal year 2026-2026 budget components, including the staff and ad hoc recommendations.

SAC Chair Kelly provided the SAC report on this item.

Stakeholder Adam Lovgren asked whether allocation transfers have occurred and whether irrigation efficiency data could be incorporated into modeling.

Mr. Blakslee responded that staff can evaluate potential incorporation.

**d. Discuss and Take Appropriate Action on Water Year 2024-2025 Annual Report**

Mr. Van Lienden presented the draft Annual Report, including updates on groundwater conditions and modeling results.

SAC Chair Kelly provided the SAC Report on this item.

Director Reely asked whether increased groundwater pumping is related to dry year conditions. Mr. Van Lienden responded that dry conditions likely contributed to increased pumping.

Stakeholder Byron Albano asked about the timeframe of modeled extractions. Mr. Van Lienden explained that the model reflects defined reporting periods and assumptions.

Stakeholder Adam Lovgren asked whether the model can predict basin storage. Mr. Van Lienden responded that additional analysis would be required to assess storage predictions.

Stakeholder Lynn Carlie asked about methods used to estimate groundwater extraction.

**MOTION**

Director Ellsworth moved to approve draft Annual Report for Water Year 2024-2025. The motion was seconded by Director Reely. A roll call vote was made and the motion passed unanimously.

AYES: Anselm, Bantilan, Ellsworth, Grant, Jackson, Richardson, Reely,  
Williams, Young, Yurosek, Zenger

NOES: None

ABSTAIN: None  
 ABSENT: None

**e. Report on Central Management Area Allocations and Authorize Penalty Fees**

Mr. Blakslee reviewed the allocation policy and recommended authorization of penalty fees for exceedances.

SAC Chair Kelly provided the SAC report on the allocation exceedances.

Director Young suggested considering a threshold-based approach rather than a percentage-based overage.

**MOTION**

Director Young made a motion to authorize the penalty fees. The motion was seconded by Director Zenger. A roll call vote was made and the motion passed unanimously.

AYES: Anselm, Bantilan, Ellsworth, Grant, Jackson, Richardson, Reely, Williams, Young, Yurosek, Zenger  
 NOES: None  
 ABSTAIN: None  
 ABSENT: None

Stakeholder Byron Albano stated that upcoming allocations may significantly impact small landowners.

**REPORT ITEMS**

**11. Administrative Updates**

**a. Report of the Executive Director**

Nothing to report.

**b. Report of the General Counsel**

Nothing to report.

**12. Technical Updates**

**a. Update on Groundwater Sustainability Plan Activities**

Mr. Van Lienden noted that these updates are included in the board packet.

**b. Update on Grant-Funded Projects**

Mr. Van Lienden briefly reported that CIMIS stations are expected to be installed by February.

**13. Report of Ad Hoc Committees**

Nothing to report.

**14. Directors' Forum**

Director Young requested consideration of a tiered exceedance structure and volunteered to participate in an ad hoc committee.

**15. Public comment for Items Not on the Agenda**

Stakeholder Adam Lovgren asked if the board is interested in a true up period to allow the landowners to do allocation exchange.

**16. Correspondence**

No correspondence was received.

**17. Adjourn**

Chair Jackson adjourned the meeting at 5:20 PM.

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BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE  
CUYAMA BASIN GROUNDWATER SUSTAINABILITY AGENCY

Chair: *Steve Jackson*  
Steve Jackson (May 7, 2026 06:50:37 PDT)

ATTEST:

Secretary: *Matt Young*  
Matt Young (May 7, 2026 06:53:42 PDT)