Cuyama Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency
Board of Directors Meeting

May 6, 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, Debby
Yurosek, Derek
Zenger, Katelyn

Staff
Bianchi, Grace – Hallmark Group
Blakslee, Taylor –Executive Director, Hallmark Group
Collins, Claire – Legal Counsel, Hanson Bridgett
Metcalf, Nathan – Legal Counsel, Hanson Bridgett
Van Lienden, Brian – Woodard & Curran,

1. **Call to Order**
   Cuyama Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency (CBGSA) Chair Jackson called the meeting to order at 2:00 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.

   Mr. Blakslee noted a change to the agenda and stated that Closed Session would follow Item No. 10b.

4. **Meeting Protocols**
   Ms. Bianchi provided an overview of the meeting protocols.

5. **Introduction of New Legal Counsel**
   Legal Counsel Claire Collins introduced herself as new general counsel for the CBGSA and provided an overview of her background representing California water agencies, including groundwater

sustainability agencies. Legal Counsel Nathan Metcalf introduced himself as adjudication counsel and summarized his experience with groundwater adjudications, probationary basins, surface water rights, and fisheries matters.

6. Standing Advisory Committee Meeting Report

Meeting Date: April 30, 2026
Submitted to the CBGSA Board of Directors on May 6, 2026
By Brenton Kelly, SAC Chair

The Standing Advisory Committee met at the Family Resource Center in a hybrid format, with three Committee Members present in person and one on the conference line, with three 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.

The SAC meeting lasted three hours with lots of discussion and review of GSP implementation. We approved the response to the DWR review of our new GSP and we took a high-level review of the 2026-2027 budget with a couple of recommendations.

The SAC was introduced to Nathan Metcalf of the Hanson Bridgett law firm, the new GSA counsel for the Adjudication, who gave an informative and appreciated update on the current Court actions. The final draft for a Minor Extractor (ME) Order is expected shortly. A list of approximately 480 property owners in the basin has been prepared to zero out any groundwater rights into the future. Many of these are in the Cuyama Community Services District. An opt-in form will be used to apply for Minor Extractor rights for almost 200 claimants who have successfully submitted paperwork in the case to access a 400 AFY ME pool that will not be subject to any further reductions or cutbacks unless the Sustainable Yield is determined to be smaller in the future.

During public comment on items not on the agenda, Vice Chair Joe Haslett was disappointed in the accessibility of the Form 700 financial disclosures, in compliance with AB 293, for CBGSA Board of Directors. The online searching tool provided on our website was of no use.

a) Discuss and Take Appropriate Action on GSA Response to DWR's Additional Information Request Regarding their Review of the Amended 2025 GSP and Periodic Evaluation

Some general observations and recommendations include the following:

Important Descriptive Narrative: A clear and understandable description of the new process for determining Minimum Thresholds (MTs) is imperative. A majority of basinwide MTs were lowered by enough to eliminate all exceedances from the old plan, while allowing for worsening of the undesirable results of groundwater elevation declines and the loss of groundwater from storage. How is this protective of sensitive beneficial uses, such as shallow domestic wells, small farms, and degraded wetland habitats?

Water Quality Migration Mitigation: DWR continues to take issue with how the GSP addresses issues of arsenic and nitrates in the basin. Staff is suggesting that monitoring for the movement or migration of these contaminants would allow for some mitigation measures that could be an alternative to setting Minimum Thresholds with Adaptive Management measures. What would *effective migration tracking look like when current testing is done once every five years? How would the public be made aware of any impacts to domestic wells from potential migration trends?*

Plan Implementation and Allocation: The current GSP allocations are only established to 2029, are not calculated for the full basin, and are not expected to reach the basinwide Sustainable Yield by themselves.

Water Year vs. Calendar Year: At the soonest convenient opportunity, likely in 2030, the landowners' annual water reporting timeline must be synced up with the model calculations timeline. For greater accuracy and consistency, the Water Year, from October 1 to September 31, should be used instead of the calendar year.

Along with the above comments and policy questions, the SAC generally approved the recommendation of the Technical Memorandum in response to DWR's review of the 2025 GSP and Periodic Review. A motion by Haslett was seconded by DeBranch and passed unanimously.

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

The Initial Assessment process to recognize areas of irrigated acreage outside of the CMA that may be contributing to basinwide overdraft is being employed for the first time, and it revealed the following observations from the Committee and Stakeholders:

Better Map Visuals: The request was made, not for the first time, for clearer landmarks to be included on maps, such as major roads and drainages, rather than just satellite view.

Overdraft Needs to be Defined: A clear and quantitative definition of overdraft outside the CMA is needed for this Initial Assessment. It was recognized that a single year-on-year comparison is not sufficient to describe a trend, and yet the 50-year model simulation is not better and does not accurately recognize potential overdraft. Specific conditions such as well depth, amount of irrigated acreage, seasonality, and land use changes must be part of this definition. An Initial Assessment must be followed by ground truthing.

Identify the Overdraft: If the Model suggests that some amount of pumping outside the CMA may be contributing to basinwide overdraft, then this process must identify and manage that contribution to the overdraft for sustainability. If, after ground truthing the Initial Assessment, long-term contribution to basinwide overdraft is not found, then the model estimates should be viewed with skepticism. It was felt that without strong guardrails, growers could keep adding wells and irrigating new acres outside the CMA. If changes in land use cause rapid changes in groundwater elevations, this must be recognized and managed quickly. The Committee agrees with the next step of ground truthing the two parcels as indicated in the initial assessment summary, map on page 80 of the GSA packet.

c) Discuss and Take Appropriate Action on the Fiscal Year 2026-2027 Budget and Cash Flow

The SAC reviewed the draft budget and commented on some of the options, including the options for cost savings with the SAC. The SAC did not review the cash flow or fee options. The following comments were made by committee members and stakeholders:

Allocations vs. Adjudication: Some of the biggest price tag options are for model improvements for the purpose of developing allocations outside of the CMA. However, the Court is also determining basinwide allocations in the Adjudication. How much money must we spend on duplication of the Court's anticipated allocations?

Recalibration vs. Data Updating: Brian Van Lienden suggested that the cost to simply update recent data and recalibrate the Model would be approximately $200,000. The cost of these Model Improvements is an additional optional amount of approximately $600,000. Would this extra expense be of any benefit if the allocations are developed by the Court?

Collaboration and Cooperation with the Court: What is the process for providing this information to the Judge to assist in the Adjudication for the benefit of sustainability in the Basin as a whole? This $1.8 million budget is raised from basin stakeholders for a public process that should be vigorously advocated for and represented to the Court, and yet technical analysis, pumping data, and the GSP have been under-represented to the Judge.

Cost Cutting at the SAC: The Committee understands the need for efficient use of our financial resources. Staff time is valuable and can be viewed as a finite resource. Although we highly value Hallmark's critical meeting facilitation, a three-hour limit to technical support staff can be accommodated without a problem. It was felt that a brief legal update, in person or written, of 15 minutes or less would be reasonable and helpful.

A motion to approve Option 5 in Attachment 2 with a brief legal update at the start of the meeting when appropriate. The motion was made by Joe Haslett and seconded by Jean Gillard and passed with one dissent from Brad DeBranch.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:05 p.m.

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.

MOTION

Director Yurosek made a motion to approve the consent agenda item nos. 7-9. The motion was seconded by Director Williams. 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 GSA Response to DWR's Additional Information Request Regarding their Review of the Amended 2025 GSP and Periodic Evaluation

Mr. Blakslee provided an overview of the Department of Water Resources' (DWR) review of the amended 2025 Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) and Periodic Evaluation. He explained that DWR requested additional information regarding groundwater level sustainable management criteria, groundwater quality, subsidence, monitoring networks, plan implementation, and data reporting.

Mr. Van Lienden reviewed the draft technical memorandum responding to DWR's comments and summarized each response category. He explained that staff provided additional information regarding minimum threshold methodologies, groundwater quality monitoring, nitrate and arsenic management, subsidence monitoring, representative monitoring wells, allocation implementation, and data reporting methods.

Mr. Blakslee provided an overview of the Department of Water Resource's (DWR) review of the 2025 amended Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) and Periodic Evaluation. Mr. Van Lienden provided a presentation of the GSA response to each of DWR's comments in their annual review of the GSP and Periodic Evaluation.

Director Grant asked whether the Cuyama Community Services District (CCSD) wells had experienced groundwater quality concerns related to nitrates or arsenic. Director Williams responded that arsenic concentrations at the wellhead periodically exceeded the maximum contaminant level but were reduced through treatment to compliant levels, while nitrates had not presented a concern at the district wells.

Mr. Blakslee explained that staff was not recommending establishment of nitrate-specific sustainable management criteria at this time, but instead proposed annual evaluation of nitrate migration trends and potential mitigation measures if significant changes occur.

Director Young stated that other agencies already operate domestic well testing programs and suggested the GSA continue utilizing existing monitoring resources.

Mr. Van Lienden explained that DWR has identified examples of other GSAs that established nitrate or arsenic thresholds, although staff believes the proposed approach remains appropriate for the basin.

SAC Chair Brenton Kelly provided the SAC report.

Stakeholder Lynn Carlisle asked whether DWR had reviewed the groundwater quality summaries included in the GSA annual reports and questioned whether DWR still considered the current approach insufficient.

Mr. Van Lienden responded that the GSA annually summarizes nitrate and arsenic data obtained from existing monitoring programs and includes those summaries within the annual report submitted to DWR.

Stakeholder Lynn Carlisle asked whether the GSA could further define what constitutes a "significant change" in nitrate concentrations. Mr. Blakslee responded that staff preferred to maintain flexibility rather than tie the GSA to a fixed quantitative threshold at this time, but explained that significant migration toward domestic wells or new areas would warrant further review.

Director Young noted that Santa Barbara County Environmental Health offers a free domestic well testing program and suggested adding the information to the GSA website.

MOTION
Director Young moved to approve staff's response to DWR comments. 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

b. Discuss and Take Appropriate Action on Potential Areas of Overdraft Outside the Central Management Area
Mr. Blakslee reviewed prior Board direction regarding evaluation of potential increased groundwater use outside the Central Management Area (CMA). He explained that staff developed an annual assessment process using groundwater pumping changes, groundwater level changes, and land use and well permitting information to identify potential areas requiring further review.

Ms. Bianchi reviewed the groundwater pumping analysis, land use changes, and well pumping, comparing 2024 and 2025 reported pumping data. She noted that staff identified significant increases in groundwater pumping in two areas and staff recommends following up with these landowners.

SAC Chair Brenton Kelly provided the SAC report.

Chair Jackson opened the floor for public comment.

Stakeholder Jane Wooster commented that groundwater level changes alone should not automatically trigger management concerns and requested additional information regarding representative wells, well depths, and surrounding land uses.

Stakeholder Kathleen March expressed concern that groundwater levels near the North Fork vineyard area appeared to be declining more rapidly than in portions of the CMA and urged the Board to take action. Mr. Blakslee responded that the GSA monitors representative wells in that area and continues reviewing the data through the annual reporting process.

Stakeholder Adam Lovgren asked how the GSA would determine whether future management actions or restrictions would apply to specific wells or broader areas. Mr. Blakslee responded that staff was not recommending pumping restrictions at this stage and explained that several additional technical review steps would occur before any future management recommendations.

Stakeholder Byron Albano commented that the assessment process should focus on identifying long-term overdraft conditions rather than reacting to short-term groundwater level changes.

Director Young stated that the Board may eventually need to require landowners to provide technical analyses demonstrating that groundwater use will not interfere with the basin's ability to achieve sustainability.

Director Ellsworth asked whether the proposed process is similar to the process previously used to establish the CMA. Mr. Blakslee responded that the approach follows a similar staged technical review process.

Director Yurosek recommended providing additional clarification regarding Step 3 of the detailed assessment process.

Director Grant commented that staff should continue gathering information before considering more restrictive management approaches.

Director Zenger stated that restricting pumping in isolated areas may not provide an efficient basin-wide solution.

MOTION
Director Grant moved to direct staff to proceed with Steps 1-3 of the detailed assessment and provide ongoing communication to the Board regarding the process. The motion was seconded by Director Young. 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

CLOSED SESSION

13. Closed Session - 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)

Chair Jackson opened the floor for public comment.

Stakeholder Byron Albano expressed frustration regarding holding closed session in the middle of the meeting.

Stakeholder Adam Lovgren expressed concern regarding adjudication-related costs and duplication of work between the adjudication and GSA technical efforts.

----------------------*The board entered closed session at 3:34 p.m.* ---

Legal Counsel Claire Collins reported that no action was taken during closed session.

----------------------*The board resumed to regular session at 4:46 p.m.* ------------------------------------

c. Discuss and Take Appropriate Action on FY 2026-2027 Budget and Cash Flow

Mr. Blakslee presented the proposed FY 2026-2027 budget and cash flow projections, including recommendations from staff and the Budget Ad Hoc Committee. He reviewed operational costs, consultant services, adjudication-related expenses, optional technical projects, and estimated extraction fee projections needed to maintain a target ending cash balance of $200,000.

Mr. Blakslee presented the proposed FY 2026-2027 budget and cash flow projections, including recommendations from staff and the Budget Ad Hoc Committee. He reviewed operational costs, consultant services, adjudication-related expenses, optional technical projects, and estimated extraction fee projections needed to maintain a target ending cash balance.

Director Grant recommended reducing public workshop costs and questioned whether optional model improvement projects should proceed during an active adjudication process.

Director Ellsworth asked whether the GSA could utilize Cal Poly irrigation efficiency and infiltration studies instead of conducting additional basin-specific studies. Mr. Van Lienden responded that the proposed technical work would generate basin-specific information needed for future groundwater management decisions.

Stakeholder Jim Wegis commented that the Cuyama Conservation District is also conducting irrigation efficiency efforts.

Director Anselm asked whether more detailed land use data would become available through the adjudication process.

Chair Jackson asked whether the historical land use update would remain necessary for future model updates. Mr. Van Lienden responded that the historical land use update could potentially be deferred to a future fiscal year.

Mr. Blakslee reported proposed telemetry cost savings would equal approximately $900 per quarter, resulting in a long-term payback period.

SAC Chair Kelly provided the SAC report on this item.

Stakeholder Teddie Kelly asked about the purpose of adjudication-related spending and questioned the GSA’s litigation posture.

Stakeholder Kathleen March stated that adjudication filings are publicly available through the Superior Court and noted that the CBGSA had not filed substantive adjudication documents.

Stakeholder Jane Wooster asked whether historical land use information could later be used for allocation decisions. Mr. Blakslee responded that historical land use data had been used previously in development of groundwater allocations.

Stakeholder Adam Lovgren asked about the purpose and potential impacts of the irrigation efficiency budget item.

Stakeholder Lynn Carlisle asked whether the proposed budget would be funded through pumping fees. Mr. Blakslee responded that the budget would be funded through a combination of existing cash disbursements and extraction fee revenue.

Mr. Blakslee reviewed the cash flow projections and estimated extraction fee levels necessary to maintain a $200,000 ending cash balance.

The Board discussed whether to include an adjudication contingency.

Director Young suggested including the contingency with a requirement that any notice to proceed return to the Board. Legal Counsel Collins stated that the Board could approve the amount as a flagged item within the budget and require subsequent Board approval before expenditure.

Director Zenger asked about the large increase in the annual land use surveys. She supports includes incorporating SBCF investigation into the model.

MOTION
Director Yurosek moved to approve Fiscal Year 2026-2027 budget with caveat that any expenditures under contingency must come back to board for 75% approval, with option 5 for SAC with legal update. The motion was seconded by Director Anselm. 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

d. Discuss and Take Appropriate Action on Consultant Task Orders for Fiscal Year 2026-2027
Mr. Blakslee reviewed consultant task orders for Hallmark Group and Woodard & Curran and noted the authorized amounts will match the approved FY 2026-2027 budget.

MOTION
Director Grant moved to approve Fiscal Year 2026-2027 task orders for the Hallmark Group and Woodard & Curran. The motion was seconded by Director Anselm. A roll call vote was made and the motion passed unanimously.

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

REPORT ITEMS

11. Administrative Updates

a. Report of the Executive Director

i. Report on Final 2025 Basin-Wide Groundwater Use, 2025 CMA Allocation

Compliance, and CMA Groundwater Allocation Exchanges
Ms. Bianchi reported that the final 2025 reported use and CMA allocation compliance are included in the packet.

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 reported that the grant work was complete, the station installation work and all grant components had been completed, and DWR had released the retention payment.

13. Report of Ad Hoc Committees
Nothing to report.

14. Directors' Forum
Nothing to report.

15. Public comment for Items Not on the Agenda
Stakeholder Teddie Kelly asked about the public perception of the GSA orientation in the adjudication and questioned whether the judge was provided information on the fault investigation.

Stakeholder Byron Albano commented that the adjudication court determined one basin for legal purposes but left management areas and basin management issues for later phases. He expressed frustration with Board representation, the budget, and decisions requiring supermajority approval for adjudication-related legal spending.

Stakeholder Jane Wooster stated that there is a difference between what the judge decides and what the GSA decides. She commented that the CMA was based on model results showing two feet per year of decline over 50 years and questioned whether the model foundation reflected actual local measurements.

Stakeholder Karen Lewis commented on the allocation program and stated that there was no clear process for purchasing allocation, no available sellers, and uncertainty regarding how much water to purchase or how to avoid financial harm.

Stakeholder Adam Lovgren also commented on the allocation transfer program, stating that interested buyers do not know how to participate and that the program lacks structure. He stated that the issue is difficult for landowners with permanent crops, landowners who purchased property before the allocation program, and landowners who cannot attend long technical meetings or face language barriers.

Stakeholder Jim Wegis commented on Board representation and lack of Cuyama-local representation.

Stakeholder Alicia Taff requested waiver of late fees and penalties for the water account associated with 2225 Foothill Road in New Cuyama and requested permission to pay the outstanding principal balance in monthly installments. She stated that she did not receive notices from the landowner regarding water charges or reporting requirements, acted in good faith to comply once notified, installed a flow meter, and worked with staff to develop an accurate ET figure for mature jujube trees.

Chair Jackson and Mr. Blakslee stated that Ms. Taff's request would need to be addressed at a later Board meeting.

16. Correspondence

No correspondence was received.

17. Adjourn

Chair Jackson adjourned the meeting at 6:20 PM.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE
CUYAMA BASIN GROUNDWATER SUSTAINABILITY AGENCY

Chair: Steve Jackson
Steve Jackson (Jul 2, 2026 07:09:08 PDT)

ATTEST:

Secretary: Matt Young
Matt Young (Jul 2, 2026 09:59:31 PDT)