MEETING MINUTES – Merced GSP

SUBJECT: Merced GSP Stakeholder Committee Meeting #13

DATE/TIME: May 29, 2019 at 9:30 AM

LOCATION: Castle Conference Center, 1900 Airdrome Entry, Atwater, CA

Stakeholder Committee Members In Attendance:

	Representative	Community Aspect Representation
☐	Alex McCabe	City of Livingston
☒	Arlan Thomas	Merced Irrigation District Advisory Committee (MIDAC), growers
☒	Ben Migliazzo	Live Oak Farms, growers
☒	Bill Spriggs	City of Merced, Merced Irrigation District
☒	Bob Salles	Leap Carpenter Kemps Insurance, insurance industry and natural resources
☒	Brad Robson	Buchanan Hollow Nut Co. Le Grand-Athlone Water District, growers
☐	Breanne Ramos	Merced County Farm Bureau
☐	Brian Carter	D&S Farms, growers
☐	Carol Bonin	Winton M.A.C.
☒	Daniel Machado	Machado Backhoe Inc., construction industry
☒	Darren Olguin	McSwain MAC
☒	Frenchy Meissonnier	Rice Farmer, rice growers
☒	Galen Miyamoto	Miyamoto Farms
☒	Gino Pedretti III	Sandy Mush Mutual Water Company
☐	James (Jim) Marshall	City of Merced
☒	Joe Scoto	Scoto Bros Farms / McSwain Union School District
☒	Ladi Asgill	East Merced Resource Conservation District / Sustainable Conservation
☒	Maria Herrera	Self-Help Enterprises
☐	Mark Maxwell	University of California, Merced
☐	Maxwell Norton	Retired agricultural researcher
☒	Parry Klassen	East San Joaquin Water Quality Coalition, growers
☐	Rick Drayer	Drayer Ranch, Merced cattlemen
☐	Simon Vander Woude	Sandy Mush Mutual Water Company, dairies

*Jean Okuye attended as alternate for Ladi Asgill

Meeting Minutes

1. Welcome, Introductions, and Agenda Review
    a. Charles Gardiner (Catalyst) welcomed the group and reviewed the agenda items for the meeting.
2. Coordinating Committee Update
    a. Hicham ElTal (MIUGSA) provided an update on the Coordinating Committee meeting in April, including a summary of the climate change presentation, sustainable management criteria (broken down by individual sustainability indicator), as well as the implementation timeline.
    b. Hicham also provided a quick update on the Santa Clara Valley Water District proposal to buy 5,000 acres located in the Merced Subbasin to use as a water bank.
        i. Point was raised that Merced County would need to provide a permit to export groundwater per Ordinance. SCVWD would need to go through CEQA. An exemption for water districts does not apply as this exemption is only for water districts within the County.
        ii. SC reached consensus to provide recommendation to CC that GSP should incorporate a policy statement about intent of GSP to encourage land use ordinances, but noting that GSP doesn't necessarily have the authority to enforce. CC might be able to take that to their individual GSAs if it is groundwater being exported (not necessarily for surface water).
        iii. Comment: Concern that there is no surface water in this land region and poor percolation. Not sure how it can be used as a water bank. Might be information we're missing, so intent is to gather more information.
3. Presentation by Woodard & Curran on GSP development
    a. Management Areas
        i. Alyson Watson (W&C) defined Management Areas and how and why they might be implemented. Charles Gardiner (Catalyst) provided an example where faults located in the center of a different basin interrupt water flows and it was selected as a management area where conditions were different than other areas.
        ii. Question: Have management areas been defined in the Merced Subbasin? Answer: Not yet, the team has been focusing on building an understanding and framework for the whole Subbasin, and then evaluate the need for management areas. Now we're at that evaluation point, e.g. maybe the subsidence area is one example of a possible management area.
        iii. Question: Do we have a model of groundwater levels and flow directions? Answer: Yes, this is contained within the MercedWRM and also described in the Hydrogeologic Conceptual Model section of the GSP.
        iv. Question: Should we be looking at urban vs rural in terms of different thresholds, recharge and reuse of treated water, and converting to surface water? Answer: We can implement different projects in different areas of the Subbasin regardless of management areas.
        v. Comment: Management areas have been used in other Subbasins to focus on more stringent thresholds to protect vulnerable areas. Response: We have focused on shallow water areas via groundwater levels all over the Subbasin and set conservative thresholds based on shallow domestic wells; the limitation on setting more thresholds in these areas are that there are not wells in all these areas.

vi. Comment: Poorer water quality on the West side of the Subbasin may necessitate different management areas on the east vs west but not sure how to implement. Recharge in areas with lower water quality would help water quality. Response: A more restrictive threshold can still apply to the whole Subbasin even though it's developed based on just the lower water quality area.

b. Sustainable Management Criteria

i. Alyson Watson (W&C) walked through the sustainable management criteria for each of the sustainability indicators.

ii. Question: Is there science that quantifies the delay factor of subsidence due to previous pumping? 2 consecutive years used for the definition of undesirable results for land subsidence may not be sufficient or realistic. Answer: We've tried to address this by avoiding exceeding historical rates of subsidence by maintaining current rate or less. We are also not trying to achieve 0 subsidence because this is likely unreasonable.

iii. Comment/concern: Not sure if we have decided if Jan 1, 2015 is representative if historical groundwater levels indicate that the shallowest domestic well(s) may have been dewatered already. As-is, we might be restricting ourselves and need to select a deeper minimum threshold in these cases.

iv. Question: Why don't we have thresholds in the southern area of the Subbasin? Answer: No CASGEM wells currently available (data record limitations or no construction information: ultimately do not meet CASGEM monitoring requirements), but will be able to use the same methodology to implement new wells in future (as described in data gaps section of GSP). Goal to implement additional wells in the first five years of GSP implementation.

v. Question: How much funding do we have for monitoring wells? Answer: 2 monitoring wells in El Nido have been applied and received. The Subbasin is changing the request for Technical Support Services (TSS) from a monitoring well to a continuous GPS station for a number of reasons.

vi. Question: The GSAs are not establishing minimum threshold for contaminants besides salinity – why wouldn't we to set additional thresholds for these other contaminants and meet them by coordination with other agencies? Answer: The GSAs could choose to set minimum thresholds for other contaminants, but there are challenges for making any change or impact on the issue if a threshold was to be exceeded, for example due to natural arsenic increases or due to a commercial user with a toxic contaminant. It's difficult for GSAs to assume responsibility because there's no control over many of these contaminants. Salinity is an issue where changes in pumping can have an impact.

1. One thing to look at would be having an annual review process internal to look at other agency data. Ultimately, project implementation is where we have control.

vii. Question: What are the water quality challenges as of 2015? Answer: We've met with SC, CC, GSAs, and Merced County Environmental Health to identify these issues. They have been laid out in the Current and Historical Conditions section.

viii. Comment: CV-SALTS is about to go before the State in August to adopt new basin plan. Prioritization and optimization study with deep dive on data analysis to identify hotspots of salts, with results coming out over next 10 years. Nitrate control plans are already in place

for ILRP, but additional nitrate control efforts have started in Chowchilla, Turlock, and Modesto Subbasins.

ix. Amanda Peisch-Derby (DWR): DWR cautions against an approach that simply references other water quality programs for addressing other water quality parameters. Amanda shared that she was not clear on how the GSP will become aware of issues and track. Additionally, exceedances of an MT don't have to mean undesirable results are immediately applicable.

x. Alyson framed that many of the suggestions provided for addressing additional contaminants are good basin management actions that should likely be implemented. However, this is different than self-imposed regulatory requirements (minimum thresholds) that include responsibility for managing the problem.

xi. Comment: Other GSAs appear to be doing a more thorough analysis of water quality constituents against MCL/SMCL levels and impacts of pumping on historical water quality and they are thinking about ways to deal with them. Response: Other subbasins are implementing thresholds but adding a disclaimer specifically "as impacted by groundwater pumping". The difference there is that they need to pay for monitoring wells that meet the standards and also back it up with analysis in every reporting cycle to prove whether it was or wasn't due to groundwater pumping on likely a regular basis.

xii. Lots of discussion ensued about what does a coordination program look like, what is enforceable, what does the Subbasin want.

xiii. Public Comment: Need to figure out how to reduce pumping so that total water volume increases and thus improves water quality. Water quality is a trigger.

c. Implementation Plan

i. Alyson Watson (W&C) gave a brief outline on implementation planning steps for the GSP that are currently underway, as well as a schedule for future implementation of the GSP.

ii. Comment: GSP needs to consider economics of the region in setting the implementation time period while balancing the need to avoid perverse incentives for single users to exploit supplies.

d. Next Steps in GSP Development

i. Included a summary of upcoming section review drafts to expect.

e. Other Updates

i. Included a summary of upcoming section review drafts to expect.

4. Public Outreach Update

a. The next public workshop will take place May 29th at the Atwater Community Center. Notices and additional information will be posted on the Merced SGMA website.

5. Interbasin Coordination Update

a. A meeting with Turlock was just held. Also developing a draft agreement on how to coordinate in the future with Delta-Mendota (which is on a tight timeline and does not expect to be able to coordinate on data sharing unless there has been sufficient time for internal review).

6. Public Comment on Items not on the Agenda
    a. Comment provided:
        i. What is the status of the Castle Air Force Base groundwater quality cleanup? Answer: Lots of progress has been made in recent decades, but it is ongoing.
7. Next Steps and Next Meeting
    a. Focus for June will be on comments on draft sections and process for GSP Adoption and next steps.

Next Regular Meeting
June 24, 2019 at **9:30 a.m.**
Castle Conference Center, 1900 Airdrome Entry, Atwater, CA
Information also available online at mercedsgma.org

Note: If you need disability-related modification or accommodation to participate in this meeting, please contact Merced County, Community and Economic Development staff at 209-385-7654 at least 48 hours prior to the start of the meeting.