



Summary of Merced Subbasin Groundwater Sustainability Plan Community Workshop in Atwater, CA

May 29, 2019

Overview

The fifth Merced Subbasin Groundwater Sustainability Plan community workshop was held in Atwater, CA on Wednesday, May 29, 2019 at the Atwater Community Center from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. The workshop was attended by 8 community members, a representative from the City of Atwater, a representative from the Winton Water and Sanitary District, and three staff from the Groundwater Sustainability Agencies.

The goals for the workshop included the following:

1. Provide information about the status the Groundwater Management Plan under development for the Merced Subbasin.
2. Obtain participant feedback.
3. Encourage attendees to share their knowledge and experiences with groundwater in the Merced Subbasin.

The workshop was publicized using the following methods:

1. Press Release was issued to the Merced Sun-Star, Merced County Times, and posted on www.mercedsgma.org.
2. Display Ad was published in the main news section of the Atwater Signal on May 18, 2019 and the Merced Sun-Star on May 22, 2019.
3. Workshop Notices (English and Spanish) were widely distributed by partner organizations to their email distribution lists and were posted on the three GSA websites and several partner websites.
4. Self-Help Enterprises (SHE) and The Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability assisted with outreach by distributing workshop notices.

SHE provided a Spanish translator and communications system that supports simultaneous translation. No one utilized the translation option at this workshop.

Summary of Presentations and Discussions

Presentation 1 - Sustainable Groundwater Management Act and Groundwater Sustainability Plan, and Current and Projected Groundwater Conditions

Alyson Watson, Woodard & Curran, provided a review of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) and the three Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSAs) developing the Merced Subbasin Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP). She also explained what a GSP is

and what it includes. Alyson presented an overview of the hydrologic water modeling for current and projected groundwater conditions in the Merced Subbasin.

Brenda Wey, Winton Water and Sanitary District, provided a brief overview of some of the water supply and water quality challenges in Winton. Winton currently has a moratorium on new water connections. Winton experienced a small drop in water levels during the most recent drought, but is situated near a shallow/high aquifer and has been relatively fortunate compared to surrounding communities.

Brian Shaw, City of Atwater, provided a brief overview of some of the water supply and water quality challenges in Atwater. He noted that public groundwater wells had to be deepened during the recent drought, but the City fared better than some other surrounding areas. Groundwater levels have continued to rebound during the recent wet years. The City has continued conservation restrictions since the drought. One of the City's wells is being treated for 1,2,3-TCP with carbon filters, and all wells are expected to need to be treated. Water quality in Atwater is good.

The following questions and comments were offered by participants:

1. Question: What hydrologic model are you using?

Answer: A custom model developed on the IWFM (Integrated Water Flow Model) platform developed by the Department of Water Resources. It is the same platform as C2VSIM, more refined than the fine-grid C2VSIM that is being developed now.

2. Question: On Slide 17 titled "The Groundwater Model Estimates Flows Into and Out of the Groundwater Basin", what is the black line?

Answer: Cumulative change in storage, a sum of all the net "ins" and "outs" from the Merced Subbasin storage over time.

3. Question: Does Slide 17 titled "The Groundwater Model Estimates Flows Into and Out of the Groundwater Basin" include projected land uses?

Answer: Yes, it assumes 2040 water demands and General Plan buildout. It uses the latest crop type data with small minor updates based on specific feedback/projections from each of the three GSAs.

4. Question: Is the Merced Subbasin being drawn down more than is being replaced?

Answer: Yes

5. Comment: Tree orchards are being planted now. These won't be able to be changed to a different crop that would use less water any time soon.

6. Comment: We need to conserve water and keep our neighbors in mind when using water. Water is a resource for everyone.

Presentation 2 – Sustainable Management for the Merced Subbasin Groundwater

Alyson Watson, Woodard & Curran, provided an overview of sustainable management criteria, what "sustainable yield" means, what an allocation framework is, what the allocation scheme for the Merced Subbasin is, how projects and management activities will provide additional water.

1. Question: How will the GSA handle groundwater users that can afford to pay and pump as much as they want to?

Answer: An allocation plan is being developed that will address this possibility.

2. Question: How does agricultural water get allocated based on acreage; won't that continue the shortages that we have had in the past?

Answer: The GSAs will be developing the allocation system in the first five years. The allocations will be based on the estimated sustainable yield of the basin. It is expected that some of the water could be traded in the future once a system is devised to be protective of the Subbasin.

3. Question: How will the allocation fee structure work for those that develop new water supplies or for those that decide they want to irrigate their land in the future?

Answer: Pumping fees collected could be used to enable development of new supplies.

4. Question: How do de minimus users get included in allocation framework? How do you figure out their allocation?

Answer: This is yet to be determined. GSAs can decide to include or exclude de minimus users from the allocation. GSAs cannot require monitoring of de minimus users.

5. Question: Community water systems may not be considered de minimus users, so how do they fit into the allocation framework?

Answer: They generally are considered overlying users and would get an allocation per acre.

6. Question: Will cities be allocated based on historical uses and not future projections?

Answer: Yes, and this is based on what is typically done for appropriative rights. The GSP team worked closely with the Coordinating Committee and Stakeholder Committee to look at several options for what historical period to use. There was only a small variation in amounts with different time periods. The current plan uses 1995 to 2015.

7. Question: How would City of Merced accommodate their planned growth and be allocated?

Answer: Reduce per capita use or find new sources of supply to meet increased demand.

8. Question: Where can we find a description of the possible projects?

Answer: The section of the GSP that includes the projects will be posted June 7. We'll post the draft project list on May 30.

9. Question: Where is the funding coming from?

Answer: Current work is funded from Proposition 1. There are some funds available for future projects from Proposition 68.

10. Question: Is there a specific timeline for projects or triggers for implementation (e.g. allocation not being met)?

Answer: At this point, the main management action is the allocation framework. Other projects have estimated timelines. Some are "more ready" (with timelines already), but implementation depends on funding. Projects that increase water supply would increase the allocations. The allocation will be phased in until 2040. As projects are implemented the allocations can be updated.

11. Question: Has there been discussion about replenishment beyond individuals to a regional basis?

Answer: The Coordinating Committee is applying for a long-term permit for stream diversion of flood flows. The permit would identify as many as possible diversion points along surface water conveyances so multiple landowners could opt to divert water to flood fields and manage recharge on a large scale. Currently, diversions are on an emergency basis and less reliable.

12. Question: Has the team or the GSAs talked to landowners about flooding for recharge purposes?

Answer: Merced Irrigation District (MID) has done some flood management and recharge activities on rice fields. MID holds a water right off of Mariposa Creek that is designated for El Nido. There is a project included in the Integrated Regional Water Management Plan to automate an existing check structure on Mariposa Creek to move floodwater safely.

13. Question: Will the fee structure be used to pay for projects?

Answer: Generally, the water users who benefit from a project will pay for the project.

14. Question: For groundwater levels (GWLs), with the minimum threshold set at 2015 levels, how many wells dewatered?

Answer: The minimum threshold for GWLs is set at the shallowest domestic well within a 2-mile radius. Only a small number of wells where GWLs historically appear to be below shallowest domestic well have the 2015 GWL used as the minimum threshold. We haven't specifically analyzed the number of domestic wells dewatered by minimum threshold selections, but we can develop that information.

15. Question: For SGMA, GSAs are supposed to look at the full range of water quality contaminants that could be affected by groundwater management (pumping). Is the GSP doing this for contaminants other than salinity?

Answer: There's a difference between monitoring and setting thresholds. Thresholds are set for salinity, which is the constituent where pumping could affect the movement of salinity. For other constituents, we don't have evidence that undesirable results are caused by pumping and will continue to monitor and review.

16. Comment: The GSAs should look at a number of constituents such as arsenic being released from the soil into the groundwater and monitor for more than salinity. Another Subbasin is looking at the percent change of the constituent as the minimum threshold rather than a set concentration of the contaminant.

17. Question: Are you working with other GSAs?

Answer: Both Woodard & Curran and Catalyst are working with several other Subbasins in different capacities (outreach, modeling only, full planning, etc.).

18. Question: Are GSAs talking about uniform formats for data?

Answer: Yes, we've developed a Data Management System specifically for the Merced Subbasin GSP. We'll tailor the DMS further to align with DWR standardized reporting when it is defined.

19. Question: Is data being coordinating throughout the Central Valley?

Answer: This would be the responsibility of the Department of Water Resources.