

MEETING NOTES – Merced GSP

SUBJECT: Merced GSP Coordination Committee Meeting

DATE/TIME: March 21, 2022, 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM

LOCATION: Hybrid meeting with physical location: County of Merced, Livingston Room, 2222 M Street, Merced, CA 95340 and on Zoom

Coordination Committee Members in Attendance:

	Representative	GSA
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Hicham ElTal	Merced Irrigation-Urban GSA
<input type="checkbox"/>	Stephanie Dietz	Merced Irrigation-Urban GSA
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Justin Vinson ¹	Merced Irrigation-Urban GSA
<input type="checkbox"/>	Daniel Chavez	Merced Irrigation-Urban GSA
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Ken Elwin (alternate)	Merced Irrigation-Urban GSA
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Eric Swenson	Merced Subbasin GSA
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Mike Gallo	Merced Subbasin GSA
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Nic Marchini	Merced Subbasin GSA
<input type="checkbox"/>	George Park (alternate)	Merced Subbasin GSA
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Kel Mitchel	Turner Island Water District GSA #1
<input type="checkbox"/>	Tim Allan (alternate)	Turner Island Water District GSA #1

1. Justin Vinson arrived at Item #6 below.

Meeting Notes

1. Call to Order and Welcome

- a. Jim Blanke (Woodard & Curran [W&C]) called the meeting to order at 10:10 am.

2. Roll Call

- a. Coordination Committee members in attendance are shown in table above. The Committee did not reach a quorum until later in the meeting, so approval of meeting minutes and Emergency Teleconference Findings were moved to later in the agenda.

3. Public Comment

- a. None received.

4. Reports

- a. GSA Reports
 - i. *Merced Subbasin GSA.* Lacey McBride reported updates to the land repurposing program (short-term with 3-5 year contracts) being planned for implementation

by the GSA. California Department of Conservation multi-benefit land repurposing grants are being pursued for later 10+ year projects. The GSA is also working on a Prop 218 proceeding may happen later in the summer to fund first phase of the two-phase approach. Workshops will be coming up in the next few weeks. A well consistency determination draft policy document has been made public (<https://mercedsubbasingsa.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/MSGSA-Well-Consistency-Policy-Public-Draft-Clean-v2-03.16.22.pdf>). Comments are due back by April 7.

- ii. *MIUGSA*. Matt Beaman shared that MIUGSA has been holding MIUGSA-specific Stakeholder Guidance Committee meetings (3 meetings in late 2021 and a 4th meeting in March 2022). Recommendations have come from that Committee on general implementation rules, policies, and guidelines for the GSA implementation, including addressing terms for allocations (recommended that the MIUGSA board allocate on a 3-year term of 1.1 AFY/ac average – water could be used any time within that 3-year period). The recommendation also included some options for pooling between common landowners, carryover, and potential trading. A report is being provided (in draft now), soon to be publicized.
 - 1. Q (Eric Swenson): What year will this allocation program be implemented?
A: If not 2022, then 2023.
 - 2. Q (Mike Gallo): How does an allocation work in a year where irrigation water allocation is 1.1 AF/ac? A: The grower has an option to use all or some of their allocated 3.3 AF of groundwater that they have available to them over the next 3 years. If they use all of that 3.3 AF, then they would not have the ability to pump groundwater for the next two years.
- iii. *TIWD GSA #1*. Kel Mitchel (TIWD-GSA#1) had no updates.
- b. Current Basin Conditions – no updates were generated for this meeting due timing and also the Annual Report presentation later in the agenda which includes a fall 2021 conditions update; a spring 2022 conditions updates is expected to be provided at a later Coordination Committee meeting.
- c. Report on plan(s) to address changes to the Merced County Groundwater Ordinance
 - i. Lacey McBride (MSGSA) provided an overview of the updated Groundwater Mining and Export ordinance approved by the Board of Supervisors Feb 8, 2022 but not in effect until May 1, 2022.
 - ii. Hicham ElTal (MIUGSA) shared some concerns from MIUGSA that most of the wells will be looked at as a project requiring a lead agency, e.g. for potential linkage to CEQA. He expressed that no individual GSA should not be considered the lead agency. MIUGSA’s approach has not been fully developed, but will make sure in response to the county on draft policy to make sure the lead agency issue is clear plus require certain well construction requirements, e.g. recommendation per MIUGSA Stakeholder Guidance Committee to install meters on new wells. The intention is that GSP policies will guide use of well(s) in the future.
 - 1. Stanislaus County for instance passed a Programmatic EIR as a potential option.



- iii. Kel Mitchell (ITWD GSA-#1) has the same major concern as MIUGSA about lead agency, e.g. high cost (money and time) of performing CEQA for each new well installation.
- iv. Lacey McBride (MSGSA) has had an ad-hoc meeting working on this and it's been discussed at public board meetings as well.
 - 1. The gist of the MSGSA policy is that it includes ways to find a consistency determination for replacement wells that are within the GSA and locating replacement wells on historical parcels served by original well. The MSGSA policy also includes a section for backup wells. It includes a section for wells that don't meet earlier criteria – then can go through a CEQA process to show the GSA that the proposed well doesn't have impacts. Purpose of the policy is to allow growers to maintain farming when needing to replace wells.
 - 2. For the Corcoran Clay, there's a section addressing this; if a well currently exists in both layers and needs to be replaced, it allows flexibility in replacing in one or the other principal aquifer (or otherwise install two separate wells, one per aquifer) in recognition of potential that in future, there could be limitations in Sub-Corcoran pumping.
 - 3. If landowner chose to do CEQA evaluation, landowner funds the work but the GSA would be the lead agency.
 - 4. Policy is intended to be a bridge to get the GSA to when an allocation program is in place for long-term SGMA implementation. MSGSA expects that allocation program to have CEQA requirements.
 - 5. Q: With exemption for replacement backup/replacement wells, will the GSA file the official exemption? A: Not determined yet, will be brought up with legal counsel.
 - 6. Q: What happens to portion of Chowchilla basin that falls within the Merced Subbasin but is in Merced County? A: Subject to the county ordinance – will have to have a consistency determination with application package submitted to Merced County.

5. Grants

- a. Round 1 SGM Implementation Planning and Projects Grant Update
 - i. Jim Blanke (W&C) described that the application was submitted and DWR has since shared that they do expect to fund the whole \$7.6 million requested.
- b. Prop 68 Round 3 Planning
 - i. Lacey McBride (MSGSA) shared that staff level conversations have been occurring on the second phase of the Data Gaps Plan to fund 2 shallow or 1 deep well plus some other activities to incorporate existing wells. Surrounding subbasins are also using Technical Support Services and the Merced GSAs would like to pursue this funding source as well. The GSAs have talked to the Stakeholder Advisory Committee as well as their Boards about potential additional wells. There's a running list of wells to be considered. Conversations are continuing.

- ii. Jim Blanke (W&C) shared that the Remote Sensing Decision Support Tool development is ongoing, largely based on what kind of data is available. Time has been spent looking for accurate and cost-effective data. OpenET has been the latest focus, but the data is not quite available yet, though a preliminary copy has been obtained for initial review.
 - iii. Q: What's the status of the new CIMIS station? A: MID needs to meet with landowner and coordinate an agreement. MID has met with DWR to identify several candidate locations for the station on the parcel. Unsure of online date.
 - iv. Q: What other remote sensing options have you looked into? A: Formation and LandIQ.
 - 1. TIWD GSA-1 has looked into LandIQ and found it to be more robust than OpenET. OpenET does not match up more with irrigation records.
 - v. Public Comment (Greg Young): "Just a note about OpenET...they have designed the platform to continue to refine and obtain more consistency between various remote sensing methods, which would get things closer to very specific analysis like LandIQ. This just may take time (a few years)."
- c. 2020 SGM Implementation Grant
- i. Matt Beaman (MID) shared the latest information on the two funded projects, both of which are in progress and on track (LGAWD Intertie and Recharge Project & El Nido Conveyance System Improvements).
 - 1. Q: When is LGAWD construction expected to finish? A: Nic Marchini shared that he thinks it may be completed in late 2023.
- d. SDAC Grant
- i. Matt Beaman (MID) provided an update on a 2019 grant agreement covering 3 projects serving underrepresented communities.
 - ii. Q: Over time, do recharge basins have diminishing returns for volume recharged? A: Depends basin to basin on soil type and how it's maintained. It's like a natural log where you might see a drop in effectiveness over the first 2-3 years, but then should remain more consistent.
 - 1. Under FLOOD-MAR, it is challenging when it comes to recharge basins because floodwater includes silt and other materials that can over time reduce recharge capability. But if you're taking (flood) water out of a reservoir, it's likely to be better quality.
 - iii. Q: When is Planada basin going into service? A: 2 sites with cone penetration tests found shallow clay, so moving to install dry wells at one site. Permitting is on schedule to be done over next 3-4 months and dry wells will be installed in summer 2022. Dry wells will be screened at 50 and 90-110 feet deep. Water is 190 feet deep. Water quality testing will be involved, as well as a settling tank.

6. State of Emergency Teleconference Findings

- a. Motioned by Nic Marchini and seconded by Hicham ElTal. Motion passed unanimously.

7. Approval of February 7, 2021 Meeting Minutes

- a. Motioned by Kel Mitchel and seconded by Hicham ElTal. Minutes were approved unanimously.

8. WY2021 Annual Report

- a. Chris Hewes (W&C) provided key highlights from the recently drafted WY 2021 Annual Report that will be submitted to DWR by April 1.
- b. Comment (Hicham ElTal): It would be interesting to look at change in storage per aquifer.

9. Comments on Groundwater Sustainability Plan by the Department of Water Resources

- a. Jim Blanke (W&C) provided an overview of the schedule for the response to comments from the DWR on the Merced GSP, as well as an overview of the comments. He also presented some information on the technical analysis for the groundwater levels sustainability indicator, including potential options being considered for updated minimum thresholds.
- b. Q: Did DWR also recommend looking at domestic wells? A: Yes, they noted the need to investigate domestic wells further to understand potential impacts.
- c. Comment (Hicham ElTal): Expressed support for Option 1 (2015 GWLs) with interim milestones because the basin may run into issues with regulatory agencies in the future for levels below 2015 (e.g. such as a mitigation requirement), even though this is a harder option to implement.
- d. Comment (Kel Mitchel): The GSAs need to consider balancing the need to be responsive to DWR's comment and reasoning for the comment against practicality – don't want to see the GSP do a hard pivot to a more restrictive threshold without careful consideration.
- e. Comment (Eric Swenson) Don't think MSGSA can meet the 2015 levels scenario.
- f. Q (Eric Swenson): Could the GSAs approach things differently within their regions? A from Hicham ElTal: Providing there can be a handshake in areas that influence MIUGSA, that's possible. Thinks 2015 levels are achievable if pumping reduces, but there are some areas that may need more careful attention.
 - i. Kel Mitchel cautioned that other GSPs had comments from DWR about differences in policies between GSAs in the same GSP. Need to consider that as a potential secondary issue to avoid.
- g. Eric Swenson proposed writing up an MT policy and discussing it in next 20 days to come to a consensus on minimum threshold approach, while W&C continues to develop the technical analysis to support. Hicham ElTal and Kel Mitchel supported the idea.
- h. The Committee agreed on the need to put together questions for DWR and meet with the agency soon.
 - i. Coordination Committee requested W&C to develop questions and send out for Coordination Committee review and input.
- i. Q (Kel Mitchel): If groundwater levels were to decline to minimum threshold for option 3, what would be the impact to domestic users? Even if not dewatering, are there electricity or pump-resetting issues? A: Dataset doesn't exist to answer all those questions, per Eric Swenson. Pump companies have that kind of data, but doesn't exist in the county dataset and isn't typically made available.

10. Next steps and adjourn

- a. Meeting adjourned 12:09 pm.



Next Regular Meeting
TBD, but expected to be April 25, 2022
Information also available online at mercedsgma.org