

# MEETING NOTES – Merced GSP

SUBJECT: Merced GSP Coordination Committee Meeting

DATE/TIME: November 29, 2023, 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM

LOCATION: Merced Irrigation District, Franklin Yard Facility, 3321 North Franklin Road, Merced, CA 95348 and online via Zoom

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## Coordination Committee Members in Attendance:

	Representative	GSA
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Hicham ElTal (remote)	Merced Irrigation-Urban GSA
<input type="checkbox"/>	Scott McBride	Merced Irrigation-Urban GSA
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Justin Vinson	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 checked="" type="checkbox"/>	George Park (alternate)	Merced Subbasin GSA
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Kel Mitchel (remote)	Turner Island Water District GSA #1
<input type="checkbox"/>	Tim Allan (alternate)	Turner Island Water District GSA #1

## Meeting Notes

### 1. Call to Order and Welcome

- a. Jim Blanke (W&C) called the meeting to order at 10:09 am.

### 2. Roll Call

- a. Coordination Committee members in attendance are shown in the table above. A quorum of members was not established.

### 3. Approval of Meeting Minutes

- a. Tabled to the next meeting due to not establishing a quorum of the Coordination Committee.
- b. No comments received on the two sets of meeting minutes for review.

### 4. Public Comment

- a. Joseph Gallagos (from Umida AG) – Presented a subsurface agriculture irrigation system product (Aquifer Pipe) that he said is able to reduce irrigation requirements. He indicated that Umida AG is starting to apply for grants to implement their product. His stated purpose of his public comment was to share with the GSAs that this exists and the grant

application activities are occurring, in case questions were to be routed directly or indirectly to GSA staff.

## 5. Reports

### a. GSA Reports

#### i. Merced Subbasin GSA (MSGSA) – Lacey McBride provided several updates:

1. Earlier in November, the GSA held presentations and a public workshop on the allocation development. A recording of the workshop from Nov 9 is posted on the Merced Subbasin GSA website.
2. In September, the GSA approved an update to the sustainability zone boundaries.
3. In October, the GSA determined a process where if an agricultural operation is bisected by the new sustainability zone boundaries, property owners can request to reclassify the parcel to be in one sustainability zone (with some limitations on size and timeline for making the request).
4. The GSA has made a request to all parties who provided water elevation data in the summer to provide updated fall monitoring data now ahead of the GSAs' preparation of the water year 2023 annual report.

#### ii. Merced Irrigation-Urban GSA (MIUGSA); Matt Beaman provided several updates:

1. Since the 9/18 CC meeting, the MIUGSA board has adopted the rules/regulations and governing plan. The rules go through how groundwater is allocated and managed at the account level and what opportunities there are to move water between groundwater accounts. This is the culmination of a 2.5 year effort.
2. MIUGSA continues to make progress on registering wells as part of the well registration policy discussed previously.
3. Potential edits to the Groundwater Export Ordinance have been discussed recently among staff; the current ordinance prohibits groundwater from leaving the basin it's in, but can leave Merced County if the basin crosses county lines. The proposed amendment would give GSAs ability to allow an export between subbasins (primarily within the County, unless the basin already crosses county lines) if the GSA for export origination and GSA who is receiving agree the transfer is in compliance with SGMA.
  - a. Matt shared that MIUGSA thinks that proposed ordinance edits might be missing some important components or be inconsistent with other laws/ordinances (e.g., compliance with other state or federal laws like CEQA).
  - b. Hicham EITal (MIUGSA): When the original ordinance was first adopted years ago, certain board members were very active in trying to find a solution for challenges faced at the time with groundwater export. Concerned about moving backwards; don't want to accidentally create a market for water exports. MID can and does export water in an official agency capacity and wouldn't need to go through a third party. If the ordinance is going to be changed, it needs to be studied thoroughly to make sure sustainability of the basin is not impacted and a market isn't created to remove water from the basin.
  - c. Q (George Park): who's proposing this change and why the rush?  
A (Lacey McBride): The change is coming from the County Board of Supervisors who directed staff to work with stakeholders throughout Merced County. In outreach, staff have included

stakeholders from all four subbasins, all GSAs, and multiple Water Districts. Meetings have been held over the last year.

- i. Matt Beaman (MIUGSA): Meetings have been held since February 2023; MIUGSA has been the only agency pushing back at the proposed changes.
  - d. Public Q (Natie, Leadership Counsel): Is this a new ordinance or update of existing? Is there public access to the proposed edits? A (Lacey McBride): This is the existing Merced County Groundwater Mining and Export Ordinance. There is a draft redline of the proposed changes available online on Merced County Board of Supervisors Agenda Center for 11/28/2023.
  - e. Q (George Park): What wells are you requesting growers to register? A (Matt Beaman): All new drilled wells have to register. Agricultural wells serving over 10 acres had to register by 4/1/23. Agricultural wells serving less than 10 acres have a 1/1/24 deadline for registration. Deadline for private commercial/industrial is 6/30/24. All domestic wells must register by 12/31/24.
  - f. Q (George Park): Do registration requirements apply to any drilled hole, regardless if there's a pump currently in place? A (Matt Beaman): If you think you're going to operate the well in the future, you should register it now.
- iii. Turner Island Water District GSA-#1 (TIWD GSA-#1): Kel Mitchel provided this update:
    1. The GSA has been working over the last month or two to reframe the water budget for the District and the GSA, leading to tracking/allocation of water usage. Over the next 6-12 months, they plan to have developed a framework to build an allocation upon for use within the GSA.
- b. Current Basin Conditions
    - i. Matt Beaman (MIUGSA) presented a subset of slides from a longer report that contains overview information as well as hydrographs for each individual wells.
      1. Generally seeing increases in groundwater levels over the last year.
      2. About 60 sites are being monitored on a monthly basis. It's been good to have more data, but analysis has been challenging. Will be looking at the necessity of continuing the monthly well sampling frequency.
      3. Comment (Public): It would be helpful to see on the hydrographs where the bottom of the Corcoran Clay is (for subsidence monitoring purposes).
      4. Q (Nic Marchini): Overall was it good since last year? A (Matt Beaman): Yes overall! Below Corcoran in the El Nido area in particular has seen surprisingly strong level increases, potentially because of MID water transfers.
    - ii. The full set of slides were uploaded to MercedSGMA.org.

## **6. Consideration of Updates to Sustainable Management Criteria (SMC)**

- a. Jim Blanke (Woodard & Curran) walked the group through different sustainability indicators and considerations for updates to the SMC.
- b. Reduction of groundwater storage
  - i. Eric Swenson (MSGSA): GSP definition of storage includes TDS defined with a fairly high concentration which is too salty to be utilized for agriculture. That's why there aren't wells deeper than approximately 1,200 feet. More typical is 600-

800 ppm. One thing to look at might be: what is the storage volume with TDS of 1000 ppm or lower, rather than 2000 ppm.

1. Hicham ElTal (MIUGSA): Would rather not mix storage with water quality. Some crops can take higher TDS than others. There's a separate indicator for water quality. Hicham generally supports using groundwater levels as a proxy though.
  2. Eric agreed with using groundwater levels as a proxy.
  - ii. Q (Nic Marchini): Would thresholds for storage be different by principal aquifer?  
A (Jim Blanke): We would need to show groundwater levels are connected to storage and likely it would just be connected to the single groundwater level SMC (not specific to principal aquifers), but need to evaluate options to be sure.
- c. Degraded water quality
- i. Eric Swenson (MSGSA): Nitrate and arsenic are two constituents that are heavily tested and there's a database for this already.
  - ii. Hicham ElTal (MIUGSA): Water quality is going to take a long time to figure out how we're going to use the authority of a GSA. Water quality issues can be very small in scale (e.g., well by well) and less often a large regional issue that is more suited to the GSAs. Several other agencies are more involved in this. It will take time to figure out how the GSP is going to address this in a meaningful way.
  - iii. Ken Elwin (MIUGSA): How do you control high constituent concentrations where they occur in small, local areas beyond the control of the GSAs? Not sure how the GSAs can really control for this.
- d. Chronic lowering of groundwater levels (monitoring network and establishing SMC at new sites)
- i. Eric Swenson (MSGSA): The other source for potential data in a linear regression analysis/extrapolation are the well pump companies. They typically measure static water elevations in wells when pulling pumps. A large owner might have some historical data to see how well the regression fits historical data.
  - ii. Hicham ElTal (MIUGSA): The way the well was made could influence trends observed in the linear regression (e.g., 1950s drilled well vs more recently installed wells). Might want to take into account cable tool vs gravel pack wells in the regression.

## 7. Next steps and adjourn

- a. Meeting adjourned at 11:17 am.

### **Next Regular Meeting January 24, 2024 at 10am**

Meeting to be conducted as an in-person meeting with remote option (subject to change)

Information also available online at [mercedsgma.org](https://mercedsgma.org)