

MEETING NOTES – Merced GSP

SUBJECT: Merced GSP Coordination Committee Meeting

DATE/TIME: January 24, 2024, 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

Coordination Committee Members in Attendance:

	Representative	GSA
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Hicham ElTal	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	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 10:03 am.

2. Roll Call

- a. Coordination Committee members in attendance are shown in the table above.
- b. Kel Mitchel (TIWD GSA-#1) requested that Tim Allan be removed as alternate from the Coordination Committee as Mr. Allan no longer sits on the TIWD GSA #1 Board.

3. Approval of Meeting Minutes

- a. No comments on the three sets of meeting minutes
- b. Approval of the minutes was received unanimously.

4. Public Comment

- a. George Park clarified that he was attending the meeting as a member of the public, not participating as an MSGSA board member or as an MSGSA alternate.

5. 2024 Rural Communities Water Managers Leadership Institute Introduction (Self-Help Enterprises)

- a. Sue Ruiz (Self-Help Enterprises, SHE) provided an introduction to the 2024 Rural Communities Water Managers Leadership Institute and this year's particular focus on bringing in members of the north part of the region including Merced.
- b. Agencies and community members can apply to participate (at no cost) online at <https://bit.ly/SHELeadershipInstitute>
- c. Q (Lacey McBride, MSGSA): How are you looking to identify community members for this year's program participation? A: Many times SHE is attending public meetings like this to cast a wide net, but have generally found that word of mouth has been most effective. SHE is asking Coordination Committee members to reach out to their contacts to spread the word about this program.
- d. Comment (Nic Marchini, MSGSA): SHE has done a lot for Planada and Le Grand which is much appreciated. Nic thinks there's more room to continue to grow leadership in Planada.

6. Reports

a. GSA Reports

- i. Merced Subbasin GSA (MSGSA) – Lacey McBride provided several updates:
 - 1. The MSGSA continues to work on the allocation policy and plans to release a policy statement on values in the coming weeks (on schedule) for public comment.
 - 2. Multi-benefit land repurposing grant (\$8.9M grant awarded last summer) – in February, the GSA is going to evaluate releasing an RFP to select a firm/team to develop the plan, implement projects, perform outreach, and conduct monitoring (in addition to working with partners already identified).
- ii. Merced Irrigation-Urban GSA (MIUGSA) - Matt Beaman provided several updates:
 - 1. MIUGSA has been focused on the well registration policy because it feeds into groundwater accounts which benefits monitoring and tracking of the allocation MIUGSA has adopted.
 - 2. MIUGSA sent out a formal reminder in early December about the Dec 15 deadline to register wells of a certain size before a penalty is assessed. This resulted in ~800 additional wells registered.
 - 3. The MIUGSA Board took a recent action to provide some flexibility for staff to void penalty invoices if well owners register late by Jan 31.
 - 4. MIUGSA continues to manage several grant-funded projects, including some older projects that are wrapping up.
 - a. Some remaining funding that's expiring soon may be used to purchase additional well transducers.
 - b. Currently working with 8 different agency points of contacts through some logistical challenges around reimbursement of regular invoices. Matt stressed how important it is for all participants to follow the State invoicing guidelines so that everyone can be reimbursed on time because it's evaluated in bulk, not on an individual project basis.
 - c. Most recent grant award for La Paloma MWC projects is undergoing grant agreement discussions with DWR.
 - 5. Hicham ElTal (MIUGSA): Yesterday, MID met with the SWRCB Director of the Water Rights Division to talk about MID's FloodMAR application. Topics of discussion included a water availability analysis and a state request to reduce the application volumetric amount requested.

- a. The State has received a similar application from Turlock. During the last ACWA conference, Merced + Turlock discussed combining efforts.
 - b. Upcoming activities include updating the water availability analysis and holding ongoing discussions with SWRCB about maximizing the appropriation in the license application.
 - c. Q (Brad Samuelson): Previously discussed legislation to codify some of these concerns – what’s the latest? A (Hicham ElTal): No major progress has been made, particularly due to a lot of other activities happening in the region and at the SWRCB level. It’s still on the table as a future path to pursue.
 - d. Q (Nic Marchini, MSGSA): What are your thoughts about joining with Turlock Irrigation District (TID)? A (Hicham ElTal): Would like to go to Sacramento with TID to coordinate on the request.
 - e. Q (Eric Swenson, MSGSA): Did SWRCB give a timeline for this process? A (Hicham ElTal): No timeline was provided. The main focus of discussions has been on overall concepts and Hicham anticipates it being a long process.
 - f. Q (Brad Samuelson): Has the MIUGSA used well data (as part of the registration process) to define the Corcoran Clay and prepare allocations for above vs below? A (Matt Beaman): The allocation is agnostic to the Corcoran. As part of the well registration, MIUGSA did ask about well perforation depths. Some well owners have that information but others don’t.
 - g. Q (Eric Swenson, MSGSA): Heard that a particular 20-30 acre grower who had an ideal site for locating a CIMIS station was approached by MID but was hesitant to participate because MID wouldn’t guarantee irrigation deliveries in dry times. Can you comment? A (Hicham ElTal): Plans to approach the Board to discuss this in more detail. Hicham is the lead for further discussions on the CIMIS station topic.
- iii. Turner Island Water District GSA-#1 (TIWD GSA-#1): Kel Mitchel provided this update:
- 1. No significant updates since the previous November 2023 Coordination Committee meeting. Discussions about allocation are ongoing.
 - 2. Kel seconds Matt’s earlier comments about the coordination on reimbursements for the grant-funded projects. The grant amount for TIWD’s projects is approximately equal to their annual operating revenue which has made underwriting the grant project difficult.
- 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 well.
 - 1. The Jefferson Rd well site (installed 2020 or 2021) has had some recent cellular reception issues so MIUGSA has been out to the site to replace equipment and try a new vendor.
 - 2. Michael Rd was added in 2022 and has been measured for the last year. It should be instrumented soon to collect more frequent measurements.
 - 3. Northwest of Lake Yosemite (North of City of Merced) there is an existing MID well that will be instrumented soon based on GSA + grant funding.

4. Another grant will be used to install 4-5 monitoring wells which do not yet have proposed locations. The grant agreement expiration is quickly approaching.
 - a. Q (Nic Marchini, MSGSA): Generally where are wells needed? A (Matt Beaman): MSGSA did a recent analysis that identified the southwest of the Subbasin as being an ongoing data gap.
 - i. Nic identified a ranch in the area that could be a potential location.
 - b. Comment (Eric Swenson, MSGSA): The MSGSA has a data gaps plan with a schedule that will lead to budgets for spending. Eric thinks a basin-wide plan, schedule, and budget is necessary to coordinate overall. The grant is not going to cover all the basin data gaps.
 - c. Matt Beaman (MIUGSA): Emphasized that the grant schedule is very tight and whatever approach the GSAs take, there needs to be some immediate near-term actions.
5. There have been spotty measurements due to oil at certain existing wells; Matt will be looking at what it would cost to resolve these issues.
6. Quality Well Drillers was recently hired to collect well measurements.
7. Matt would like to put together an operational data management system with ability to perform QA/QC in addition to reporting.
8. Comment (George Park): Lone Tree can provide additional data to collaborate with the contractor measurements collected at a subset of Lone Tree wells.
 - ii. The full set of slides were uploaded to MercedSGMA.org.

7. Discussion about 1/23/24 Merced County Board of Supervisors Meeting Considering Amendment to Merced County's Groundwater Ordinance Export Policy

- a. Lacey McBride (MSGSA): The amendment would require the GSA in the originating basin and GSA in the receiving basin to provide a sustainability determination report on all exports. Right now the GSAs make the sustainability determination for new well installs, but it's specific to the GSP.
 - i. Yesterday, the Board tabled the decision for one year unless the GSPs in Chowchilla, Delta-Mendota, Turlock are all approved earlier. In the meantime, the extension gives the GSAs time to prepare for a future policy change.
- b. Q (Hicham ElTal): To move this forward, Hicham suggests Merced Subbasin (likely to be the originating basin for most future exports) should have a consistent agreement amongst the subbasin GSAs about natural groundwater (not banked or other), e.g. limit the volume of future exports to no more than the natural yield of groundwater.
 - i. Eric Swenson (MSGSA): The natural/sustainable yield could change through time. Might be better to limit the quantity to a shorter time period that has to be refreshed through time.
- c. Q (Jim Blanke): Would the CC like to include exports in the GSP update?
 - i. Eric Swenson (MSGSA): Once the amendment is on track with the Board of Supervisors, an email should go out to the CC so they can collectively decide on a response to the final version being proposed.

- ii. Hicham ElTal (MIUGSA): Suggests reviewing and considering this sooner than later. Doesn't see a need to bring this into the GSP.
- d. Comment (Nic Marchini, MSGSA): Generally supports Hicham's proposed policy about the limitation related to sustainable yield. Agrees with wanting to make a decision on this sooner than later.
- e. Lacey McBride (MSGSA): Ordinance defines groundwater as anything pumped from the ground. In the past, when exporters mentioned a groundwater bank, then the County requires proof that it's not "groundwater".
- f. Kel Mitchell (TIWDGSA-#1): Agrees with Hicham, but wants to keep it as simple as possible (e.g., avoid additional documents with different definitions than GSP).
 - i. Hicham ElTal (MIUGSA): Let's pull out the proposed amendment language for the next CC meeting and compare it to the GSP definitions/policies.

8. Inelastic Land Subsidence Discussion

- a. Jim Blanke (Woodard & Curran) provided an update on current/recent conditions of subsidence as well as a the recommended corrective actions provided by DWR and some potential approaches to respond.
- b. Comment (Hicham ElTal, MIUGSA): Clarified that the uncertainty in each individual subsidence measurement value is +/- 0.08 ft.
- c. Comment (George Park): Clarified that one or more recent subsidence monitoring points saw an increase in elevation so it's not necessarily considered "inelastic" per the title of this agenda item.
- d. Q (Hicham ElTal): What's the depth of the groundwater in the Lone Tree MWC area? A (George Park): about 100 feet below ground surface in winter.
- e. Art Machado (Woodard & Curran) provided an overview of the different approaches to subsidence SMC that have been taken in the Westside Subbasin and Kings Basin.
- f. Jim Blanke (Woodard & Curran) reviewed some additional considerations for the GSAs to respond to the recommended corrective actions.
 - i. Hicham ElTal (MIUGSA):
 1. Reclamation has performed a lot of modeling of the impacts on the Eastside Bypass and San Joaquin River; can't think of anything else or other groups to reach out to.
 2. Should continue to emphasize residual nature of subsidence and that subsidence is largely impacted by actions outside the Subbasin.
 3. Potentially consider non-regulatory thresholds that are used for local management.
 - ii. Eric Swenson (MSGSA) was encouraged how rapidly subsidence abated during the wet winter of early 2023. There may need to be a better understanding of what happened – was that due to shallow soil swelling that masked the deeper mechanisms? Have heard about USGS work to look at subsidence rates at different depths.
 - iii. Hicham ElTal (MIUGSA): consider comparing Merced-specific subsidence values compared to the focal point of subsidence to the south the Subbasin and use some percentage comparison.

9. Minimum Data Standards for Groundwater Levels

- a. Tabled for a future meeting due to lack of time.
- b. Lacey McBride (MSGSA) provided a brief summary of this point in anticipation of discussing it in more detail at a future meeting. The MSGSA has been collecting local data to fill some data gaps (measurements growers take manually). Many have been rejected from being included in the annual reports. Would like to consider a short-term exception to find a way to incorporate this information.

10. Next steps and adjourn

- a. Meeting adjourned at 12:05 pm.

Next Regular Meeting

March 20, 2024 at 1:30 pm

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

Information also available online at mercedsgma.org