

MEETING NOTES – Merced GSP

SUBJECT: Merced GSP Coordination & Stakeholder Advisory Committees Joint Meeting

DATE/TIME: August 18, 2025, 10 AM to 12 PM

LOCATION: Hybrid meeting with physical location at Merced County Farm Bureau conference room, 646 State Hwy 59, Merced, CA 95341 and online via Zoom

Coordination Committee Members in Attendance:

	Representative	GSA
☒	Bryan Kelly	Merced Irrigation-Urban GSA
☐	Scott McBride	Merced Irrigation-Urban GSA
☒	Justin Vinson	Merced Irrigation-Urban GSA
☐	Frank Verduzco	Merced Irrigation-Urban GSA
☒	Ken Elwin (alternate)	Merced Irrigation-Urban GSA
☒	Bob Kelley	Merced Subbasin GSA
☐	Gino Pedretti (alternate)	Merced Subbasin GSA
☐	Mike Gallo	Merced Subbasin GSA
☒	Nic Marchini	Merced Subbasin GSA
☒	George Park (alternate)	Merced Subbasin GSA
☒	Chase Hurley	Turner Island Water District GSA #1
☒	Justin Darnell (alternate)	Turner Island Water District GSA #1

Stakeholder Committee Members in Attendance:

	Representative	Community Aspect Representation
☒	Alvaro Arias	UC Merced
☒	Arlan Thomas	MIDAC member
☒	Bill Eisenstein	River Partners
☒	Breanne Vandenberg	MCFB
☐	Caitie Diemel	ESJWQC
☐	Craig Arnold	Arnold Farms
☒	Daniel Melendrez	City of Merced
☒	Danielle Serrano	Serrano Farms - Le Grand
☐	David Belt	Foster Farms
☐	Eddie Rojas	E&J Gallo Winery
☐	Emma Reyes	Martin Reyes Farm/Land Leveling
☐	Jean Okuye	E Merced RCD
☐	Joe Sansoni	Sansoni Farms/MCFB
☐	Joe Scoto	Scoto Brothers/McSwain School Dist.
☐	Lisa Baker	Clayton Water District
☐	Lisa Kayser-Grant	Sierra Club
☒	Maxwell Norton	Unincorporated area

☒	Nav Athwal	TriNut Farms
☒	Simon Vander Woude	Sandy Mush MWC
☒	Susan Walsh	City of Merced
☒	Thomas Dinwoodie	Master Gardener/McSwain
☒	Trevor Hutton	Valley Land Alliance
☐	Wes Myers	Merced Grassland Coalition
☐	Zachary Hamman	Cal Am Water
☐	Phillip Woods (alternate)	UC Merced
☐	Ben Migliazzo (alternate)	Live Oak Farms
☐	Blake Nervino (alternate)	Stevinson/Merquin
☒	Scott Menefee (alternate)	Clayton Water District
☐	Bill Spriggs (alternate)	Resident City of Merced
☐	Lou Myers (alternate)	Benjamin Land LP

Meeting Notes

1. Call to Order and Welcome

- a. Charles Gardiner (Catalyst) called the meeting to order at 10:13 am.

2. Roll Call

- a. Coordination Committee members in attendance are shown in the table above.
- b. Stakeholder Advisory Committee members in attendance are shown in the table above.

3. Approval of Coordination Committee Meeting Minutes

- a. Meeting minutes approved unanimously.

4. Public Comment

- a. Comment: I was reviewing the 2025 Annual Report and was comparing change in storage across previous calendar years. I noticed that there were large overdrafts between 2019-2022 due to drought conditions, followed by a large rebound in 2023 due to wet conditions. However, despite being relatively wet, 2024 only had an approximately 2,500 AF positive change in storage. This seems very modest and more effort should be directed towards capturing and storing more water in wet years.

5. Reports

- a. GSA Reports
 - i. Merced Subbasin GSA (MSGSA) – Lacey McBride provided several updates:
 1. MSGSA adopted final sections of its Groundwater Allocation Rule on June 4, 2025. It had previously adopted an initial Groundwater Allocation Rule in October 2024.
 - a. The Final Groundwater Allocation Rule becomes effective Jan 2026.
 2. Landowners have until October 2025 to opt in contiguous parcels that are currently not irrigated.
 3. MSGSA mailed out PIN numbers for landowners to claim their accounts on the affiliated online platform.

- a. MSGSA sent out an example usage statement for 2024 that includes both groundwater and surface water usage and demonstrates how the usage would have fared under the allocation rule
4. MSGSA will mail out 2025 usage statements out in November 2025.
 - a. Statement will contain a comparison of actual usage vs allocation rule volumes.
5. MSGSA updated its GSP Consistency Criteria for Well Construction Applications - Rule 1 to account for the allocation rule implementation.
 - a. New requirements placed on replacement wells.
 - b. New wells can only be drilled if usage will comply with allocation rule.
6. Q: How will usage be determined by the GSAs?
 - a. A (Lacey McBride, MSGSA): The GSAs will use satellite imagery of evapotranspiration, known as Open ET.
7. Q: what percentage of irrigated land is signed up
 - a. A (Lacey McBride, MSGSA): Over 50% of irrigated land is enrolled, but many small growers are not signed up. A second letter was sent to unsigned parcels in May.
8. Q: Will Open ET be used for the allocation system?
 - a. A (Lacey McBride, MSGSA): Yes, it is what the entire Merced Subbasin will use in 2026. Additionally, Open ET will not be broken down between surface water and groundwater usage in 2025. However, beginning in 2026 it will delineate the two types of water supply.
 - i. Q: How will surface water usage be tracked?
 1. A (Lacey McBride, MSGSA): Farmers will indicate the volume of surface water utilized on the Alternative Sources of Water form that is to be submitted by end of each year (after the growing season).
 - ii. Q: Is precipitation removed from the surface water usage?
 1. A (Lacey McBride, MSGSA): Yes, precipitation is measured via a gauge at the Merced airport and is subtracted from surface water usage.
 - iii. Q: Are animal usage facilities GIS outlines due at a certain date?
 1. A (Lacey McBride, MSGSA): The allocation rule does not have a deadline attached, but MSGSA is hoping to get this settled by end of 2025.
 - a. Dairy farm water consumption under the allocation cites a white paper that includes the industry accepted consumption volume. However, an equivalent industry standard does not exist for poultry or other livestock facilities and will be considered on a case-by-case basis.
 - ii. Merced Irrigation-Urban GSA (MIUGSA) - Matt Beaman provided these updates:

1. MIUGSA's first groundwater account statements were sent out in August 2024. At the end of 2024, MIUGSA also sent out additional invoices with mock penalties for excessive usage.
 - a. MIUGSA has worked through the spring and summer to address the 400 account contacts in its system and sought to provide additional information about its groundwater accounting platform.
 - b. Additionally, groundwater users that receive notices on the MSGSA website are now also able to see MIUGSA groundwater accounting information.
 2. MIUGSA is performing meter reading on wells in its service area. It is currently monitoring at a rate of approximately 160 wells per month.
 3. MIUGSA is planning to deliver 2025 groundwater account statements to all agricultural groundwater users by the end of August 2025.
 4. MIUGSA is continuing to make progress in filling its data gaps by installing telemetry equipment at its monitoring wells.
 - a. Additionally, MID secured grant funding to put flow meters on wells in their service area. The grant will pay for the purchase of the equipment, but installation will come at the landowner's expense.
- iii. Turner Island Water District GSA-#1 (TIWD GSA-#1): Chase Hurley provided several updates:
1. TIWD GSA-#1 is continuing to focus on maximizing alternative water sources, including recirculated drainage water from neighboring irrigated water suppliers.
 2. TIWD GSA-#1 recently drilled two new shallow wells that are anticipated to be operational by November 1, 2025. These new shallow wells will reduce pumping from the deep aquifer.
 3. TIWD GSA-#1 will also implement rotational fallowing in winter to avoid overpumping and subsidence.
 4. TIWD GSA-#1 is also planning to make improvements to its main canal system to enhance water quality standards and improve delivery to customer headgates. Additionally, a small regulating reservoir will also be installed.
 - a. It is anticipated that this project will go to bid on October 1, 2025 and may be completed by end of year.
 5. TIWD GSA-#1 has been holding internal discussions to determine if it will need to implement an allocation rule and hypothesizing what the potential rule would look like.
- b. Current Basin Conditions
- i. Matt Beaman (MIUGSA) provided an overview of current basin conditions through hydrographs at monitoring wells.
 1. Q: Many of the wells from in the presentation do not have minimum thresholds (MTs) included in their hydrographs. Do these wells not have MTs? If so, how are MTs determined?
 - a. A (Jim Blanke, Woodard & Curran): The recent GSP update changed the process for developing MTs as we collect more data in the Subbasin. Therefore, the timeline for developing MTs can vary from well to well and based on hydrologic conditions.

Eventually, the GSAs would like to see consistency in MTs across the Subbasin.

2. Q: If Caltrans wants to destroy a well, who is responsible?
 - a. A (Matt Beaman, MIUGSA): Caltrans would be responsible, not the GSAs.

6. GSP Plan Manager Update

- a. Jim Blanke (Woodard & Curran) provided an update on selecting a new GSP Plan Manager after the retirement of Hicham ElTal from MID/MIUGSA.
 - i. Discussion: Who should replace Hicham as GSP Plan Manager?
 1. Q: Have any of the GSAs discussed this internally?
 - a. A (Matt Beaman, MIUGSA): MIUGSA has historically held this role and is willing to continue for consistency.
 - b. There was general agreement in the audience supporting MIUGSA maintaining the role of GSP Plan Manager and appointing one of its staff members.

7. Domestic Well Mitigation Program Development Update

- a. Jim Blanke (Woodard & Curran) introduced DWR expectations for GSAs undertaking domestic well mitigation programming.
 - i. Ideally, a domestic well mitigation program would be developed and implemented before overdraft impacts are observed in domestic wells.
 - ii. These programs are currently advancing under DWR guidance and seeking to balance water supplies and costs associated with the program.
 - iii. Q: Valley Water Collaborative has been sending flyers throughout the county, are GSAs paying into their mitigation program?
 1. A: This is mostly for nitrate mitigation programming under which growers pay to participate, not the GSAs.
 - iv. Comment: I've observed my neighbor's domestic well mitigation water deliveries and seen how difficult it can be because they do not give advance notice of delivery and once the water is unloaded it cannot be reloaded, even in systems with RO systems. I'm worried this will lead to excessive costs.
 - v. Overview of Self-Help Enterprises services:
 1. There are currently 43 sites where Self-Help Enterprises is providing emergency water service due to either domestic wells running dry or due to water quality concerns.
 2. Q: How long can you be on the well mitigation program? Is the next step to provide resources to drill a new well?
 - a. A: The initial response is to deliver 5-gallon jugs of water within 24 hours, potentially install a water tank within 72 hours, and, if necessary, drill a new domestic well.
 - i. Currently, the outlook is approximately two and half years for installing new wells. This is primarily due to slow disbursement of state funds.
 - ii. There are income eligibility criteria that program participants must meet, and water can only be used for domestic purposes.
 3. Comment: In eastern Merced County, the timeline for drilling new domestic wells is approximately one year.
 - vi. Domestic Well Inventory Summary

1. It is difficult to gauge potential impacts of GSA activities on domestic and public water supply (PWS) wells in the Subbasin because no fully comprehensive data set for domestic wells exists.
 2. Currently the GSAs rely on Merced County well drilling permit records and DWR's Online System for Well Completion Reports (OSWCR).
 - a. Merced County data goes back to the 1990s and state data goes back to the 1950s.
 - b. However, OSWCR well locations are less refined (i.e., one-mile radius of well site) compared with the precise coordinates included in the Merced permitting database.
 3. The Subbasin received IRWM funding to perform a Domestic Well Inventory Summary
 - a. The initial task helped refine the location of about 30 domestic and PWS wells. Next, the team pivoted to a technically intensive approach to further define well locations. This ultimately improved the locations of approximately 300 wells. Finally, a manual review of well completion reports resulted in the further refinement of 4,000 well locations. Additionally, this step also revealed some construction information and improved the location of some agricultural wells.
- vii. Chowchilla Domestic Well Mitigation policy
1. Eligible participants include domestic wells impacted by the PMAs of the Revised GSP for the Chowchilla Subbasin. Currently, there is a maximum award limit of \$30,000, but exceptions can be made on a case-by-case basis. To date, 9 wells have been funded through this program.
- viii. Delta-Mendota Domestic Well Mitigation policy
1. The Delta-Mendota Subbasin employs a similar approach to the Chowchilla Subbasin. However, there is a greater risk of water quality impacts rather than wells going dry. Therefore, Delta-Mendota response actions may differ slightly.
- ix. The Draft Merced Domestic Well Mitigation policy will likely be very similar to previous two examples.
1. The program implementation structure includes the Coordination Committee, GSA staff, and support entities such as dedicated Domestic Well Mitigation staff members, technical consultants, and other contractors (i.e., drillers).
 2. A decision tree flowchart for the draft Merced Domestic Well Mitigation policy was presented to demonstrate the process for determining eligibility for participation in the program.
 - a. In the case of a domestic well being impacted, the landowner shall contact the support entity to initially secure a delivery of emergency water. Next, staff will take steps to determine if the well meets the eligibility requirement for further action. If so, a determination if the well was impacted by GSA activity must occur, followed by a written determination of need for mitigation measures. Finally, mitigation measures will be implemented including up to the installation of a replacement well.
- b. Discussion Questions:
- i. Q (Charles Gardiner, Catalyst): Should the program mitigate multiuse wells that serve non-domestic purposes?

1. Q: What about wells that both irrigate and serve domestic purposes?
 - a. How do we determine what acreage is appropriate for domestic well production? Is the irrigation of some landscaping or horse pasture considered domestic?
2. Comment: This program should address domestic wells only, not multiuse wells. If someone wants to irrigate with their domestic well and it runs dry, that is not the GSAs issue.
 - a. Comment: We can address multiuse wells as we encounter them on a case-by-case basis.
- ii. Q (Charles Gardiner, Catalyst): Should the program mitigate domestic wells that are non de minimis?
 1. Comment: Without a cap (both volumetric and financial) then people will seek to get larger replacement wells out of the program and the GSAs should not pay for it. They could put a tank in instead. Potential caps could be:
 - a. 2 AF de minimis.
 - b. \$30,000 limit with exceptions on a case-by-case basis (as seen in the Chowchilla Subbasin).
 2. Comment: We should only be paying to replace domestic service and nothing more.
 - a. In the Chowchilla Subbasin, the focus is on houses going dry and does not even consider small amounts of irrigation (e.g., small horse pasture).
- iii. Q (Charles Gardiner, Catalyst): Should there be a financial cap on any well mitigation measures?
 1. Comment: Yes, \$30,000 (with exceptions on case-by-case basis).
- iv. Q (Charles Gardiner, Catalyst): Should the program reimburse applicants who have already replaced a domestic well dry prior to September 2025?
 1. Comment: No, that would be before the program existed.
 - a. Comment: However, we could have public and state perspective issues in this matter.
 - i. Comment (Jim Blanke, Woodard & Curran): That is the lingering issue with an inherited condition where we knew groundwater levels would go down.
 - b. Q: How do we mitigate potential risk?
 - i. A; Funding should be set aside for the next round of well-mitigation.
- v. Q (Charles Gardiner, Catalyst): Should the program offer the option to reimburse an eligible applicant who wants to manage the replacement of their own well?
 1. Comment: If you can move faster than the speed of the GSAs maybe you should be eligible to be paid back the reimbursable cap of \$30,000.
 - a. Comment: However, we need to implement limits and establish a policy requirement to prove the root cause of the mitigation implementation.
 - b. Comment: Who certifies that the well went dry because of GSA activities? If it is our pumping contractors or drillers then there is a worry about falsification for reimbursement.
- vi. Q (Charles Gardiner, Catalyst): How do we want to determine programmatic caps (i.e., Chowchilla put cap due to involvement with Water Board)?

1. Comment: We want to avoid the state looking at the Subbasin, even if mitigation costs are high.
2. Comment: How do we address competing domestic wells in neighborhoods? As new homes are built with deeper wells than older homes, wells at older properties could start to go dry. Additionally, this would not be due to GSA activities.
 - a. Q: Are the GSAs responsible for extremely shallow wells (e.g., 20 ft) running dry?
 - i. A: No, only wells running dry due to GSA activities are included in the mitigation program.

8. Allocation Program Policies Coordination

- a. Lacey McBride (MSGSA) provided an update that GSAs have committees working on the interbasin coordination of allocation program policy in regard to parcels bordering GSA jurisdictions.

9. Department of Water Resources Subsidence Best Management Practices

- a. Jim Blanke (Woodard & Curran) introduced and highlighted elements of DWR's Draft Subsidence BMP report.
- b. Comment: Public comments on the BMP report are due by September 22, 2025.
 - i. Q (Charles Gardiner, Catalyst): Would the Coordination Committee want to submit a collective comment?
 1. A (Jim Blanke, Woodard & Curran): Groundwater Resources Association (GRA) and other advocacy groups are preparing substantial comment letters to submit to state.
- c. Comment: SGMA only defined damage caused by subsidence as an undesirable outcome, not subsidence itself.
 - i. A (Jim Blanke, Woodard & Curran): That is true, but the interpretation of SGMA is that the legislative intent is to have no subsidence (agnostic to damage impacts).
- d. Comment: 2025 General Plan updates are underway for local cities. These would be good documents for GSAs to review to better understand potential growth and development plans in the Subbasin.
- e. Comment: DWR should not get away with recognizing that the reduction in state imported surface water deliveries and the emergence of subsidence due to increased groundwater pumping are not interrelated.

10. Update on Filling Monitoring Network Data Gaps

- a. *This item was included in the Current Conditions Report earlier in the presentation.*

11. Next steps

- a. *This item was skipped due to timing; updates provided in the slides.*

12. Adjourn

- a. Meeting adjourned at 12:17 pm.

Next Regular Meeting

TBD late 2025

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

Information also available online at mercedsgma.org