

TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

May 25, 2021

Special Meeting

1:00PM

AGENDA

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85636885915?pwd=NmdIV3dNek1qclRXMkFIY1FKQXF2Zz09>

Meeting ID: 856 3688 5915
Passcode: 517241

Dial in: +1 669 900 6833

IMPORTANT NOTICE: Due to the ongoing COVID-19 Crisis, and as authorized by the Governor's Executive Order N-29-20, Committee Members will participate in this meeting offsite via Zoom meeting. Members of the public who wish to provide comment or observe the meeting may join the Zoom meeting.

1. INTRODUCTIONS

2. PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

Public opportunity to speak on any matter of public interest within the Agency's jurisdiction including items on the Agency's agenda. Testimony limited to three minutes per person.

3. MEETING MINUTES

March 17, 2021

4. DROUGHT IMPACTS ON DOMESTIC WELLS

5. COMMITTEE REPORTS TO GSA BOARD

6. NEXT MEETING

7. ADJOURNMENT

Alternate formats of this agenda will be made available upon request by qualified individuals with disabilities. Appropriate interpretive services for this meeting will be provided if feasible upon advance request by qualified individuals with disabilities. Please contact the Secretary at (209) 385-7654 for assistance and allow sufficient time to process and respond to your request. Copies of agendas and minutes will be available at the Merced County Community and Economic Development Department and at www.countyofmerced.com/MercedSubbasinGSA.

**MERCED SUBBASIN GROUNDWATER SUSTAINABILITY AGENCY JOINT MEETING OF
THE TECHNICAL AND ADVISORY COMMITTEES**

MINUTES FOR MEETING OF MARCH 23, 2021

The special meeting of the Technical and Advisory Committees for the Merced Subbasin Groundwater Sustainability Agency (GSA) was called to order at 10:00 a.m., on MARCH 23, 2021 via Zoom Meeting.

I. INTRODUCTIONS

All attendees did roundtable introductions.

II. PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

None

III. MEETING MINUTES

Meeting minutes for December 02, 2020 approved with suggested changes to page 1, item IV, last paragraph.

IV. GSP OBJECTIVE OVERVIEW

Overview opened with a presentation from Lacey McBride, Merced County Water Resources Coordinator, and Greg Young, of Tully and Young. The information presented evapotranspiration data, based on remote sensing information, for the GSA. This information is presented to help understand the magnitude of consumption, 400,000 acre feet of ET is met by combination of precipitation and applied water, in the form of pumped groundwater or surface water. Some locations in the GSA have surface water supplies to help meet this consumption. Reduction needs to be addressed through replacement supplies or reduced consumption of roughly 100,000 acre feet, the use is scattered within the GSA, there are a lot of areas that reflect no evapotranspiration, irrigated lands in the east and grazing grassland areas which use precipitation.

Ms. McBride commented that the long-term objective is to reduce consumption by a large amount and that the basin is defining what that overall amount is. The near-term objective is to reach smaller targeted reduction goals in the first 5- years.

The objective of this meeting is to discuss the goals and how creating Sustainability Zones and offsets fit into the long and short term objectives.

V. SUSTAINABILITY ZONES

Ms. McBride commented that Sustainability Zones are something the GSA Board has been interested in since before establishment of the GSP, these areas are different than the management areas defined by SGMA. The intent is to use these zones as a tool for the GSA to manage as they move forward. The Sustainability Zones were initially discussed in the December 2020 Technical and Advisory Committees and the topic was carried to the January 2021 GSA Board meeting for further discussion. The Technical and Advisory Committees have been asked to

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address different ways to connect different parcels through the zones using considerations of similar land use and non-contiguous zones.

A proposed six zone sustainability map was presented to the Committees, Zones 1 and 2 include eastern parts of the basin without much irrigated agriculture and a lot of range land and native grasslands. Zone 3 has deeper water levels, Zone 4 recognizes subsidence in the southwestern triangle of the basin. Zone 5 is along the western part of the basin and in the presentation it is marked by refuge land that is owned by the state and federal government and is irrigated land. Zone 6 includes portions of the basin with access to surface water and water rights to delivered surface water, this zone contains shallow ground water.

Mr. Bob Kelley commented that he is okay with the six zone proposed sustainability map.

Mr. Brad Samuelson commented that the zoning is a good representation, he suggests that using six zones is better than four zones because of different needs of Zones 4 and 5, he commented that both need to address subsidence but the north side of Zone 5 is a lot different than Zone 4. Mr. Samuelson also commented that Zones 2 and 3 in the southern portion have similar groundwater characteristics and suggests that Le Grand-Athlone Water District is a reasonable boundary.

Mr. Samuelson commented that Zone 3 has a huge area of depression and expresses that Zone 2 contributed to the depression, through white area, permanent trees and deep aquifer pumping. He commented that falling groundwater will need to be managed in both zones.

Mike Day of Provost and Pritchard commented that there is very little developed agriculture in Zone 2, and along Zone 3 there is very little data, weak aquifer and Corcoran clay to the west.

Mr. Eric Swenson commented that a portion of Zone 1 which has permanent agriculture is more closely aligned with Zone 3. He commented that the boundary of Zone 2, with developed agriculture, goes slightly north of Highway 140 and suggested extending Zone 2 slightly north and areas of Zone 1 into Zone 3, to group by hydro geologic similarities.

Mr. Kelley commented that Zone 1 and areas of Zone 2, primarily range land, should be grouped by themselves. He commented that if there are small areas of each zone with intensive ground water extraction, that have different ground water footprints, they should not be included in other areas with different ground water footprints.

Mr. Young recommended that TAC consider potential separation of areas of Zones 1 and 2, which are non-irrigated and the creation of a smaller zone.

Mr. Bert Crane commented that there seems to be a lot going on in Zone 1, including district activity, range land and solid pumping.

Mr. Kelley commented that he supports trying to group all range land in one zone, keeping range land and beef cattle owners in mind.

Mr. Young provided overview of the presented Sustainability Zones conversation, Committees have suggested expanding Zone 3 to the east, to encompass existing irrigated lands, expanding Zone 2 northward to create a large area of rangeland area and to revise Zone 1 to a smaller area that focuses on smaller irrigated portions.

VI. DEMAND OFFSETS

Ms. McBride, presented options to offset demand and commented that she would like committee feedback on additional methods.

Mr. Young presented the long-term objective ET numbers and reiterates that MSGSA is working with other GSAs in the basin, to develop near term targets and to start making progress without immediately determining an end goal. MSGSA is targeting the reduction of consumptive groundwater, which can be achieved by removing, modifying or lowering consumption, by changing crop types, fallowing/rotational fallowing, land repurposing or replacing groundwater with a different source that is not currently part of the baseline condition. Mr. Young recommended that the Committees consider the possibility of addressing permanent easements, converting some lands to habitat interests or other things that might receive funding assistance from different mechanisms throughout the state, growing crops with lower consumption, fallowing and repurposing of land, use of import water or in lieu recharge, and any new opportunities to augment current baseline long term use of surface water. Other methods for offset demand include direct recharge, which could come in through programs such as FloodMar. Mr. Young commented that allocation can be addressed by allocating consumption reduction or by allocating native sustainable groundwater that is available to the GSA. These are not independent, and they can be used together. Mr. Young commented that extraction fees are ways to create an economic driver of reduction and change.

Mr. Samuelson commented that fees received can be used to pay for fallowing or other projects and management actions, there cannot be a fee penalty structure for just behavioral change according to Prop. 218, this can be used with or without allocation.

Mr. Blake Nervino suggested that MSGSA find a way to create a savings to help eliminate expenses or to reinvest into land use for that owner.

Mr. Kelley commented that paid fallowing will need funding and a general fee across the GSA may not work because some zones contribute more than others to the ground water levels.

Mr. Nervino commented that he agrees that economics should determine and that some individuals will need to fallow more than others.

Mr. Crane suggested recharge basins in the off season for areas that have discharge water, he suggests that almonds can't be fallowed, there are too many trees and vines to fallow, and that maybe field and row crops can be fallowed.

Mr. Young commented that the challenge of this committee is to help advise the board on ways to help make that transition as smoothly and equitably across GSA as possible, by recognizing all of the variances in play.

Mr. Samuelson suggested adopting a groundwater recharge policy prior to adopting demand management, this will give farmers incentive to start planning for upcoming changes and commented that we need to provide the farmers with facts and policies to give them direction.

Mr. Nervino commented that the GSA should research to determine what crops are viable and which would be beneficial for water usage reduction, in each zone, and suggested the GSA can have zone by zone recommendations for crops that might thrive in each zone with reduced water usage.

Mr. Nervino commented that to implement metering wells will be expensive, and suggests that a fee across may be the easiest way, that managing well meters is not feasible for the GSA.

Ms. McBride, provided an overview on the demand offset conversation, she commented that there seems to be interest in using the idea of zones, there is an understanding that there will be need for funding, possibly in the form of extraction fees, or other revenue mechanisms, which needs to be explored and that allocations need to remain in consideration by the board members.

Mr. Samuelson commented that MSGSA is considered critically over drafted by DWR and to avoid undesirable results from subsidence, any sort of management action needs to differentiate between deep aquifer and upper aquifer pumping in the subsidence area.

VII. NEXT MEETING

Next meeting will be determined at a later time.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

Meeting was adjourned at 12:00p.m.