

TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

September 29, 2021

Special Meeting

10:00AM

AGENDA

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84482859861?pwd=clFmc3dJalkzZi9Hb3ptbGRKcS9NQOT09>

Meeting ID: 844 8285 9861

Dial in: +1 669 900 6833

Passcode: 847043

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

July 29, 2021

4. DROUGHT UPDATE

5. MSGSA GSP IMPLEMENTATION APPROACH

6. MSGSA ROLE IN COUNTY WELL PERMITTING

7. COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS TO GSA BOARD

8. NEXT MEETING

9. ADJOURNMENT

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**MERCED SUBBASIN GROUNDWATER SUSTAINABILITY AGENCY
TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

MINUTES FOR MEETING OF JULY 29, 2021

The special meeting of the Technical Advisory Committee for the Merced Subbasin Groundwater Sustainability Agency (GSA) was called to order at 9:00 a.m., on July 29, 2021, via Zoom Meeting.

I. INTRODUCTIONS

All attendees did roundtable introductions.

II. PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

None

III. MEETING MINUTES

Minutes for May 25, 2021 were presented to the committee changes requested on item IV, paragraph 2 “Julie” should read “Julia” on the final minutes.

IV. DOMESTIC WELL DISCUSSION FOLLOW UP

Lacey McBride presented a follow up on the domestic well discussion from May. Mrs. McBride informed the TAC that Merced County has been issuing well permits for domestic wells that have gone dry. There have been 14 out-of-water domestic permits issued since April, three in the MSGSA, all others have been in MIUGSA. Mrs. McBride presented the TAC with information about the Self-help enterprises and the services provided. Mrs. McBride informed the TAC that Self-Help enterprises provides tanked water to those who need water and that as of today one tank has been installed in MIUGSA’s jurisdiction. Julia Berry inquired about how many of the 14 wells are irrigational wells.

Mrs. McBride commented that all of the Out of Water wells are domestic.

Blake Nervino inquired if staff knows the depth of the wells that have been replaced.

Mrs. McBride responded that the average depth of replacement wells is approximately 300 feet and commented that she would have to research to know if the previous well depth is available.

V. LAND REPURPOSING PROGRAM

Mrs. McBride commented that this is the first time the TAC will be given the opportunity to discuss land repurposing and the board is requesting feedback on what TAC believes the water users in the GSA would be open to. Mrs. McBride presented the Sustainable Yield and Overdraft table to the TAC and an alternative based on GSA action to adopt a Water Year 2025 groundwater consumption reduction objective, and explained the path to

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reduction. The MSGSA has estimated their own sustainable yield of 268,000 AF per year by 2040, in order to move forward with reductions
Greg Young clarified that the sustainability numbers provided are not for the whole basin but were estimated for the Merced Subbasin GSA.

Geoff Vanden Hueval asked if the land repurposing would be long term, he commented that other basins are bidding short term land fallowing.

Mrs. McBride responded that both long- and short-term repurposing will be discussed.

Mr. Hueval commented that the Pixley Irrigational District GSA formed a land conservation trust to buy and manage lands that are being fallowed and suggested looking into this model.

Ms. Berry responded to inquire where the Pixley GSA obtained funding for the land trust.

Mr. Hueval commented that the funding was from the Bureau of Reclamation and they have been working on funding for a couple of years.

Brad Samuelson commented that the overdraft chart is unclear, it expresses that there will be no ramp down in 2022. Mr. Samuelson commented that he would like the board to take action to set date of starting a reduction program, even if the details are unclear.

Mrs. McBride commented that the water year 2025 target of 15,000 acre feet reduction requires the TAC to discuss methods to reduce consumption of groundwater and informed the TAC that the board has expressed interest in surface water increase when available. Mrs. McBride commented that although there are projects to increase supply, there is an understanding that there is not enough surface water supply to offset all of the reduction in consumptive use that needs to happen in the Merced Subbasin GSA. Mrs. McBride commented that board members are considering allocation of sustainable yield, allocation of overdraft or land repurposing strategies. Land repurposing/fallowing doesn't just take land out of production to sit, but to offer benefits for what it is doing. Land repurposing might be the vehicle to help attain the near-term results to achieving the 2025 water year objectives, while allocation conversations are happening.

Mr. Young commented that there is no need to wait for demand reduction, we have been in overdraft for a while, which is documented in the GSP. The GSA needs to have 15,000 acre feet of annual reduction of groundwater consumption in three years. Mr. Young presented a map containing crops from the DWR 2018 crop data and presented potential areas for habitat benefit between the Eastern Sierra Foothills and the western coast range. Mr. Young commented that the area identified was in a study performed by CA Fish and Game. Mr. Young commented that this specific habitat connecting corridor would be a long term repurpose, the map is to help the TAC understand what the land uses are in the identified area and what crops might be removed, this data will help craft programs for land repurposing.

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Mrs. McBride commented that the map is not the recommended area for the corridor, it can be larger or smaller than the area shown on the map, the map is just to show the possible corridor benefit area.

Lou Myers inquired who generated the map presented.

Mr. Young commented that the map was originally generated by a study done by the CA Department of Fish and Game, on habitat corridors in the state of CA. Luhdorff and Scalmanini created an approximation of where the study was. The map was presented to help the TAC pursue one type of land repurposing with a co-benefit.

Mr. Myers inquired if the map coincidentally falls in the subsidence area, or if the study was related to the subsidence occurring in the area.

Mr. Samuelson commented that he was involved in the study and that the study was done for the Kit Fox and Tiger Salamander habitat along the Sandy Mush corridor to the east side.

Bob Kelley inquired if there was further information for grant funding for habitat land repurposing.

Mrs. McBride commented that there is a bill in the state legislature to create a program for multi benefit land repurposing in the Department of Conservation. MSGSA signed a letter of support in June, grant funding from the state is not guaranteed, outside funding may be available.

Mr. Young presented additional potential near term focus areas and suggested considering prioritization of land repurposing in areas that help protect and benefit domestic wells in risk of going dry.

Mr. Samuelson commented that he is interested in seeing the locations of the wells that have gone dry, on the map of Sustainability Zones.

Mrs. McBride commented that she would create a map of the wells that have gone dry and commented that there are some in the Winton and Atwater area, which is near Zone One, in the MIUGSA jurisdiction.

Mr. Samuelson commented that most of the wells are not in the MSGSA.

Mr. Young commented that the TAC is being asked to consider what program will work best, if there doesn't seem to be a risk to domestic wells, it may not have true benefit.

Mr. Samuelson commented that actions that help the DACs, Community Service Districts, could still benefit the surrounding communities. Mr. Samuelson commented that these areas aren't listed on the map but these communities have concerns about domestic wells and action around them still has potential benefit. The DACs are in MIUGSA but programs around them may still be beneficial.

Mr. Young commented that it would benefit to include small community wells on the sustainability map.

Mrs. McBride asked the TAC to consider objectives, programs and area prioritization by habitat, environmental benefit, zones, domestic wells, subsidence impacts, crop type, protection of prime farmland and incentivizing land owners. Mrs. McBride further asked the TAC to consider how the land owners would be incentivized for the land repurposed and whether there is a target of acreage or consumption, or targeted area of land repurposing.

Mr. Nervino commented that the farmers would be more receptive if they could choose terms of the contract, length for incentive and having the option to remove the land if the conditions change.

Mr. Myers asked for clarification on the terms of conservation agencies, partnership and funding and commented that the CA law for public funding may require perpetual terms.

Ms. Berry commented that from her past experience with easements and perpetuity, CA Conservancy is long term and that programs like the Williamson Act, with flexibility, seem to work the best for land owners because they could opt in and out of the program.

Mr. Meyers suggested gathering information and explaining to land owners what funding sources are available.

Breanne Ramos with Farm Bureau commented that her agency has worked with CA Farmland Trust and would be happy to connect landowners to CA Farmland Trust or others to help discuss the benefits of conservation easements.

Mr. Young commented that the reason for considering outside funding is to help reduce requirement for the GSA participants to fund easements. Self-funding is an option and there can be different funding pathways.

Mr. Samuelson commented that the GSA should discuss how to fund programs independently and that outside funding may be uncertain or may be delayed.

Mr. Myers commented that there may be current programs like the NRCS which will fund up to 75 % of perpetual easements. Mr. Myers suggested learning about the programs available to educate the GSA board.

Bob Kelley commented that allocation of sustainable yield needs to be discussed, that a program needs to be planned and there will need to be fees to disincentivize not reducing consumption.

Mr. Kelley commented that this is a large GSA with differing circumstances and that having the whole GSA assume financial responsibility for the entire GSA may be difficult when not all areas will benefit equally.

Mrs. Berry commented that the farmers would prioritize their long-term investments, which may conflict with the subsidence areas, where there is deep pumping and investment in trees. The growers would likely appreciate if the GSA considers their long-term investments as priority.

Mr. Myers commented that priority should be less pumping, which will have great impact on everyone in the GSA.

Mr. Young asked the TAC to consider how the GSA would incentivize the land owners for removing land from production.

Mr. Myers commented that farmers typically calculate per acre, per year and that crops that require a lot of water might not have such productive crops and may be more willing to accept per acre, per year incentive.

Mr. Samuelson commented that per acre, per year is the best way to incentivize and suggested considering if the amount was equivalent to renting the land.

Mrs. McBride inquired if farmers would take advantage of incentive that was comparable to rent income.

Mr. Samuelson commented that he believes that a program which pays comparable to rent would work.

Mr. Myers commented that longer term programs may charge less, if the money is coming from a trustworthy source.

Mr. Samuelson commented that we need to ensure that the water is not moved to another piece of land, there has to be a net reduction in consumption.

Mr. Myers commented that winter forage can be planted to generate income and give up summer crops to allow the land owner additional income, if there is rain to water.

Mr. Young commented that the land could still be used for dry land farming, while the GSA was renting the land to reduce consumption.

Mrs. McBride summarized that there seems to be agreement that the objective is to reduce consumption of ground water and that interest in prioritizing is in using the Sustainability Zones to prioritize, DACs, adverse impacts, and farmers investments. Habitat benefit seems like an extra benefit and not an intentional priority. Mrs. McBride commented that TACs interest in incentivizing seems be in land owners' interest in flexibility, payment per acre, per year and having a program that competes with land rental, with consistent, reliable payments.

Mr. Myers commented that if the land is constricted by water restrictions that the GSA should consider additional sources of income, such as winter forage or cattle and suggested adding this to the program agreement.

George Park commented that the winter forage will also help control weeds, if the land is sitting idle.

VI. COMMITTEE REPORTS TO GSA

Brad Samuelson has agreed to report the TAC discussion and recommendations at the August 12, 2021 board meeting.

VII. NEXT MEETING

Next meeting will be taking place in late September 2021

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

Meeting was adjourned at 10:49 am