

Petaluma Valley Groundwater Sustainability Agency Advisory Committee Meeting February 8, 2023 | Summary

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Welcome and Call to Order

Heidi Bauer, Chair, opened the meeting at 4:35 p.m. and welcomed the participants to the first in-person meeting in three years, then proceeded with a high-level overview of the agenda.

Sandi Potter introduced herself and said she looks forward to collaborative work with the group. Potter introduced GSA staff member Indigo Bannister, and Sebastian Bertsch, a new member of the Petaluma Valley Advisory Committee recently appointed by the Board. Bertsch introduced himself and explained he was a previous member of the Santa Rosa Plain Groundwater Sustainability Agency Advisory Committee, until he moved from the area some years ago.

General Public Comments

None.

Agenda Review, Approval of Previous Meeting Summary, and FY 2022-23 Meeting Schedule Review

Objective: Confirm agenda and approve September meeting summary

Sandi Potter asked if there were any requested changes to the agenda; there were none. No changes were requested to the September meeting summary so it will be posted as written.

No questions or public comment.

Draft Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) Annual Report

Objective: Provide overview of GSP Annual Report and receive AC feedback

Marcus Trotta gave an update on the Annual Report for water year 2022 and asked for feedback/written comments from the Advisory Committee by February 24. A draft is in the meeting packet. This is the second annual report for the GSA. Annual reports are intended to be a progress report for DWR but also allow an opportunity to share information on the status of groundwater conditions with the community and interested parties.

Trotta noted that Sections 1 (Introduction/Background) and 2 (Overview of Plan Area and Hydrogeologic Setting) of the Annual Report will generally be the same every year but Sections 3 (WY 2022 Basin Conditions and SMC Status) and 4 (GSP Implementation Progress) will incorporate changes every year.

Trotta outlined the GSP implementation progress and 5-year schedule.

Questions/Comments

Lindsey Strain – Is the depletion of interconnected surface water attributable to groundwater pumping?

Trotta – It is important to include it because the Undesirable Results need to be something controllable by the GSA; having it tied to groundwater pumping is important. Conditions with the drought are related more to climate than groundwater pumping. We need to work on getting better information and reassess the thresholds and their appropriateness.

Peter Kiel – The Connor model would suggest that the upper most portion of the basin is at higher risk of depletion. Should we adjust the criteria for the 5-year update?

Trotta – GSA staff is involved in the update. I am on the Technical Advisory Committee and Sandi Potter is on the Policy Advisory Committee. I think it is likely the criteria will be changed for the 5-year update. The goal is to make improvements. DWR is coming out with guidance to the GSAs on this sustainability indicator. Depending on where the technical scope of the well ordinance goes, there may be some things we want to integrate into the Sustainable Management Criteria.

Eugene Camozzi – The estimated storage change seems like a large number. How does that compare to other years?

Trotta – It is a relatively small change and well within year-to-year storage change estimates. It is the long-term average. During dry years it can go down more. There are areas of moderate declines throughout the basin. When you have a large area, you can have relatively significant storage declines.

Sebastian Bertsch – Estimated extraction is 3300 acre-feet from the storage decline number, where does the discrepancy come from?

Trotta – There is less recharge in a drier year, and extractions are a component of that. Pumping as well.

Bertsch – We are using water level thresholds as a proxy for connectivity and storage loss. How much can we move Minimum Thresholds on a drought?

Trotta – There are different thresholds in drought years and non-drought years. The criteria for having Undesirable Results are different in drought year versus non-drought year for interconnected surface water and groundwater levels. Emergency operations are intended to account for shorter term emergencies.

Bertsch – Would quick response from a city pumping more because they receive less surface water count as an emergency?

Trotta – That can occur during a drought year, it is intended to be covered by a drought classification.

Bertsch – Is there a fixed number or percent the Minimum Thresholds can be adjusted?

Trotta – I don't think we adjust the Minimum Thresholds, we adjust the percent of wells that would trigger an Undesirable Result.

Camozzi – 'Surface water' on your Water Use chart is the water from Lake Sonoma, right?

Trotta – Yes, imported surface water is the water delivered by Sonoma Water through the aqueduct to the City of Petaluma.

Gary Mickelson – Are the 11 monitoring wells purely monitoring or are they pumping as well?

Trotta – It is a mix, some aren't used. A good portion are private residential wells. They were historically monitored by DWR but have been taken over by the GSAs.

Bertsch – There seems to be a slight decline of two out of three measurements for surface water depletion over ten years; overall, there is a slight average decline. Our assumption says that if we can maintain 2020 water levels, things are fine and now that we have gone below those levels, we say it isn't caused by us because we don't have the data. I still have a concern about using water level as a measurement for interconnected surface water.

Trotta – We aren't saying it isn't groundwater, we are saying we don't know if it is groundwater. SGMA provides the GSA 20 years to correct Undesirable Results. With uncertainty of guidance still being formulated by the state, our recommendation is to continue focusing on the data gaps and coming up with an improved methodology and criteria for assessing interconnected surface water and through that process also identifying what types of projects and management actions can help the situation, in the event there is a problem in the basin. In the future should the conditions occur, and it looks like it is caused by groundwater, we would have something to move forward with that is responsive to the problem.

Potter – Following the sustained drought, this year looks to be an above average rainfall year. We will capture that data and see how the basin responds to the change in climate and have more information moving forward.

Public Comment

None.

Overview of SGMA Implementation Grant Application and GSP Implementation Updates

Objective: Share activities included in grant application, receive feedback from AC on near-term activities/initial planning, and solicit potential volunteers to assist staff in development and stakeholder engagement

Marcus Trotta gave an overview of the GSP determination, scope of work in SGMA grant application, and GSP implementation updates.

Great news! DWR approved all the Groundwater Sustainability Plans for the basins in Sonoma County. Out of 51 GSPs reviewed to date, 12 were approved including the three in Sonoma County, the other 39 were found inadequate or incomplete. Trotta highlighted DWR findings including recommended corrective actions. Some of those actions were already flagged. A response to the recommended actions is required in the five-year update.

Having an approved GSP allows the GSA to solely focus on the significant work needed to implement the GSP, rather than expending time and resources in addressing deficiencies.

DWR recommended corrective actions regarding chronic lowering of groundwater levels and depletion of interconnected surface water SMCs, as well as the monitoring network.

A summary of the grant application is in the meeting packet. \$230 million grant funds are available. Petaluma Valley has requested \$6,739,409 million. SGMA anticipates having the draft award list available in June 2023 and the final award list in fall 2023.

Component 1: Grant Administration

Component 2: Aquifer System and Beneficial User Impact Assessments

- 2.1 Assess potential effects to sensitive beneficial users
- 2.2 Monitoring network improvement
- 2.3 Aquifer System characterization
- 2.4 Outreach and stakeholder engagement

Component 3: Planning for Demand Management Programs

- 3.1 Water-use efficiency assessment and pilot program
- 3.2 Assessment and prioritization of potential policy options
- 3.3 Outreach and stakeholder engagement

Component 4: Planning for Projects

- 4.1 Coordinated recycled water planning
- 4.2 Aquifer storage and recovery (ASR) planning
- 4.3 Stormwater capture and recharge planning
- 4.4 Outreach and stakeholder engagement

Component 5: Urban Recycled Water Expansion

- 5.1 City of Petaluma urban recycled water expansion
- 5.2 Outreach and stakeholder engagement

The components for the grant funding were prioritized in the following order: 2,3,4,5,1.

Questions/Comments

Strain – If we are on the draft award list in June, will we start making plans to begin working on projects in the fall?

Trotta – Absolutely. How much work we can get done by the actual grant is awarded will depend on the level of funding the GSA Board adopts for next year’s budget. We have some funding now in this year’s budget, and we will discuss it with the Board at their March meeting.

Bauer – The recycled water project is for irrigation, right?

Trotta – Yes, for landscape irrigation in parks.

Bauer – How did you decide on the priority of the projects?

Trotta – We took the input from AC and Board and ranked them based on that.

Bauer – Everyone thought the recycled water wasn’t an actual project.

Trotta – Water conservation would be the actual project. The pilot project would provide the tools and incentives. There is a timeframe for completing the grant so, it made more sense to put it in as a pilot project for this grant. We are data poor in Petaluma Valley so there is a need for studies; building our monitoring network is a higher near-term priority.

Bauer – If we find out we don’t get the full amount requested from DWR, do we re-prioritize?

Trotta – It will be interesting to hear from DWR how much input we have.

Bertsch – The City’s integrated water management plan is progressing. Can some of these things start now before they get funded?

Chelsea Thompson – Some have already been awarded and are in process.

Bertsch – There are a lot of new projects, some without much data included. How do we update costs based on construction costs the last three years? Can that process of updating start sooner than 2024?

Trotta – It includes projects related to stormwater management. One of the grant requirements is that any stormwater grants/projects need to be listed in the SWRP. I don't what level of activity is on revising the plans. It is another area that the GSA needs to coordinate with other agencies. Also, through flood zone funding, the city has been involved in hydrology modelling. We have been tracking that and bringing the GSA's interests to those types of projects.

Engstrom – When you talk about creeks and recharge are you talking about dams and retention?

Trotta – Vineyards and retention basins near streams can provide some flood protection. Getting better mapping of permeable areas in the basin is the initial phase of the projects/study. It could include smaller scale projects, anything that slows it down and spreads it out.

Strain – Is it feasible in the next fiscal year and a half, to start projects?

Trotta – Having the initial conversations and planning is within our scope and budget. If we get awarded the grants, they need to be completed in two and a half years. The planning was included and recommended in the GSP.

Potter – We are looking forward to hearing from DWR.

Standing Item: GSA Operational Updates

Objective: Provide progress updates on GSA administration and operations

Sandi Potter provided various operational updates.

Consolidated GSA administration – An ad hoc committee met in December with two members from each Board to discuss consolidation of the three basins in Sonoma County. At this point, there is no desire to consolidate the GSAs as the current structure is proving effective. There was a simple and efficient coordinated process for three grant applications with just one grant writer. There may be a three-Board/basin meeting in January 2024 and another ad hoc meeting between now and then.

Potter gave an update on fee implementation. Notification letters were sent to 1231 groundwater users in Sonoma Valley with GUIDE information and the annual fee amount. 43 manual invoices were mailed to tax-exempt groundwater users and public water systems. Staff has responded to over 47 public inquiries received through the GSA hotline.

GUIDE covers the entire county and was updated in August 2022 to include all three basins. GUIDE includes information for all parcels and users can log in to access information for their parcel as well as respond and update information. Total corrections = 43 parcels. Very successful to-date. Potter listed common Guide survey responses; biggest complaints across the basins are regarding recycled water use offsetting groundwater pumping, and turf.

The fiscal impact of fee corrections so far is \$13,899 (budgeted appeal allowance was \$12,419), staff time is approximately \$28,000. Other expenses include consultant time, issuing of refunds, corrections with Assessor's office, etc. It is hoped we can absorb the costs with cutting/spending less in other areas.

Bertsch – What was the breakdown of the 43 change requests?

Indigo Bannister – For Petaluma Valley it was mainly turf (golf courses/parks) irrigation updates. We soon realized the turf information we used is old data and largely incorrect. The DWR turf layers were done years ago.

Bertsch – Is that also capturing residences with large turf?

Bannister – Yes, there was a threshold, the turf had to be half-acre or more if outside city limits and larger than .2 acre if inside city limits.

Drought Emergency Order Compliance

The Governor’s Executive Order is still in place. Sandi Potter explained that the Order sets out a process for wells that are non-exempt. Exempt wells include public wells and domestic wells using less than two acre-feet annually. Staff is working with the county on well permit revisions. There is a well drilling moratorium until April.

Questions/Comments

Bertsch – Do the Groundwater Sustainability Agencies have documented standard criteria they will review for the well permits?

Potter – That is part of what is being developed. Most of the criteria will be derived from the thresholds in the GSP; they will need to dovetail with the GSP. We are working on developing systematic criteria.

Trotta – It is one of the things we are working on with the county. Permit Sonoma hasn’t settled on which criteria they will use. We want to make sure it captures what satisfies the GSAs’ interests so it wouldn’t require a lot of our staff time for review.

Potter – We want to make it user friendly for people to get well permits.

Bertsch – Does the GSA review the well?

No public comment.

Summary of Action Items / AC Chair “Board Summary”

Sandi Potter mentioned that John Shribbs is no longer on the committee and introduced the applicant for his member environmental seat, Sarah Raker, in attendance, a professional geologist, and hydrogeologist. Potter, also mentioned Jordan Mahrt, not in attendance, a candidate for the open agricultural seat.

Questions/Comments

Camozzi [to Chelsea Thompson] – How much groundwater did the City of Petaluma pump last year? Was there a change compared do the prior year?

Thompson – Conservation/reduction was about 20% over the prior year.

No public comment.

Adjournment

Sandi Potter thanked everyone for participating and adjourned the meeting at 6:29 p.m.

The next scheduled Advisory Committee meeting is Wednesday, May 17 2023, at 4:30 p.m. and the next Board meeting is Thursday, March 23 at 4:00 p.m.

Attendees

Advisory Committee Members - Attending

Clayton Engstrom – arrived 5:30

Eugene Camozzi

Gary Mickelson

Heidi Bauer

Lindsey Strain

Peter Kiel

Sebastian Bertsch

Advisory Committee Members - Absent

Rebecca (Becky) Ng

Staff / Presenters

Sandi Potter, PV GSA Administrator

Marcus Trotta, Plan Manager

Ann DuBay, Outreach

Indigo Bannister, GSA Staff

Simone Peters, GSA Staff (recording meeting summary)

Other Attendees

Chelsea Thompson, City of Petaluma

Gina Benedetti-Petnic, City of Petaluma

Sarah Raker, AC member applicant