Merced Irrigation-Urban GSA
Merced Subbasin GSA
Turner Island Water District GSA #1

Summary of Merced Subbasin Groundwater Sustainability Plan Community Workshop #1

Issued August 20, 2018

Overview

The first Merced Subbasin Community Workshop was held on August 2, 2018 in the Sam Pipes Room, 678 W. 18th Street, Merced, CA from 6 pm to 8:30 pm. The total attendance was approximately 35 of which 8 were members of the GSP Coordinating Committee, Stakeholder Committee, or staff from the County, City, or Merced Irrigation District (MID).

The workshop goals included the following:

1. Provide an introduction to:
    a. What are the requirements of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA),
    b. What are the roles of the three Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSAs), and
    c. What is the schedule and requirements for the Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) being prepared for the Merced Subbasin.
2. Provide an overview of the Merced Subbasin conditions.
3. Encourage attendees to share their knowledge and experiences with groundwater in the Merced Subbasin and to talk about what groundwater sustainability means for them.

The workshop presentations covered the following topics:

1. What is SGMA -- what is required, who is responsible, and how will the GSP be developed?
2. Current Merced Subbasin groundwater conditions.
3. What are the undesirable effects of overuse of groundwater?
4. What does groundwater sustainability mean to people?

The workshop was publicized using a number of methods including:

1. Press Release was issued to the Merced Sun Times and posted on the GSP website.
2. Display Advertisement/Notice was placed in the Merced Sun Times.
3. Workshop Notices (in English and Spanish) were widely distributed by partner organizations to their email distribution lists and were posted on the three GSA websites as well as several partner websites.

4. SelfHelp Enterprises also distributed a workshop notice in several communities within the Merced Subbasin.

Questions about SGMA, GSAs, and the GSP

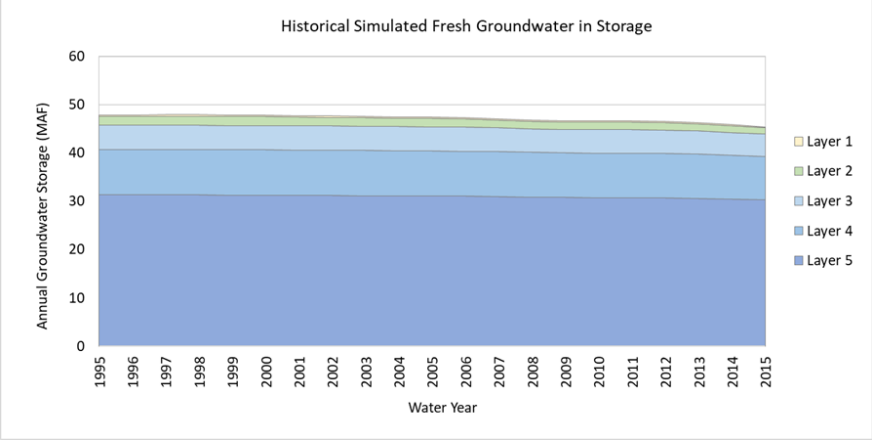
After a presentation about what is SGMA, the formation of the three GSAs and their roles, and the decision for all three GSAs to work together to develop one GSP for the Merced Subbasin, the following questions were asked:

1. What is the approval process from the State?
2. How many other GSPs are being prepared now in California?
3. Does the public get to review the draft GSP?
4. What will the process be for the public to get to review the draft GSP?
5. What is the website to go to for information about the Merced Subbasin GSP?
6. Who hired the consultants to prepare the GSP?

Questions about Current Merced Subbasin Groundwater Conditions

After a presentation about current Merced Subbasin groundwater conditions, the following questions were raised:

1. Is it possible to capture water from Bear Creek as the water flows to the ocean?
2. What is the definition of a Disadvantaged Community (DAC)?
3. Questions asked when the Total Storage slide (below) was discussed:



a) What is the significance of the “brackish water” layer?

b) Is there a correlation between the levels shown and depth in feet?

c) Is the lower water level from the High Sierras and the top level from recent events like rain?

d) Are there water quality differences in the levels shown?

4. When it comes to measuring well depths, will it be the responsibility of each individual to recharge their own well if the elevation drops? Are people going to have to track their individual well water usage?
5. Will there be a loss in storage in areas with land subsidence?
6. Is there a lot of data on interconnected surface water?
7. For the groundwater model being used, will there be "ground truthing" or validation of the model with real time well data? If so, how is it done?
8. Will there be any monitoring wells that can measure a number of different elements including groundwater levels, direction of flow, and flow rate?

Discussion about Undesirable Effects

In the initial workshop presentation, it was explained that under SGMA, sustainability is the management of groundwater to prevent significant and unreasonable undesirable results. There are six undesirable results defined under SGMA. They include: Chronic lowering of groundwater levels indicating a significant and unreasonable depletion of supply; significant and unreasonable degraded water quality; significant and unreasonable reduction of groundwater storage; significant and unreasonable land subsidence; significant and unreasonable seawater intrusion; and depletions of interconnected surface water that have significant and unreasonable adverse impacts on beneficial uses of the surface water.

Attendees were asked "What Do You See as the Undesirable Effects of Groundwater Use?" and the following responses were shared:

Responses Related to Land Use Planning and Groundwater Use

Improved Land Use Planning is Important. In the Merced General Plan, when new ground is broken for a project, water use parameters need to be established. A grading ordinance is needed when changing the function of the land use. Changes in land use when irrigation is added should be addressed or regulated in some way.

Consider Using Recycled Water for Urban Use. An example was provided that in Salt Lake City, a dual piping system is used where water goes to houses as two water supplies: one for recycled water used for lawns and other non-potable (non-drinking water) uses, and one for drinking water.

Coordination of Private Well Groundwater Use is needed between Suburban Areas and Agricultural Areas. What are the depth of the wells, and how can the water use be coordinated? When comparing water use between a subdivision and agricultural use, which uses more?

Responses about Educational Needs for Efficient Use of Water

More Education about Water Use Efficiency is Needed. An attendee asked about the allowable watering schedule in Merced County as he observed people watering their lawns during the day

and kids' pools overflowing, with no way to capture that water. Can the GSP include water efficiency actions and education? It was mentioned that some examples of efficiency and educational tools can be found and have been implemented in the City of Merced.

Responses Related to Surface and Ground Water Use

Land Subsidence Creates Loss of Water Storage. These areas are no longer able to be recharged as the soils will no longer hold water.

More Surface Water is Needed. The Proposed Temperance Flat Dam Project was voiced as a potential solution.

With Water Cutbacks, Water for Trees and Landscaping is Reduced. There needs to be a balanced approach.

Lower Groundwater Levels Negatively Affects Drinking Water Supplies for Rural Schools. There are areas around Merced where the elementary schools have come close to not having drinking water because of wells drying up.

No Water Transfers out of Merced

What prevents someone from buying land, putting in high capacity pumps, and pumping groundwater and selling it southern CA? This has happened. There should be no transfers out of the area but with surface water, water districts can transfer between water districts. There is, however, a County ordinance that prevents an individual from purchasing land, pumping the water, and selling it elsewhere.

Responses Related to Water Quality

Water Shortages Increase Contamination. In Planada, the contaminants from whatever is sprayed on the fields is getting into water that is available.

Monitoring Movement of Contaminant Plumes. With the groundwater modeling, can there be plumes of contaminants? How are they monitored? Plumes worsening or moving is the undesirable result.

Responses Related to Water and Economics

Smaller farmers are not able to afford deeper wells.

Responses Related to How Specific Items of Concern will be Addressed in the GSP

How will the GSP address groundwater being used at water bottling plants?

How will the GSP address population growth and crop changes?

Discussion about Sustainability

Following the discussion about undesirable results, attendees were asked for their thoughts and ideas about what sustainability means to them. They were asked to share about "What do

you see as sustainability goals for you? What does sustainability mean to you, what does sustainability look like for you? The following input was received.

Responses Related to Sustainability Solutions

- Use conservation techniques.
- Water is required to be recharged, so increase recharge in wet years.
- Increase groundwater banking.
- Harvest water in urban areas.
- Use the groundwater model for land use decisions.
- Capture Merced River flood flows.
- Consider use of groundwater credits.
- Secure reliable surface water supply for recharge.
- In wet years, turn water into fields for recharge.
- Capture water from creeks in the Merced Subbasin for recharge.
- Provide equitable access to whatever the water resources are for all. If good, then good for everyone. If bad, then bad for everyone.
- Identify subsidence areas and focus recharge efforts there.
- Capture and retain storm water from Owens Creek.
- Merced Irrigation District (MID) Canal draining to recharge lands.

Responses Related to Economics and Sustainability

- Farming and economics -- need to keep the economy healthy, water is the driver of the whole area.
- What protects the value of the land?

Responses Related to Funding

- Is Department of Water Resources funding the GSP?
- What constraints on management actions or projects are anticipated such as funding? Are there others?

Responses Related to Other Ideas

- If more water retention is the only answer, how do we carry that message forward?
- Consider climate change factors.
- SED (the Substitute Environmental Document) if approved and implemented would be devastating as it will reduce San Joaquin River flows.

Discussion about Additional Concerns about Land Subsidence

1. Identify subsidence areas and have recharge areas put in.
2. Supply surface water to subsidence areas.
3. Capture urban runoff in subsidence areas.

4. Federal funding needed [for management actions and projects].
5. Appropriate monitoring of layers is needed to understand where subsidence occurs.
6. Flood benefits – flood and storm waters should be used for recharge.

Roles and Responsibilities for Developing the Merced Subbasin GSP

Governing Boards

Consistent with the requirements of SGMA, water management and land management agencies in Merced Subbasin formed three Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSAs): the Merced Irrigation-Urban Groundwater Sustainability Agency, the Merced Subbasin Groundwater Sustainability Agency, and the Turner Island Water District Groundwater Sustainability Agency. The three GSAs are collaborating on developing one Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) for the entire Merced Groundwater Subbasin by January 2020. To develop the Plan, the GSAs will review groundwater conditions and identify means to ensure the long-term sustainability of the Merced Groundwater Subbasin.

Coordinating Committee

The three GSAs for the Merced Groundwater Subbasin have formed a Coordinating Committee of senior staff and governing board members to coordinate day-to-day planning activities and public outreach. Meetings of the Coordinating Committee will be noticed and open to the public and are held the fourth Monday of the month.

Stakeholder Committee

The three GSAs have also approved the formation of a Stakeholder Committee. The Stakeholder Committee serves as community representatives to advise the Coordinating Committee and the GSA governing boards on groundwater conditions, management issues and needs, and projects and management actions to improve sustainability in the basin. Meetings of the Stakeholder Committee are open to the public and are held on the fourth Monday of the month.

General Public, Landowners, Farmers, Ranchers in the Merced Subbasin

Your role is to provide input as the GSP is developed. You can submit comments through the GSP website: www.mercedsgma.org. Consider attending a Board meeting, Coordinating Committee meeting, or Stakeholder Committee meeting, or a Community Workshop to learn more, ask questions, and provide input.