



MEETING MINUTES – Merced GSP Stakeholder Advisory Committee

SUBJECT: Stakeholder Advisory Committee Meeting

DATE/TIME: July 12, 2021 at 1:00 PM

LOCATION: Zoom Virtual Meeting

Stakeholder Committee Members In Attendance:

	Representative	Community Aspect Representation
<input type="checkbox"/>	Arlan Thomas	MIDAC member
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Ben Migliazzo (alternate)	Live Oak Farms
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Bob Kelley	Stevinson Representative
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Breanne Ramos	MCFB
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Craig Arnold	Arnold Farms
<input type="checkbox"/>	Darren Olguin	Resident of Merced County
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Dave Serrano	Serrano Farms - Le Grand
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	David Belt	Foster Farms
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Emma Reyes	Martin Reyes Farm/Land Leveling
<input type="checkbox"/>	Gil Cardon (has left committee, replacement TBD)	Merced Co. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce
<input type="checkbox"/>	Greg Olzack	Atwater Resident
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Jean Okuye	E Merced RCD
<input type="checkbox"/>	Joe Sansoni	Sansoni Farms/MCFB
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Joe Scoto	Scoto Brothers/McSwain School Dist.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Jose Moran	Livingston City Council
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Lacy Carothers	Cal Am Water
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Lisa Baker	Clayton Water District
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Lisa Kayser-Grant	Sierra Club
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Mark Maxwell	UC Merced
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Maxwell Norton	Unincorporated area
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Nav Athwal	TriNut Farms
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Olivia Gomez	Community of Planada
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Amanda Monaco (alternate)	Leadership Counsel
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Parry Klassen	ESJWQC
<input type="checkbox"/>	Reyn Akinoa	River Partners
<input type="checkbox"/>	Rick Drayer	Merced/Mariposa Cattlemen
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Robert Weimer	Weimer Farms
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Simon Vander Woude	Sandy Mush MWC
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Susan Walsh	City of Merced
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Thomas Dinwoodie	Master Gardener/McSwain
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Trevor Hutton	Valley Land Alliance
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Wes Myers	Merced Grassland Coalition

Meeting Minutes



1. Call to Order and Welcome
 - a. Charles Gardiners (Catalyst) welcomed the group.
2. Introductions and Roll Call
 - a. Stakeholder Advisory Representatives for the Merced Subbasin GSP introduced themselves (see attendance record above).
 - b. Charles Gardiners (Catalyst) provided a summary of responses to a survey of committee members conducted online ahead of the meeting (25 responses) about resuming in-person meetings.
 - i. Comments ranged from wanting in person to desire for hybrid approach (both in person and option for virtual); the major limitation to a hybrid system is confirming a meeting space and the available technology.
 - ii. Concern was raised over losing the voices of people who can't attend in-person if there's not a way to include them remotely.
 - iii. Emma Reyes shared that vaccination status can be requested or can be stated as part of a policy, but participants don't need to provide that information as it is private medical information.
 - iv. The Merced County Farm Bureau is working to upgrade their conference room for remote integration over the next several months which may be a possibility for future hybrid meetings.
 - v. GSAs and W&C will explore technology and room availability to see if hybrid option is possible for October meeting.
3. Review of Topics Covered at April Stakeholder Advisory Committee Meeting
 - a. Samantha Salvia (Woodard & Curran) briefly listed the topics covered at the April meeting and reminded the group all slides and meeting notes are posted on the www.MercedSGMA.org website. Topics covered:
 - i. Overview of Merced GSP (sustainable management criteria, sustainability goal, etc.)
 - ii. GSP Implementation Progress (grants, monitoring, projects)
 - iii. Annual Report Summary (changes in gw levels in WY 2020)
 - iv. Data Gaps Plan Development (gaps identified in GSP and grant funded work to prepare a plan to prioritize and address)
4. SGMA Overview
 - a. Samantha Salvia (Woodard & Curran) explained that given the group only meets quarterly and the GSP is a large document, the GSAs want to start each meeting with some context. She provided a brief explanation of SGMA's purpose emphasizing that SGMA is meant to foster local management of groundwater and that SGMA gives GSAs authority to establish groundwater extraction allocations and collect fees. SGMA and GSPs adopted under SGMA cannot alter water rights.
 - b. Lacey McBride (MSGSA) provided an informational update about how Merced County is considering updating the Groundwater Ordinance for well permitting (staff proposal currently being developed). The proposal would shift determination of consistency with GSPs from the County to the appropriate GSA. Lacey pointed out that under current conditions, the County is making a determination of whether well permit applications are consistent with GSPs they did not directly develop.
 - i. Q: What about existing well replacement? A: Under the current staff proposal, well replacement would fall under the GSAs the same as for new wells. Existing exemptions would be pre-empted by the fact that the applicant is within jurisdiction of a GSA managing under a GSP.
 - ii. Q: What about hardship such as replacement of a domestic well? A: That is something the GSAs will need to consider as they develop their policies if the proposal moves forward.



- iii. Lisa Kayser-Grant: How many GSAs are considered under this policy? A: Merced County-wide has 17 GSAs across portions of several subbasins, but the Merced Subbasin only has 3 GSAs (and 1 GSP).
- iv. Q: What is the level of oversight on consistency between GSPs? A: DWR reviews GSPs for consistency across each individual basin, and each GSP has to adhere to SGMA requirements as well.

5. Merced GSP Overview

- a. Samantha Salvia (Woodard & Curran) provided more information specific to the Merced GSP and ongoing review by DWR. She outlined what DWR has shared about its 3 review pathways for GSPs (approved, incomplete with corrective actions, inadequate). She described the feedback DWR has provided on the plans it has released public information on so far (2 approvals, and 2 “internal consultation”). She reiterated that DWR expects GSAs to be implementing their GSPs during the review process.
 - i. Q: If there are questions from DWR’s review, does this put us back to “zero” for Committees and decision-making? A: DWR feedback is more likely to be specifically targeted to areas of the GSP where DWR wants more information or support for analyses. Not so much a “redo” as a “refinement”.
 - ii. Q: Are the Plans that have already received feedback due to lack of documentation or weak implementation? A: Santa Cruz was approved while two others (Cuyama and Paso Robles) have started a more informal “internal consultation” with DWR (this information consultation avoids triggering the formal 180 day period for GSAs to address deficiencies, not fully declared “incomplete”). DWR’s initial feedback is published publicly in the SGMA Portal.
 - iii. Comment (Amanda Monaco): One takeaway from Leadership Counsel is that in addition to comments on sustainable management criteria and linkage to undesirable results, DWR wants to see as part of undesirable results that GSAs are looking at potential drinking water impacts and whether there will be impacts, as well as whether or not a mitigation program is required. .
- b. Samantha Salvia (Woodard & Curran) walked the group through the Merced GSP’s estimates of water budgets, calculation of sustainable yield, and the development of the framework for allocation of the sustainable yield among the GSAs. The Merced GSP contains an explanation that GSAs intend to allocate water to each GSA but have not yet reached agreement on allocations or how they will be implemented. As the GSAs continue to work on basin-wide allocations, they are evaluating GSA-specific 5 yr targets to make immediate progress towards sustainability while allocation framework discussions are ongoing. Samantha invited each GSA rep to describe their 5 yr target.
- c. Matt Beaman (MIUGSA) described MIUGSA’s tentative target as a goal of reducing pumping of native groundwater to 1.5AF/AC by 2025. He further explained that a public process is underway within the GSA to develop principles and guideline for GSP implementation within MIUGSA (meetings expected to start August). He said MIUGSA recognizes that the ultimate sustainable number might be lower (than 1.5 AF/AC) but they wanted to set an aggressive intermediate target. Info available at <http://mercedgroundwater.org/>
- d. Lacey McBride (MSGSA) shared that MSGSA adopted via resolution on 7/8/21 a 5 yr target of 15,000 AFY reduction in consumptive use of groundwater in MSGSA by 2025. She acknowledged that greater reductions will be needed, but that this target puts the GSA on a glidepath to allow time for programs and projects to get into place in the first five years, and then additional reductions in years afterward will need to be steeper.
- e. Kel Mitchell (TIWD GSA #1) confirmed that all wells in TIWD GSA#1 are metered and that 1.5 AF/AC is a likely achievable 5 yr target but nothing has gone to the TIWD GSA#1 board formally yet. He stated that 1.5 AF/AC will be subject to additional discussions and collaboration at the Coordination Committee level.



- f. Q: MIUGSA to reduce to 1.5 AF/AC by when? Will the MSGSA target eventually include AF/AC limit to users? Any ideas on when that clarification will be made public?
 - i. A (MIUGSA): MIUGSA board has not taken specific action on this. Additional technical work and the public process are ongoing.
 - ii. A (MSGSA): There's no single silver bullet for MSGSA to reduce consumptive use – it will be accomplished through a variety of projects and programs. The GSA has a technical advisory committee that is looking at this. Land repurposing will likely be part of a solution because it can provide multiple benefits (habitat, protection of domestic wells around DACs, etc.) along with allocations.
 - g. Q: So is the thought is we'll reduce pumping by 1.5 acre feet and then to meet the rest of the gap, we'll come up with additional surface water sources or establish a trading market?
 - i. A (MIUGSA): There is no set schedule beyond the five-year target at this time.
 - ii. A (MSGSA): Similar to MIUGSA, not sure exactly when bigger discussion about trading/markets/etc. will happen down the road because there are more near-term framework discussions to be had. The intent of the 5 yr targets is to help us make progress while we figure out what sustainability ultimately looks like for this basin.
 - h. Q: How many wells are metered in the Subbasin? A: The GSAs do not have data on how many are metered currently, except for TIWD GSA-#1. Requiring metering on wells is one management option available to the GSAs.
6. Summary of April Coordination Committee Meeting
- a. Chris Hewes (Woodard & Curran) provided a summary of current basin conditions that were presented at the April Coordination Committee meeting, including spring 2021 measurements of groundwater levels.
 - b. Samantha Salvia (Woodard & Curran) provided a summary of the April presentation to the Coordination Committee about the Meadowbrook Intertie Feasibility Study. The goal of the grant funded study was to evaluate the needs and feasibility of connecting the Meadowbrook water system to either the Atwater or Merced city water system. The study found that interties to both Merced and Atwater systems are feasible with costs ranging from \$1M to \$2.5M depending on location.
 - c. Chris Hewes (Woodard & Curran) provided a summary of the methodology and progress to date on the Data Gaps Plan. The Data Gaps Plan is grant funded and with a goal of developing a plan that identifies and ranks priority areas for the installation of monitoring wells or subsidence monitoring stations to support basin characterization and future GSP refinement. Chris shared the results of the SAC's April meeting poll on priorities for data gaps to fill. The Plan is currently drafted and being reviewed by GSA staff. Chris shared preliminary results of the spatial analysis tool showing areas recommended for additional monitoring.
 - i. Q: Can private well owners be compelled to have their wells participate in the GSP monitoring network? A: No.
 - ii. Comment from Bob Kelley: I have let WC know that we have installed a dedicated internet item in monitoring well on the east portion of the Stevinson Area. It is close to an orange area you cite in your tool methodology. Contact Betty Lindeman for inclusion of this real time information. I'm sure you have her email address.
 - iii. Q: Will there be outreach to well owners to encourage participation in the monitoring program? A: Yes, the next step in the implementation of the Data Gaps Plan will be to conduct outreach. There is currently a standing call for monitoring data on the MercedSGMA website.
 - iv. Q: Is the alternate to volunteering for groundwater level monitoring to be expensive remote sensing? A: For groundwater levels, it is more likely that new dedicated monitoring wells would need to be installed in right-of-ways or by finding willing landowners. . Note: A Remote-sensing tool is also being developed under grant funding as a potential alternative to *metering*, which is very expensive.



- v. Q: Do volunteered wells need construction information to be part of the network? A: SGMA doesn't necessarily require construction information but we do need to know which aquifer it is completed in; there's the possibility of running a camera down the well to determine this.
 - 1. Follow-up comment from Parry Klassen: ESJWQC asked well owners to volunteer wells for their Groundwater Quality Trend Monitoring program and were amazed at the number of owners who volunteered, but most didn't qualify as they didn't have construction information. The ESJWQC Board might agree to provide information previously collected for volunteers in the data gap areas to approach them to be part of the network.
 - vi. Written Comment in chat: I thought USGS was doing a lot of monitoring of the zone below Corcoran Clay. *Follow-up response in chat:* USGS has been in Stanislaus and Merced Counties monitoring domestic wells. 60-80 wells is planned I understand
7. Drought Preparedness
- a. Matt Beaman (MIUGSA) provided a description of drought-related resources as California continues to experience an extreme drought.
 - b. Lacey McBride (MSGSA): MSGSA's Technical Advisory Committee met in May and discussed drought and domestic wells. The committee's recommendation was to gather better information about domestic well locations before considering a mitigation program (data from the County about post-1996 permitted domestic wells may overcount because it doesn't include records for destroyed wells.) For now the best resource for emergency water is Self Help Enterprises (SHE). They are the administrator of state funds to provide tanked water or help drill new wells.
8. Public Comment
- a. Ursula Stock (via email):
 - i. Attached is a very good article on the status of water in California, and I hope it will be referenced when making decisions, and included with my public comment, <https://thevalleycitizen.com/valley-water-belongs-to-the-people/>
The water of Merced County needs to stay in Merced County. The natural system of the entire valley is an "ecosystem" onto itself. Low snowpack is constantly blamed on global warming, but our handling of valley water is crucial to snowpack. Over 95% of the Valley wetlands have been drained, cutting evapotranspiration. As we divert surface water, reducing recharge and the health of valley biomes, we further impact snowpack. As we lower or dry out the groundwater basin, that has a on the snowpack too. The less moisture in the valley, the less there is to evaporate, form clouds and rain/snow in the mountains- to flow back down our rivers. It is all interconnected.
For example, lowered groundwater tables become too deep for the tap roots of indiginois trees to reach, causes the death of the tree, stops the huge movement of water it transpires, and reduces soil biomes that are tree dependent. The loss of these biomes result in the loss of water retention around the tree. In the early spring, you can easily see this water retention due to trees, when green encircles the trunks, while surrounding treeless areas remain brown. The Tule Fog is impacted as ground water recedes, which stone fruits and many local plants "mine" for water, further reducing evapotranspiration. Water is a finite resource, and as we remove the water from the valley, and reduce the flow of that water, we impact its availability to snowpack and to the valley.
Like the human body, which can sustain a sudden loss of up to 14% of its blood in a short incident, and at 15% begins to suffer dire consequences, our watersheds have a tipping point. That tipping point is desertification, and humans have done this all over the world. Will we do it here too, as we fuss about water rights, versus the viability of the entire valley and delta ecosystem upon which we depend?
Keep the water of Merced County in Merced County, and work to find nature based solutions to " living within the means" provided by this magnificent Valley.
Ursula Stock, Merced

- b. No other public comment during the meeting.
- 9. Next steps and adjourn
 - a. Q: Could we change time of meetings from 1pm to 1:30PM? A: GSAs and consultants will consider this along with evaluating options for hybrid meeting location.



**Next Regular Meeting
TBD mid-October 2021**

Information also available online at mercedsgma.org