



Stanislaus County Water Advisory Committee

Minutes

March 26th, 2025, 9:00 a.m.

Stanislaus County Farm Bureau

Members Present:

Daniel Bays
Louis Brichetto
Larry Byrd
Joseph Day
Caitie Diemel

Jim Mortensen
Tom Orvis
Sean Roddy
Cooper Rossiter
Edward Tobias

Rod Vilas
Navjot Athwal
Katie Staack
Trent Voss
Christy McKinnon

Members Absent:

Vince Dkyzeul
Terry Withrow

Rachelle Antinetti
Tim Sanders

- I. Call to Order at 9:01 am (The entire meeting can be viewed [Water Advisory Committee - Groundwater Resources - Environmental Resources - Stanislaus County](#) and by selecting the video option for March 26th, 2025, Water Advisory Committee Meeting)
- II. Pledge of Allegiance
- III. Public Comment
- IV. Roll Call

V. Action Items (subject to formal vote):

A quorum of voting members was present

- I. Approval of January 29th, 2025 Meeting Minutes
Motion: Jim Mortensen
Second: Tim Orvis

VI. Informational Items (not subject to a formal vote):

- I. **Robert Kostlivy – DER Updates** – Robert Kostlivy provided a summary of a meeting following a February 19th discussion on well mitigation and groundwater pumping reductions. During this meeting, stakeholders from the western portion of the basin expressed concerns about the proposed approach, particularly opposing a “one size fits all” strategy. Their primary concern is that water use varies across the subbasin, some areas relying heavily on wells that may be overused, while others depend on surface water. An issue then arises regarding the cost-sharing or regulatory measures that need to be tailored accordingly.

The urgency of finalizing a plan within the next ten months to meet the State of California’s approval timeline was emphasized. Kostlivy suggested that meetings may need to occur more frequently to ensure timely communication with the Board of Supervisors and to address any pressing issues as they arise.

- II. **Christy McKinnon – ETSGSA Updates – April 8, 2025, Groundwater Use Fee Protest Hearing**

Christy McKinnon announced that the Proposition 218 protest hearing for the proposed groundwater use fee will take place at 9:00 A.M. on Tuesday, April 8th. The fee study outlines the projected costs of projects and management actions necessary to achieve groundwater sustainability. The proposed fees will fund critical initiatives such as water replenishment, transitional water programs, multi-benefit land repurposing, well mitigation, and demand reduction strategies.

McKinnon noted that if there is no majority protest at the hearing, the fee may be adopted during the Board's April 27th meeting, with initial invoices to landowners expected in June or July. She highlighted the upcoming opportunity for public engagement at Cortez Hall on March 27th, and the tools that landowners can use to review their 2023-2024 groundwater use, understand potential fees based on usage categories, and explore savings through participation in land use change programs.

III. Christy McKinnon – Modesto and Turlock Subbasin GSP Approval Determinations

Christy McKinnon reported that on February 27th, the California Department of Water Resources issued approval determinations for 16 basin GSP's, including those for the Turlock and Modesto Subbasins. These approvals indicate that both GSPs have sufficiently addressed prior deficiencies, met the SGMA objectives, and comply with GSP regulations. McKinnon attributed this milestone to the collaborative efforts of scientists, engineers, policymakers, and community members dedicated to sustainable groundwater management.

The two primary deficiencies previously identified by DWR were corrected in both subbasins' GSPs. These included establishing sustainable management criteria, analyzing impacts on beneficial users at minimum thresholds, and conducting a comprehensive well impact analysis. Additionally, both GSPs addressed overdraft by outlining demand reduction measures, groundwater allocations, and augmentation projects. McKinnon noted that the State's approval came with recommendations for future updates, including refining well impact analysis to better assess effects on public supply and environmental users, and updating monitoring networks. Both GSPs must also reevaluate sustainable management criteria once forthcoming state guidance on managing surface water depletions is released.

IV. Christy McKinnon – Modesto Subbasin STRGBA Groundwater Sustainability Agency Workshop #1: Well Mitigation Program and Management Actions

McKinnon gave a summary of a recent Modesto Subbasin workshop, the focus being on implementing demand management actions to maintain sustainable groundwater levels and avoiding undesirable outcomes projected by 2027. The approved GSP outlines interim milestones and requires

adaptive strategies, including groundwater use monitoring, reporting programs, groundwater extraction fees, and voluntary conservation efforts. Key proposals include a groundwater allocation system, well registration, and a potential pumping credit or trading program to give landowners flexibility while promoting conservation.

Additionally, McKinnon highlighted the developing well mitigation program that addresses domestic wells at risk of going dry, with emergency water delivery, well deepening, and long-term solutions under consideration. Input is being sought from landowners on program design, service providers, and management strategies. There was also an emphasis on gathering accurate data to improve water budgets and support future projects. Future workshops will explore allocation methods, exemptions, and ways to adapt programs based on ongoing data and changing groundwater conditions.

V. Christy McKinnon – Delta-Mendota Subbasin Pumping Reduction Plan Updates

Christy McKinnon provided an update on the Delta-Mendota Subbasin Pumping Reduction Plan. Under the GSP, Stanislaus County is required to reduce groundwater pumping from the lower aquifer in the Stanislaus County white areas by approximately 1,000 acre-feet by the end of 2030, with 20% reductions to be phased in annually starting in 2025. To support this effort, the County sent mailers to all out-of-district landowners who may not be exempt from the plan adopted by the Board of Supervisors. So far, 11 responses have been received. More are to be received as landowners are submitting questions and applications.

McKinnon also proposed exploring programs like paper water transfers, recharge credit programs, or options where landowners could contribute to district recharge projects in exchange for reduced pumping requirements. She closed by opening the floor for guidance on what role Stanislaus County and the DER should play, how to fund feasibility studies, and how best to move forward with engagement and implementation strategies.

V. Round Table Discussion:

The committee members' conversation reflected a mix of concern and forward-thinking from stakeholders affected by SGMA implementation. There was concern expressed about the financial burdens and bureaucracy that

have emerged from groundwater regulations, suggesting that the need for pragmatic decision making is imminent.

The discussion also addressed how irrigation practices have changed, specifically, the shift in the almond industry from flood irrigation to micro and drip systems. While more efficient in water use, this shift has decreased groundwater recharge. It was noted that newer developments are attempting to incorporate both systems to retain flexibility.

The group emphasized the importance of keeping local control, minimizing regulatory overreach, and preserving flexibility in how water is managed and moved across the region.

VI. Meeting adjourned at 11:00 am

VII. Scheduling of Next Meeting:

Wednesday, May 28, 2025, at 9:00 a.m.

Meeting location: Stanislaus Farm Bureau,
1201 L St. Modesto, Ca

*Underlined items are Action Items subject to vote as described in the committee by-laws