



Stanislaus County Water Advisory Committee

Minutes

January 28, 2026, 9:00a.m.
Stanislaus Farm Bureau

Members Present to Vote:

Daniel Bays
Caitie Diemel
David Wright
Rod Vilas

Christy McKinnon
Jim Mortensen
Tom Orvis
Sue Zwahlen
Joseph P Day

Tim Sanders
Terry Withrow
Larry Byrd
Katie Staack
Trent Voss

Members Absent:

Louis Brichetto
Vince Dkyzeul

Cooper Rossiter
Edward Tobias

Navjot Athwal

- I. Call to Order at 9:00 a.m. (The entire meeting can be viewed at <https://www.stancounty.com/er/groundwater/wac.shtm> and by selecting the video option for the January 28, 2026, Water Advisory Committee meeting.
- II. Pledge of Allegiance
- III. Public Comment - None
- IV. Roll Call
 - I. A quorum of voting members was present.
- V. Guest Introductions
- VI. **Action Items (subject to formal vote):**
 - I. Approval of September 25, 2025, Meeting Minutes- **Attachment 1** The meeting minutes were presented by the Chairperson. The members were asked to consider the minutes for approval.

Motion: Tim Sanders

Second: Jim Mortensen

Vote: Unanimous

VII. Informational Items (not subject to a formal vote)

I. Sarah Hamilton, Stantec – Presentation Stanislaus County Drought Resilience Plan

Sarah Hamilton of Stantec presented an overview of the Draft Drought Resilience Plan (DRP) developed for Stanislaus County. The plan was prepared in response to state legislation, including Assembly Bill 1668, Senate Bill 606, and Senate Bill 552, with a focus on improving drought and water shortage preparedness for state small water systems and domestic wells.

The presentation outlined the background, structure, and key components of the draft plan, as well as next steps for review and finalization. Senate Bill 552 requires counties to form a task force to facilitate drought preparedness; in Stanislaus County, the existing Water Advisory Committee fulfills this role.

The DRP includes a countywide risk assessment evaluating vulnerabilities to drought and water shortages resulting from both drought and non-drought hazards, such as water quality issues, wildfires, and power outages. The assessment utilized a Department of Water Resources (DWR) water shortage vulnerability tool that integrates physical and social vulnerability indicators to identify higher-risk areas, including clusters of domestic wells and state small water systems.

Based on the risk assessment, the plan identifies short-term and long-term actions to address water supply vulnerabilities. Short-term actions focus on immediate response measures, such as emergency drinking water supplies, water hauling, temporary tanks, and expedited well permitting during emergency events. Long-term actions are intended to reduce future vulnerability and include potential system consolidation, interties between water systems, development of a drinking water well mitigation program, regional infrastructure coordination, and addressing data gaps related to well information.

The plan also outlines implementation and coordination strategies, including assignment of lead and supporting entities for each action, integration with existing county plans, identification of potential funding opportunities, and ongoing oversight by the County Environmental Resources Department. The DRP proposes periodic updates, consistent with other county planning efforts.

Next steps include review and comment on the draft plan, incorporation of feedback, and preparation of a final Drought Resilience Plan for county consideration and adoption.

Review and provide comments by February 11th, and by March 4 is the goal to have the final DRP compiled and submitted to the County.

II. Ryan Aston, CSI Consulting Group – Presentation Northwestern Delta-Mendota GSA Development Planning and Regulatory Fee Study for Stanislaus County.

Ryan Astin of SCI Consulting Group presented an overview of a Phase One funding options analysis for the Northwestern Delta–Mendota Groundwater Sustainability Agency (GSA). SCI Consulting Group assists GSAs statewide with legally compliant funding mechanisms to support GSP implementation.

The purpose of this phase is exploratory and informational. The project is intended to identify and evaluate legally defensible and practical funding options, compare methodologies, and support stakeholder understanding. No fee or assessment adoption is proposed at this stage.

The project scope includes three primary components: (1) evaluation of funding mechanisms aligned with GSA costs and legal requirements, (2) stakeholder engagement and outreach to explain options and trade-offs, and (3) preparation of a Funding Options Memorandum summarizing alternatives and providing preliminary rate scenarios based on parcel data and cost assumptions.

Three primary legal funding frameworks were discussed:

- Water Code §10730 Fees, which are board-adopted and limited to administrative and program costs;
- Water Code §10730.2 Fees, which are subject to Proposition 218 majority protest procedures and may fund a broader range of GSA activities; and
- Benefit Assessments (Proposition 218), which require weighted ballot approval and may fund both administrative and capital costs.

The presentation also reviewed common funding methodologies used by GSAs, including volumetric (extraction-based) charges, irrigated acreage charges, land acreage charges, and hybrid approaches that combine multiple methodologies to address different types of groundwater users.

Discussion highlighted challenges faced by smaller GSAs, cost considerations for domestic well mitigation programs, equity among groundwater users, and the importance of stakeholder engagement prior to selecting any funding mechanism.

Next steps include refining parcel and groundwater use data, further analysis of GSA costs, development of preliminary rate scenarios, and continued stakeholder outreach.

III. Christy McKinnon – Updates

Board of Supervisor’s meeting on 1/28/2026, the Board of Supervisors approved and adopted the Modesto Subbasin Well Mitigation Plan and the Groundwater Use Management Program, authorizing the Department of Environmental Resources to

implement the program in coordination with Subbasin GSAs and member agencies. The Board directed staff to develop action plans for approval, including demand management measures, by January 31, 2027, and to return to the Board on any policy-related issues. Supervisors Buck Condit and Terry Withrow were designated to participate in groundwater management discussions, and staff were authorized to retain a third-party consultant to review competing technical reports to support development of a fair and equitable action plan. The County was also affirmed as the management area steward for the non-district East and West areas, with final program documents made available through the meeting agenda and CRFA website.

Turlock Subbasin – ETGSA Updates:

February 11, 2026: Technical Assistance Fair, 11am – 3pm – **Attachment 4** - It's going to be an opportunity for landowners to learn about the GSA incentive programs to decrease reliance on groundwater, highlighting the multi-benefit land repurposing projects. Also, provide technical assistance to help landowners select projects that might be viable for their needs.

Vegetation Land Cover Requirements & Resources Quick Guide – **Attachment 5** - The guidelines include additional resources to help growers plant cover crops, cover crops that increase water infiltration rates through roof-created channels. This is an easy way for many landowners to improve soil health, make impactful groundwater savings, and improve drought resilience.

Turlock Multi-Benefit Land Repurposing (MLRP) webpage - <https://turlock-mlrp.netlify.app/> - additional information can be found at the webpage, where you can also find the program application.

VIII. Roundtable Discussion

During the meeting, members discussed recurring technical difficulties with Zoom, particularly issues with viewing presentations. There was frustration about delays caused by screen-sharing problems and questions about whether Zoom is required for meetings or if alternatives should be considered. It was noted that any change would require further review, legal consultation, and a formal vote, especially due to new Brown Act legislation taking effect July 1. Staff acknowledged that multi-factor authentication and Zoom settings may be contributing to the issues and committed to troubleshooting, improving screen-sharing procedures, and possibly sharing presentations in advance (e.g., via the website or agenda) to minimize disruptions. Several members expressed a preference for in-person attendance and emphasized the importance of board members being present and prepared to keep meetings running smoothly.

Meeting Adjourned: 10:46 a.m.

IX. Scheduling of Next Regular Meeting –

Wednesday, March 25, 2026, at 9:00 a.m. - Meeting location: Stanislaus Farm Bureau, 1201 L St. Modesto, CA.

Wednesday, May 27, 2026, at 9:00 a.m. - Meeting location: Stanislaus Farm Bureau, 1201 L St. Modesto, CA.

PREPARED BY:

Christy McKinnon, Groundwater Resources Manager

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