



## Stanislaus County Water Advisory Committee

### Minutes

March 25, 2026, 9:00a.m.  
Stanislaus Farm Bureau

#### Members Present to Vote:

Daniel Bays  
Caitie Diemel  
David Wright  
Louis Brichetto

Christy McKinnon  
Jim Mortensen  
Tom Orvis  
Sue Zwahlen  
Edward Tobias

Tim Sanders  
Terry Withrow  
Trent Voss  
Navjot Athwal

#### Members Absent:

Vince Dkyzeul  
Rod Vilas

Cooper Rossiter  
Joseph P Day

Larry Byrd  
Katie Staack

- 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 January 28, 2026, 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 - Presentation - Attachment 2**

A presentation was provided on the development of the County's Drought Resilience Plan, incorporating feedback received following the draft presented in January. The plan was developed in compliance with Senate Bill 552, which requires counties to support state small water systems and domestic wells during drought or water shortage emergencies.

The existing Water Advisory Committee fulfills the role of the required task force and is responsible for plan development support, coordination with partner agencies, and public outreach. The plan development process included a comprehensive risk assessment using the Department of Water Resources' vulnerability tools to evaluate physical and social risks to wells across the county. This analysis identified high-risk areas and well-density clusters to inform planning efforts.

The plan outlines both short-term and long-term actions. Short-term actions focus on emergency response measures, including provision of bottled water, establishment of water filling stations, and expedited well permitting. Long-term strategies include system consolidation, interconnections (interties), well mitigation programs, infrastructure improvements, and addressing data gaps related to groundwater and well conditions.

An emergency response framework was developed consisting of three stages—information, alert, and response—with defined triggers to guide implementation of actions. The plan also includes a distribution strategy for emergency water supplies. Implementation measures include assigning responsibilities to County departments, identifying funding needs, coordinating with external agencies, and integrating the plan into broader County and regional planning efforts. The plan will be monitored and updated regularly, with a standard five-year review cycle or as needed following emergency events.

### **II. Mike Tietze – Demand Reduction Outcomes, Groundwater Use Fee Status and Plans for Fiscal Year 2026 - Presentation**

The East Turlock Subbasin Groundwater Sustainability Agency (GSA) continues to advance implementation of its Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) through coordinated demand reduction measures, groundwater accounting, and infrastructure development. During the 2025 reporting period the GSA finalized groundwater use data, applied outcomes to its fee structure, and issued true-up invoices to inform fiscal year 2026 planning.

Results indicate that total groundwater use (146,900 acre-feet) remained well below the allocated supply (165,800 acre-feet), exceeding required reduction targets by approximately 19,000 acre-feet. Relative to baseline conditions, the GSA achieved an estimated reduction of over 24,000 acre-feet, reflecting a strong initial performance toward meeting SGMA-mandated sustainability objectives.

Demand reductions were achieved through a combination of management actions, including fallowing, expanded cover cropping practices, and in-lieu recharge programs utilizing surface water deliveries in coordination with irrigation districts. Concurrently, the GSA is advancing key capital projects, including pipeline infrastructure and recharge projects, to increase long-term water supply reliability and groundwater replenishment capacity.

Financially, reduced groundwater use resulted in lower-than-projected fee revenues, necessitating adjustments in future budget planning. Additionally, broader economic conditions—such as declining commodity prices, reduced land values, and agricultural contractions are contributing to decreased water demand, while also presenting challenges for growers and regional economic stability.

Looking ahead, the GSA recognizes that achieving long-term sustainability will require continued demand management, expanded surface water utilization, and execution of strategic land repurposing projects. Current estimates indicate that approximately 21,000 acres may need to be repurposed or rotationally fallowed to align with the Turlock Subbasin GSP sustainability goals.

Early monitoring data suggests that groundwater levels are beginning to stabilize in some areas; however, sustained implementation of projects and adaptive management strategies will be essential to meeting regulatory milestones and ensuring the long-term successful management of the basin.

### **III. Christy McKinnon – Modesto Subbasin Groundwater Use Management Program Non-District East Action Plan and Next Steps – Presentation**

Following the County's adoption of the Groundwater Use Management Program (GUMP) for the Modesto Subbasin, the Department of Environmental Resources (DER) provided an update to stakeholders in response to expressed concerns, with the goal of improving clarity, building consensus, and outlining next steps—particularly for the Non-District East (NDE) Action Plan.

The program was developed in response to state recommendations tied to the approved GSP, requiring a groundwater allocation and demand management framework to arrest declining water level trends and overdraft in the NDE management area. The GUMP establishes a subbasin-wide approach that allocates groundwater based on sustainable yield across four management areas, using overlying land area as the basis with a collaborative resource sharing component. Management responsibilities are assigned to seven Groundwater Sustainability Agency (GSA) member agencies with Stanislaus County acting as the management area steward for the unincorporated areas of the NDE and Non-District West (NDW) management areas.

The County clarified that it does not have regulatory authority over incorporated cities, including the City of Riverbank, and is responsible only for unincorporated (out-of-district) areas. This distinction raised stakeholder concerns regarding equity, particularly related to groundwater extraction and perceived differences in regulation between urban and agricultural users.

For NDE, where significant overdraft and declining groundwater levels have been identified, the County is responsible for developing an Action Plan to meet reduction targets and timelines outlined in the GWUMP. To support this effort, the Board of Supervisors directed staff to procure a third-party consultant to review existing technical studies and ensure the Action Plan is based on accurate, comprehensive, and unbiased data. The intent is to build trust, ensure transparency, and support informed decision-making.

Stakeholders expressed mixed perspectives during discussion. Some questioned the need for additional studies given the time, cost, and prior multi-agency effort invested in GWUMP, while others supported independent review to strengthen data reliability and public confidence. Concerns were also raised about stakeholder inclusion, communication, and perceived inequities between management areas.

The County emphasized its neutral role and commitment to a fair, data-driven process, noting that the Action Plan will outline specific measures to achieve groundwater reductions. Procurement of the consultant is underway, with selection anticipated in the coming months. Meanwhile, other management areas, including NDW, are not currently required to implement action plans due to relatively stable groundwater conditions but must continue monitoring and reporting.

Overall, the discussion highlighted the importance of transparency, stakeholder engagement, and data validation as the County advances toward implementation of the GWUMP by the January 31, 2027 deadline.

### **SGMA Updates:**

#### **Delta-Mendota Subbasin – California Water Board Staff Assessment – Attachment 3**

The State Water Resources Control Board's recent staff report indicates a likely recommendation to return the Delta-Mendota Subbasin to the Department of Water Resources for oversight and avoid being placed on probationary status which is viewed as a positive development because it will allow the Subbasin to retain local control. The Board has identified several reasonable ongoing requirements, such as further refinement of sustainable management criteria related to subsidence and interconnected surface water. A formal decision is expected at the April 7 meeting. If approved, the Department of Water Resources will have up to two years to review the Delta-Mendota Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP). Local GSAs remain confident that the GSP meets minimum regulatory requirements and will continue to coordinate closely with State staff through regular check-ins to ensure continued compliance with the GSP regulations.

#### **Eastern San Joaquin Subbasin – Proposal to Develop Eastern San Joaquin Groundwater Authority Annual Net Groundwater Impact Accounting Framework – Attachment 4**

Staff reported that the Eastern San Joaquin Groundwater Authority recently approved a consultant proposal to develop a groundwater allocation and accounting framework, similar to efforts underway in the Modesto Subbasin. This framework will establish a consistent methodology for distributing sustainable yield among agencies based on

pumping and groundwater management activities and will be developed in coordination with individual agencies to ensure clarity and transparency for landowners.

The Authority has committed to adopting the framework by the end of the year. Subsequently, GSAs in areas identified as being in significant overdraft—likely including portions of Stanislaus County within the Eastern San Joaquin Subbasin—will be required to develop demand management programs by the end of the following year. These programs must be implemented by December 31, 2028.

#### **IV. Roundtable Discussion**

During the roundtable discussion, participants expressed strong perspectives regarding groundwater management and regional water use, emphasizing the importance of collaboration, communication, and long-term planning. Members acknowledged differing viewpoints but maintained mutual respect, noting the complexity and challenges associated with water management decisions.

Discussion included the need for increased outreach and education to stakeholders, as well as recognition of the difficulties faced by agricultural and local communities under evolving water regulations. Participants highlighted the value of existing irrigation districts and the importance of utilizing local surface water resources to support groundwater sustainability.

Concerns were raised regarding potential long-term water transfer agreements, with suggestions to prioritize local basin needs and explore and further alternative solutions such as off-stream storage, infrastructure improvements, and water treatment facilities to benefit local communities and the County as a whole. Emphasis was placed on protecting local water resources to sustain economic stability and advancing groundwater recovery efforts.

Additionally, participants commended ongoing efforts and leadership in developing groundwater management frameworks, acknowledging the challenges of regulatory compliance and expressing optimism about progress and future outcomes.

**Meeting Adjourned: 11:14 am.**

#### **V. Scheduling of Next Regular Meeting –**

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

Maria Razo, Administrative Secretary