

Sonoma Valley Groundwater Sustainability Agency Advisory Committee Meeting

January 11, 2022 | Draft Meeting Summary

Location: Zoom

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MEETING SUMMARY

Welcome, Introductions and Agenda Review

Tim Parker, Advisory Committee Facilitator, opened the meeting at 3:02 p.m. and welcomed the group. Fred Allebach, Chair also welcomed the group and then Ann DuBay conducted roll call.

General Public Comments

None.

Agenda and Schedule Review

Tim Parker reviewed the day's agenda and upcoming calendar.

Action Items Review and Approval of Previous Meeting Summary

Ann DuBay – We will carry the action item “create narrative for 10% conservation” forward again. Recap – Jim Bundschu is primarily looking for a narrative around water conservation and talking points that could be provided to the ag community. He would like to have the ag interests know how much they would be expected to conserve, to have a clear goal post.

Jim Bundschu – My main concern is communicating transparently to the community and one of my future goals is to have someone take charge of the recycled water contract with the Napa County water supply.

- **Action Item: Create narrative for 10% conservation explaining conservation goals to ag community**

Vicki Hill mentioned three typos. Fred Allebach provided some small changes by email. The summary will be posted with the requested changes.

Recap of Sonoma Valley GSP Adoption Hearing

Objective: Inform AC of GSP public hearing and adoption by Board.

Ann DuBay – Thirty-eight members of public attended, there were a total of 45-50 people including Board and Advisory Committee members. Overall, mostly positive comments were received, and the highlight of the meeting was the approval of the Plan; there wasn't much controversy.

Questions/Comments

Fred Allebach – How long did it take to download the GSP to DWR?

DuBay – It is still not done, there are quite a few requirements needed just to download the files. It is a detailed multiple step process. DWR has 20 days to review the GSP to make sure it is complete before they post it for a second round of public review.

Caitlin Cornwall – Congratulations for getting the Plan approved!

No public comment.

GSP Implementation Overview

Objective: Provide overview of GSP implementation activities and Advisory Committee role moving forward.

Marcus Trotta provided an overview of the primary implementation activities planned for the next six-month period. He also provided an inventory of datasets needed for the 2021 Water Year Annual Report and said that staff plans to provide the Advisory Committee with the draft Annual Report for review at the March meeting. He said, staff is still in the process of evaluating current budgets against grants. There is quite a bit of work associated with Prop 68 grant.

Questions/Comments

Greg Carr – With respect to the Prop 68 Permit Sonoma work, it looks like the scope of the work is due on March 20 this year.

Trotta – I think that is what is built into the grant application. I was thinking it might be helpful to have Robert Pennington from Permit Sonoma give us an overview of the work that they've been doing and the overall outcome at your next advisory committee meeting.

Carr – My quandary is that Permit Sonoma committed to doing the work once the scope is completed, that is a budget and work planning element. I wonder if Mr. Pennington could provide some clarification and level of certainty of the ability of Permit Sonoma to do the work.

Caitlin Cornwall – This project is a high priority in my eyes. Tightening up the county's ability to track wells and pumping that are permitted and/or being permitted right now, before the GSP has come into its full powers. I am quite new on the county Planning Commission so just newly aware of how important it is for these bigger projects to report what they're pumping and for someone to look at the results and draw conclusions. I am not quite sure that is happening. How is that information digested and then acted on, if necessary?

Fred Allebach – When Mr. Pennington comes to our meeting I would like to ask when Permit Sonoma will be updating the groundwater availability permitting map in conjunction with GSA and GSP data.

Jim Bundschu – Will the three basins have access to the modification of well permitting and the groundwater monitoring improvement and the completion of multi-level monitoring well projects? Will we have access to the thinking of what the county departments are going to do before it's written in stone? We would like to know what they are thinking.

Trotta – Most of the plan modifications to their well permitting process and database came directly from recommendations from the sub-committee formed from this Advisory Committee

early in Permit Sonoma's permitting process. They are following the scope within their agreement. As a follow-up to the meeting, we can provide a copy of that scope, so you know what they are thinking.

Allebach – Is the city well in the Veterans Memorial parking lot a test well, not one that you can do ASR?

Trotta – It is a test well. We used it as a test well for the pilot study for aquifer storage and recovery a few years ago, it isn't intended for long term use. The grant application proposed constructing a new well specifically designed for ASR.

Allebach – Same location?

Trotta – The same location or nearby.

Gilroy – Back in August, we had a discussion related to long-term strategic planning with some thought towards worst case planning. I don't see any mention of it here. What happens if something occurs to the aqueduct system that reduces or eliminates the delivery of water to the Valley? Can we survive and for how long? I get asked about it all the time. Droughts, floods, fires, all bring up this question.

Tim – Staff needs to decide how to handle the topic. Flooding is more of an emergency issue that the existing agencies would be responsible for, the GSA not so much. Some of the issues with private well owners may require further discussion about how that gets handled.

Trotta – Sonoma Water is involved in a resiliency project and there's the Natural Hazards Mitigation Plan that are required, so maybe pulling information out of these, and seeing where the GSA might fit in with some of the planning, might be a good way to start that.

Norman – One more thing. The minute we ask people to pay fees, they will ask us "what are you doing for us"? We are clarifying the groundwater situation in the Valley to keep people safe. We are looking at it from a groundwater point of view. We make recommendations to agencies, like Permit Sonoma.

Parker – We will follow up with you to have a discussion.

Carr – I want to identify another study for data gaps: land use for commercial, industrial and wineries. It may not be necessary right now but before the next model run.

Trotta – That will be part of the data collection currently underway and will continue to be advanced through the fee study.

Carr – Permit Sonoma probably needs the work plan.

Trotta – They are already very engaged.

Cornwall – Two things to consider: potential role of land use decisions regarding the Developmental Center; and regarding Spanish speaking communities, there is a grant to assist with water quality. We have been discussing how to get the water quality testing kits out to the community as many people aren't drinking municipal water because of chlorine.

Gilroy – Who do you see as the primary audience for the Annual Report? Is it a technical report to the state or is it for the public?

Trotta – The primary audience is the state, but we will post it on the website and hope to make it relatively accessible to the public.

DuBay (chat) – An update on the City/VOMWD ASR project: They received notice from DWR that they did not receive the grant.

Jane Whitsett (chat) – Are there other possible funding sources for this ASR project?

Trotta (chat) – I think their projects will still be considered for the second tier of DWR's Drought funding.

Caitlin Cornwall (chat) – Isn't the loss of the aqueduct, say due to earthquake, part of the Hazard Mitigation Plan?

Allebach (chat) – Norman Gilroy's questions maybe have more to do with city and county emergency/hazard response system... if the aqueduct goes down, we'll have to fill containers from people who have wells and generators...

Cornwall (chat) – The complexity of the answers to Norman Gilroy's question seems to depend on how fast the aqueduct could be repaired. What range of water needs would need to be met, and for how long?

Allebach (chat) – Re AEM – it looks like they didn't fly over the most groundwater-used part of the basin... we'll want to note the data is not from areas of highest use.

Trotta (chat) – Correct, those areas could not be flown due to safety considerations (homes, livestock, etc.) or metal interferences (vineyards).

No public comments.

Rate and Fee Study Introduction and Next Steps

Objective: Introduce Rate and Fee Study schedule and next steps.

Jerry Bradshaw, SCI Consulting, provided a background of the project, phasing of the fee study, funding options, policy decisions, and next steps.

Challenges include:

- **Who should pay?** Just well owners, all water users?
- **What should they pay for?** Local or state management, services provided, value to the community.
- **Rate levels** – operating budgets higher in future years, pay back agencies, include capital costs?
- **How fees are paid** - \$ / acre-foot (similar to SRP 2019 fee structure), other options
- **Community acceptance**

Questions/Comments

Allebach – I like the idea of paying less and being more invested. A good rationale for that would be emphasizing the common pool resource aspect of groundwater, that it is a healthy aspect of groundwater, and preserving the environment for the future. If only groundwater users pay it would minimize the sense that groundwater is a common pool resource. I think the rural residential use of groundwater is about 28% of use so it is fair that the user group pay their fair share of it and if they aren't metered, they would have to somehow be assessed.

Cornwall – The fee structure should avoid creating unhelpful incentives. If the GSA gets a lot of their money from people pumping a lot, that would be counter to the long-term intent of pumping less, so I would not want to see the fee too dependent on pumpers. Also, I think different kinds of people get different benefits from groundwater so spreading the costs to types of use would spread costs more evenly.

Carr – There needs to be a carve-out under the direct benefits provision, such as the ASR project. It is difficult to sell the argument to everyone in the Valley that the (ASR) costs should be borne by the general population. It is easier to sell the argument of community benefit to everyone that is benefitting in general. Clearly the admin costs need to be spread among everybody. Can we charge a fee to the watershed, or must it be only in the basin? It seems watershed folks benefit from less groundwater withdrawal in the basin. For the agricultural community, I think there needs to be an offset for people who contribute to recharge. Lastly, I think many people will argue with the fees, this came up before, we will need an appeal process for people who think they shouldn't be charged or are charged too much.

Hill – How is the new study different from what was done for Santa Rosa Plain? Also, I read about the 2019 study, an estimated amount for charging rural residential users was a \$10 annual fee, was that just a flat fee?

Bradshaw – The 2019 charge was based on use. The administration charge for properties is not that great once it is set up through a billing system or the property tax bill system. The scope of this study is close to what was done earlier. We are expanding it to consider what other GSAs are doing. We are trying to broaden our vision to come up with different realistic approaches. We may end up not doing a per acre-foot charge but base it on irrigated acres or some other type of system that makes it even simpler to administer and less subject to appeal or challenge. It is basically a revisit of what was done in 2019, expanding it out to other GSA examples, and having two more years of experience.

Allebach – What is the thinking from the agencies so far about being paid back? Is there some way of doing that to help eliminate some of the debt?

DuBay – That would be a discussion with the Board in February. It was built into the JPA, that the agencies would be paid back at some time. It doesn't have to mean getting paid back in the first five years, it could be over a longer period, it could be that they are willing to forego being paid back entirely or they are paid back half, there are a lot of options for consideration by the Board.

Bundschu – I think the common pool is a concept that people probably will think about their pocketbook first but once it's presented properly by emphasizing the importance of groundwater and the environment and that everyone benefits from the environment, I would hope that the Advisory Committee and the people who are figuring out the rates take the philosophical approach, along with the cost and the actual dollars and cents.

Whitsett – I understand the idea of different fees for different uses, but we all benefit from the entire system, and I find it hard to make those distinctions on who might have to pay more, or less, based on where they might reside or how much they might use. The benefit is not segregated by different people and different areas. If habitat improves, that is a benefit for everyone living in the Valley. A single fee is more justifiable.

Gilroy – I am pleased to hear this conversation. It is a good approach; one we need to encourage at all levels including member agencies and the Board. The \$10 annual fee is nominal. If the fee is much more, it makes it more difficult. And nominal to a rural homeowner is different from nominal to a winery.

Cornwall (chat) – Who is “liaison”?

DuBay (chat) – There is one liaison from each GSA Board: Jack Ding (Sonoma Valley), Mike Healy (Petaluma Valley), and John Nagle (Santa Rosa Plain). They are providing feedback to the consultants and staff.

Whitsett (chat) – How much of the GSP budget is to be funded by these fees?

DuBay (chat) – How much of the budget will be funded by fees versus grants is unclear at this point. The GSA Board will be asked for input on the funding assumptions at its Feb meeting.

Cornwall (chat) – We had excellent conversation with the public on challenges #1 and #2 many months ago. I recall there was support for a two-tiered fee system, where everyone pays something, and beyond that, direct users pay according to use.

Vicki Hill (chat) – The 1.2 million/year is for all three GSAs or just Sonoma Valley?

DuBay (chat) – Section 7 of the GSP provides a draft budget, in which you can see the breakdown of costs.

Cornwall (chat) – I assume we’re expecting an “all of the above” approach to funding? Just questions about how much from each.

Greg Carr (chat) – Are we including agency costs accrued over the last 3 years?

DuBay (chat) – Not in the \$1.2 million. That is only GSP implementation going forward.

Hill (chat) – How is the new study different from that done for Santa Rosa? I heard that some data is being updated. What else is different?

Allebach (chat) – Maybe agencies who have ponied up funding money for the GSP upfront can just write off that debt? Is that an option?

Allebach (chat) – As per what Greg Carr is saying now, all could help bail out the depletion areas, maybe in exchange for higher conservation rates, to bring depletion areas back to per-2010 levels faster...

Hill (chat) – The estimated fee for rural residential in Santa Rosa Plain in 2019 was \$10. Was that just an annual \$10 flat fee?

DuBay (chat) – The SRP fee was \$19.90 per acre-foot, which translates to \$9.95 for rural residents (assuming they use 1/2 acre-foot per year).

Allebach (chat) – That we all benefit is a strong argument but funding a parcel tax at its very inception could easily be shot down if not framed right with a good front person with great soft skills.

Allebach (chat) – Still, \$30 a year is a bottle of wine or a lunch out... or half a tank of gas.

Whitsett (chat) – Is there a way for philanthropic donors to contribute to GSP funding?

Cornwall (chat) – Philanthropic donors would see this as a straight-up government function, I think. And they don’t like to pay for things that go on indefinitely.

Allebach (chat) – Have other GSAs taken the same poll? What did they say?

POLL

Rank in order of priority (1-7) your top priorities for a funding mechanism	
1. All beneficiaries pay	5.86
2. Equity	5.71
3. Simplicity	4.29
4. Affordability	3.86
5. Revenue Stability / Predictability	3.43
6. Enforceability and Confidence in Data	2.86
7. Administrative Ease	2.00
Do you think the Sonoma Valley fee should duplicate the Santa Rosa Plain approach?	
Yes	13%
No	88%
Do you feel it's important for the type of fee to be consistent in the three basins?	
Yes	38%
No	63%
What are the primary concerns of the stakeholders that you represent? And what will be the most effective methods of communicating with your stakeholders regarding the study and the fee?	
Groundwater sustainability, clean water, low cost, fairness, transparency, high fee - out of business, big users should pay more, emails from trusted sources, direct contact, feedback on progress, fairness in assessment, unconstitutional fees, affordability, understanding why	

Cornwall – What does equity mean in this context?

DuBay – Fairness to you might mean that all beneficiaries pay but for other people it may mean that some pumpers pay less/more.

Allebach – What is the Santa Rosa Plain approach?

DuBay – The Santa Rosa Plain approach is based on a charge of X amount of actual or estimated groundwater pumped so everybody in the basin who uses groundwater directly and including the municipalities pay, based on the acre-foot usage. It is actual for municipalities and mutual water systems, and it's estimated for agriculture, commercial and residential.

Hill – I would like to have the option “I don't know”.

Carr – I wouldn't give the question “Do you think the Sonoma Valley fee should duplicate the Santa Rosa Plain approach” a high priority in your consideration. To make it more helpful, it needs to be flushed out a little bit more.

Cornwall – I would answer that differently.

Hill – To “Do you feel it's important for the type of fee to be consistent in the three basins?” and the previous question: these are tough questions, they aren't yes/no answers. We don't know what the real implications are.

DuBay – In the ideal world, if the costs were reasonable, is it important to be consistent in all three basins just because multiple landowners may have properties in all three basins or for whatever reasons?

Carr – You can have a similar type of fee without having the same fee.

DuBay – How the fee is levied could be the same, but it could be a different fee level.

Hill – That was my point about not knowing.

Allebach – The basins aren't the same, they don't have the same characteristics, so why go for being consistent?

DuBay – We will take your feedback about the simplicity of the questions.

Whitsett – I am not familiar with funding for agencies. Is there a way to explore donations? Is that an option for the GSP?

Bradshaw – It is not something we normally factor into our financial analysis. We can put in some honorable mention type of actions such as continuing member agency contributions, grants, etc. We can allow honorable mention for donations but there is really no way to put a number in there.

Whitsett – That is good to hear. I feel there could be an opportunity. Thank you.

Allebach – I want to refer to the first Slide question. Benefits can be linked to beneficial use.

Bundschu – A beneficial use is bathing and brushing your teeth, it has nothing to do with a life support system.

Updates

Objective: Provide relevant updates that inform the Advisory Committee and for AC to ask questions if needed. Solicit volunteers for Outreach and Engagement Plan work group.

Revised Outreach and Engagement Plan

Ann DuBay – We did quite a robust stakeholder engagement and outreach plan that was adopted in January 2018; it was focused on the period when the GSP was being developed. Because of Covid, we never had the chance to put it into place. Now, we are going into the Plan implementation phase, and we wish to renew outreach to the tribes and disadvantaged communities. DuBay listed specific questions, issues and considerations regarding outreach and engagement during GSP implementation. We would like to put together a mini task force with up to three advisory committee members from each basin. Our aim is to hold three 60- to- 90-minute virtual meetings in January through March and anticipate two to three hours for reviewing drafts/materials. I am looking for volunteers open to serving on the task force.

Jane Whitsett – Sounds like a good plan, I would like to participate.

Carr – I sat in on the Spanish speaking workshop and learned how difficult it is when you don't the speak the language. We should do it again and I would appreciate to have an English translation. I think the Latino folks opened up more there than in the English language sessions. I would also like to see us make an effort to provide some perspective to those who live in the Springs on wells, because they don't like the taste of chlorine. Seems it should be a part of our outreach – how we can get people to hook up to the City or VOM district.

Cornwall – I think the outreach to environmental interests suffered from various factors and I would like to help. I would like to use the Ecology center as a door to get people to start a conversation.

DuBay – This advisory committee has been great about stepping forward and making contacts. We are thinking of new ways of engaging or reaching out.

Allebach – I would love to keep working with the Latino community in the Springs, particularly with the group distributing food and other things to people who are hard to get to. We could easily include fliers with other things being distributed, and maybe add some bling from the water agency. I can help make the connection for you.

Carr – We should start notifying property owners in areas where we think there be a lot of activity, particularly regulatory activity. I am a little nervous about the outreach. When the fees hit the public, there will be a lot of discussion and “why didn’t you tell us”. To some extent you have to ignore it but, I am putting it out there for consideration – when is the best time to start telling people that there is a Plan and you are being affected?

DuBay – Good point. I think it should apply to all well owners in the basin.

Gilroy – That is why I asked who the Annual Review is directed at. As part of the strategy, we should be looking at the documents that are going out from the GSA locally related to one another in this regard. We need a story for the general water user that enables them to understand that important work is being done on their behalf, they will benefit from it, and there will be some fees that go with it. The Plan is so technical, most people don’t understand it. My thought that this is a bigger issue than just a public issue campaign. We will need implementation and funding for the implementation and position it right. I am happy to help reach the rural well owners that I represent, they are difficult to reach, the message needs to be simple enough to understand. We need to take a different approach now that we enter a different phase of the Plan.

Cornwall – How many homeowner email lists are there? I wonder if that is a better way to get at people? Maybe pool our knowledge of these kinds of lists?

DuBay – Maybe reach out to Susan Gorin’s office to see what kind of lists are out there.

Carr – Let’s get the press on this. I think the fee thing might be an avenue to get their interest.

Gilroy – A lot of people don’t read newspapers. Getting ahead of the story on NextDoor is an example. All kinds of good things can happen through that. If we can find a way to get to the younger people on social media, that would be good. I agree with what Caitlin Cornwall said, by applying mailing lists, we will be able to reach a lot of people.

DuBay – Thank you for your feedback, we will take it into consideration.

Outreach

Allebach (chat) – We can cooperate with the Springs MAC and Food for All for Disadvantage Community outreach, I can help with that.

Cornwall (chat) – tony@sonomaecologycenter.org and I can be GSA staff’s contacts for SEC and DACs in Sonoma Valley, including outreach that could involve the water testing kits that SEC has.

Allebach (chat) – For clean water, a lot of wells have arsenic, worse than chlorine...

Hill (chat) – Reaching out to the newish North Sonoma Valley Municipal Advisory Commission would be helpful. It covers Glen Ellen and Kenwood.

Cornwall (chat) – Are you/we doing anything in relation to Groundwater Awareness Week (March 6)?
DuBay (chat) – Andrea Rodriguez has Groundwater Awareness Week on her calendar!
Thank you for your suggestions!

Cornwall (chat) – In Sonoma Valley we have a messaging advantage in that we have a real, measured loss of groundwater. We have a real problem to be solved.

Hill (chat) – The Glen Ellen Forum has an extensive mailing list.

Whitsett (chat) – Can we set up an Instagram account for people to follow for GSP information and education?

Rodriguez (chat) – Yes, we can do Instagram, and we have a Facebook page.

Allebach (chat) – Emily Charrier, I-T editor, is very responsive.

Cornwall (chat) – Fire Safe Sonoma has a full list of fire-related landowner groups who would be good audiences.

No public comments.

Review Action Items and ask for any Closing Comments

- **Action: Staff will provide Permit Sonoma’s scope of work to the Advisory Committee.**

Tim Parker mentioned that the international community, UNESCO has three major events occurring and the theme of these events is making the invisible visible groundwater. They are pushing to make groundwater, a major focus of the update on the Sustainable Development Goals, which has never happened in 40 years. Parker (chat) – <https://www.worldwaterweek.org/event/9726-world-water-day-2022---groundwater-making-the-invisible-visible>

Gilroy – It concerns me that we are only meeting every two months when things are moving at great speed. I question whether the schedule is right for the task.

Tim – It is partially a budget issue, most of the critically over-drafted basins are meeting quarterly, but some are still meeting monthly.

Allebach – It is good to be back and on the next “stage of the hike”. I hope we can fill out the Advisory Committee with folks that we lost so that we get full representation in the basin.

DuBay – Craig Lichty is no longer on the committee. VOM is looking for a replacement for him. If anyone knows of someone, please send their name to Ann. VOM will be starting the recruiting process very soon.

Tim Parker thanked the Advisory Committee for the great dialogue and closed the meeting at 5:30 p.m.

Attendees:

Advisory Committee Members (present)

Fred Allebach

Caitlin Cornwall
Greg Carr
Jane Whitsett
Jim Bundschu
Matt Stornetta
Norman Gilroy
Taylor Serres
Vicki Hill

[Advisory Committee Members \(absent/excused\)](#)

Kenneth Johnson (excused)
Steve Wolf

[Staff/Presenters](#)

Ann DuBay, Sonoma Valley GSA Administrator
Marcus Trotta, Sonoma Water, Technical Staff
Andrea Rodriguez, Sonoma Water, Outreach Staff
Simone Peters, GSA Administrative Aide (recording meeting summary)
Jerry Bradshaw, SCI Consulting Group
Arcelia Herrera, SCI Consulting Group
Valerie Flores, SCI Consulting Group
Rich Pauloo, Larry Walker Associates

[Facilitator](#)

Tim Parker

[Members of Public](#)

Oriana Hart, City of Sonoma