.

Sonoma Valley Groundwater Sustainability Agency

Advisory Committee Meeting Summary

January 14, 2020

Sonoma Valley Groundwater Sustainability Agency Advisory Committee Meeting

Meeting Summary

Date/Time: January 14, 2020 I 3:00 p.m. – 5:30 p.m.
Location: Valley of the Moon Water District Office, 19039 Bay Street, El Verano
Contact: Ann DuBay, Sonoma County Water Agency, SVGSA Administrator
Email: Ann.DuBay@scwa.ca.gov Phone: (707) 524-8378

Action Items

Post final November meeting summary	Staff	January 31
Email Andrea.Rodriguez@scwa.ca.gov the names of organizations you will reach out to (if you haven't already signed up to speak)	AC	January 31
Provide feedback to Andrea on outreach talking points	AC	January 31
Draft simple one-pager of terms for AC	Staff	February 11
Draft simple 'leave behind'	Staff	February 11
Send word version of GURP form to AC for feedback	Staff	January 15
Provide feedback on GURP form (current version)	AC	January 17
Staff will provide AC feedback on SMCs in a format that organizes them into minimum thresholds, measurable objectives, etc.	Staff	January 31
Provide any additional input on initial SMC feedback summarized below	AC	January 31
Provide information on the percentage of wells that have increased, decreased or stay the same, and their locations.	Staff	February 11
Staff will provide information mid-meetings about what is happening with SMCs and what we will be discussing at the next meeting, so AC prepare.	Staff	January 31

Sustainable Management Criteria Summary (see full notes for details)

Significant and Unreasonable Effects/Minimum Threshold Suggestions	**Issues/Questions**
Groundwater level declines would be significant and unreasonable if they drop below historical groundwater levels.	Focus on GW levels, not wells Depends on historic record availability Depends on level trend (declining levels allow more flexibility; if trend is stable, MT could be close to that) How do we deal with depleted zones? Need more than one trigger so can deal with ecosystem impacts: ie, the root depth of oak trees

Borrego Springs (modified): Groundwater level declines would be significant and unreasonable if they are sufficient in magnitude to lower the rate of production of pre-existing groundwater extraction wells below that needed to meet the minimum required to support the overlying beneficial use(s).	Do we have production data available? Does this include all wells (domestic, ag, municipal)?
Consider combining the MTs developed by Borrego Springs, Cuyama and Santa Cruz	
Measurable Objectives	**Issues/Questions**
Bring El Verano groundwater levels up to adjacent surrounding areas	Need to consider level of depression and rate of decline
Monitoring	**Issues/Questions**
Consider rate of change as you approach minimum thresholds	Need to consider the number of wells in the area and the number of monitoring wells we have. Is it representative?
Establish a correlation between historical groundwater-levels from private water wells with longer records and dedicated monitoring wells that are better suited for use as representative monitoring points going forward.	
Consider dropping the "outlier" data points from the groundwater-level data set (the high and the low)	
Management Areas	
Possible El Verano	

Call to Order

Public Comment

Tom Martin: Are the members aware that there are three applications for cannabis production near Trinity Road and Highway 12? This is close to the area where groundwater problems exist.

Norman Gilroy, Advisory Committee member, thanked the committee for the card of well wishes. He is glad to be back.

Agenda Review

Vicki Hill will miss the March meeting. She would like to set up time in advance to review materials and provide comments/feedback.
Response: Staff will meet to set timeline for getting materials out early.

Question: Did the November cannabis presentation explain, "default rate"?
Response: Yes, they got into density and canopy cover using similar crop numbers.

Question: Did they use just registered growers vs. un-registered?
Reponses: Yes.

Comment: There was extensive discussion of cannabis at the meeting. Even though it was informational was there any action? It is frustrating the Advisory Committee is not in a position to give feedback on current projects for the county or city. The GSA is being bypassed on opportunity to comment on projects.

Greg sits on SV Citizens Advisory Committee as a non-voting member, and will bring up the issue of water use. He noted that people could attend the CAC meeting as private citizens and express their concerns.

Ann: We brought the issue to the Chair and she thought staff should focus on the GSP, then the GSA could possibly get involved if the Board wants to head in that direction.

Action Items

#7 (provide comments on the Groundwater User Registration Program form) was not completed since the registration work group is still revising and working on the form.

Vicki Hill moved to approve the meeting summary and Ken Johnson seconded the motion. The summary was approved unanimously with Norman Gilroy, Jane Whitsett and Taylor Serres abstaining.

Community Outreach

Andrea Rodriguez, Sonoma Water outreach staff, circulated a sign-up sheet of regional community groups and stakeholders for the Advisory Committee. Staff will provide support, talking points, one-pagers and PowerPoints as needed.
Action: If you did not sign up to speak to a group, please let Andrea know who you are interested in contacting by 01/31/20.
Action: Advisory Committee to provide feedback on talking points for outreach.
Action: Staff will draft a simple one-pager of SGMA terms for outreach.
Action: Staff will draft a one-page "leave behind" for outreach about why people should care about groundwater in basin and the SGMA process.

Updates

Ann DuBay, administrator, reported that the December Recharge workshop was a success and thanked committee members who attended and helped facilitate. The workshop met goals to educate people about recharge and to talk with and engage stakeholders. All materials from the workshop are now online, including the video.

Groundwater User Registration Program (GURP) in Santa Rosa Plain (SRP) is ongoing. The program will be online but well owners can also get a paper form to complete and update their information.

Staff will circulate the SRP draft paper registration form for committee feedback. After feedback is received and changes made, the form will be turned into an electronic form that will be accessed by clicking on a basin map. SRP Advisory Committee members will beta test the online form, and then the Sonoma Valley Advisory Committee will have a chance to review. The targeted roll-out date is spring 2020.

Question: Do we have any expectation of what type of response rate they will get from well owners?

Response: The GURP is an opt-out program. We are asking people to correct their information. People will be registered automatically, and it will be assumed that their information is correct unless they tell us otherwise.

Question: Is this is only for SRP? What about SV?

Response: Yes, SRP will roll this out first. But we don't want every basin to have a different registration form. Once the SRP program is underway, we will talk to SV board about the program. We know at some point the board will have to do a program. Staff will bring options to the Board.

Question: Has this been promoted to SRP residents?

Response: No, it's still a draft form. Some of them likely know that a registration program is coming.

Comment: It is more opt-out, if there was some way to let them know that. If someone has more than one well or just one well on different sites will the resident/ owner be notified?

Response: We filled in the online form pre-populated with their information, so they can see what information is already known about their wells.

Question: Is the information from well users going to be publically available?

Response: No, some information by CA law is required to be public, like well locations. The owners' response to the questions are not public but if a parcel has a well that information is public. Tim Parker indicated that personal information on well completion reports is redacted. (Note: Staff is checking with counsel regarding current policies and regulations for local agencies regarding personal information.)

Question: Are any of these questions on the User registration form from the ad hoc? We tried to solicit information about the well.

Response: I think there are some questions reflected from the Ad hoc, but the Ad hoc was looking at well permitting, and the GURP has a different focus.

Action: Send Word version of form to Advisory Committee for feedback.
Action: Change Item 3 to DWR (not SWRCB)

Marcus Trotta, technical staff, reported that DWR completed five out of six wells in Sonoma Valley through the Technical Support Services program. As reported at the last meeting, a $1 million grant application was submitted for Round Three of Prop 68 grant funding. The applications are still being reviewed, but we learned that DWR received requests for $53 million and have about $50 million to spend. They are supposed to have draft results out in February. Another round will be released next spring for implementation.

Tim Parker provided a legislative update (written and verbal). Governor Newsom released his first draft of the 2020-21 state budget. The written update provides highlights. Tim also reported that there has been talk about holding an Assembly hearing on SGMA. If that hearing happens it would be at the end of the month, and staff will send a link for information. Most likely, the critically overdrafted basins would be represented.
Action: Staff will send out the SRP GURP form for AC feedback by 1/21.

Sustainable Management Criteria

Tim Parker reminded the Advisory Committee that this is an iterative process. We will take the first cut at "Lowering Groundwater Levels," but will relook at all of the Sustainability Indicators as we develop them (since they are related). Tim and Marcus also reminded the committee that the purpose of the meeting is to discuss concepts, and that staff will come back next month with quantitative options that will express qualitative statements about groundwater levels.

Marcus reviewed the working schedule and reminded the committee of terminology (see presentation).

Comment: If our basin is already undesirable, can we say that in the SMC?

Response: Yes, we can define the basin locally.

Question: Did we define the 2015 conditions? That's the SGMA baseline date but did we look back at other dates?

Response: There hasn't been any decision made to use 2015 as a metric. Basins have used other dates, you don't have to use 2015 or later.

Question: Is future climate change built into the model?

Response: Some was done but we are going to add future forecasting into the model.

In the packet on page 14, there is a four-page document that we plan to provide for each indicator. This shows the types of data we have to consider. It would be great to get input from you today or in the future on the information provided, and if it helpful.

Question: Is the "undesirable results" described as narrative and "minimum thresholds" a quantitative measure?

Response: No both are quantitative, but will be guided by narrative descriptions of significant and unreasonable effects.

Marcus discussed the guiding questions (in packet) and led a discussion on significant and unreasonable effects on groundwater. There are a 101 wells that have been used in the basin for monitoring purposes for at least 10 years.

Question: Could you also put percentage of number of wells that show increases and decreases in groundwater levels?

Comment: In the staff report, you indicated some longer groundwater levels trends, but I did not see these in the figures. It would be helpful to see trends in longer term wells.

Response: The trend over time shows progression. You get a good idea for thresholds.

Question: Is it reasonable to think that a water budget analysis will aggregate the graphs into the document?

Comment: Defining the area of depletion and non-depletion would be helpful if the graph circles had different colors.

Question: The diversity of our basin is wide. Do we define goals for different areas or whole basin?

Marcus reviewed the next series of figures, which showed the high frequency groundwater level data which includes 17 shallow wells and 12 deep monitoring wells. Staff will be developing a proposed representative monitoring network (locations where SMCs will need to be established and monitored for compliance), which will likely emphasize the use of dedicated monitoring wells where available. Generally, the majority of the data from these dedicated monitoring wells is limited to the last 10 years. Other wells that have been monitored in the basin (primarily private water wells) have records going back to the 1970s or longer. He noted that in deeper zones we see more declines. In establishing SMCs, we can consider the trend data, water supply well depth distribution and total depth of wells throughout the basin.

Comment: You have to put yourself in my position. The problem is that we have groundwater decreasing. How many monitoring wells are in basin? What are they indicating? We can overcome any doubt people have by showing them the data.

Comment: You can't tell people not to drill a well if they buy property. The housing property outside of the urban service are Mc Mansions and have high water demand. Housing in the city will be on municipal water service.

Marcus reminded the committee that the discussion today is on developing narrative descriptions of the issues. What are significant & unreasonable effects for lowering groundwater levels? In other words, this is an indicator of minimum thresholds.

Question: Why would you set the threshold lower? (Referring to an example provided in a slide)

Response: Setting a threshold lower would allow more time for any planned projects and actions to meet thresholds.

Question: You can set less aggressive thresholds?

Response: Yes, and can revise plan every 5 years.

Comment: These are good examples of different management areas of deep and shallow. These are more like what is in the valley. Are they stable or increasing?

Marcus discussed some examples from other basins: No net decrease in groundwater levels, climate change should be considered, no impact to any beneficial uses.

Question: Is this just about wells? There are impacts on environment and habitat to consider. Do we address this now or when we discuss surface water impacts?

Response: We will address in surface water indicator. Groundwater supply to wetlands would be surface water. Today we will focus more on groundwater levels, without looking at other indicators. We also will set up a parking lot / reservoir of ideas.

Comment: Looking at example, I like what Borrego said (except for the last statement).
(NOTE: Borrego example: *Groundwater level declines would be significant and unreasonable if they are sufficient in magnitude to lower the rate of production of pre-existing groundwater extraction wells below that needed to meet the minimum required to support the overlying beneficial use(s), ~~and that alternative means of obtaining sufficient groundwater resources are not technically or financially feasible"~~)*

Comment: My idea is to get all groundwater levels up to “historic levels”.

Comment: That would be even more conservative.

Comment: Get groundwater levels up to 80’s level.

Response: What are the groundwater levels in the basin that are achievable? Then you structure your achievable and undesirable effects to those levels.

Comment: I feel like saying a series of wells in a particular area are going to trigger an undesirable result.

Comment: Trend maps only show back to 2006, that may help set the level, but if there are older data with lower levels we should know.

Response: A lot of the wells came online in 2006, some wells date back to 1980s or later. There are other sources of information that are not well data, we have looked at hot spring resorts data.

Comment: We need a value-based reason to go in the past.

Comment: We shouldn’t focus on the facilities we build for the water, but on water levels.

Question: But how do we find out about the groundwater levels?

Question: If the well is the only way for people to get water, should it be a higher priority to save?

Comment: I would take that out, as it makes it very complicated.

Comment: For many rural residential homeowners, have been in home for years may not have means to drill a new well.

Comment: You have to make sure policy does not affect those with different incomes.

Comment: Circle back to Greg, answer his question of unreasonable effects, I think the water levels could be as simple as to not drop to lower historical levels, then build a sustainable plan. Add in more protection to bring water levels up.

Comment: You got have some way to measure success of that project.

Response: We have to do something more challenging, we have to have a goal that we have to meet.

Comment: It is unacceptable to not allow beneficial uses we want. If you can’t farm or can’t live on a property it’s unacceptable.

Comment: One jurisdiction said they don’t want any well to go dry, we can discuss how low we want it to go. The depletion zone is going to continue to drop.

Response: Then you monitor those areas. The unreasonable affect is how many wells have to go below a certain level.

Comment: Keep groundwater level to benefit everybody. I look at it and my stakeholders in Valley of the Moon district, they use 15-30% groundwater and are in depletion zone. VOM is taking water in depletion zone or depleting area affecting beneficial users without their knowing as customers of VOM. We have to keep trying to work the criteria.

Comment: Who could be negatively impacted in depletion zone? I would like to see El Verano area come up to surrounding area levels.

Response: Back to min threshold- start point, where do we want the bottom to be?

Comment from committee member: The El Verano area would be the low, you can establish one you plan to violate since you already have undesirable conditions. If you set up a minimum threshold you don't think you can make, it requires looking in the future using the model until you can address the problem with projects and management actions. That is what makes historical levels safe to use.

Response: If you set the minimum threshold at historical minimum and the trend is down then in the near term you can drop at a single representative monitoring point and not violate unless exceeding undesirable result. Depending upon how you define the undesirable result, a certain number of wells may need to go below that level (minimum threshold) to violate.

Comment: From SGMA, my understanding is that you can violate minimum thresholds, if that's the condition you have planned to bend the arc up.

Response: SGMA gives you 20 years to be sustainable.

Comment: Just say the bottom is the minimum threshold. Look at rate of decline.

Comment: Baseline should be determined. Only 10% of wells are monitored to determine levels. We need more monitoring wells to get accurate accounting, begin to work out percentage wells trending down and supplement water. We need to get the formula on what that number is.

Response: We have to use the information now and do have the ability to adjust in the next 5 years.

Comment: Where we draw the line of the critical area is so important.

Comment: The other thought, on drought, you might set a minimum threshold to average levels then get into drought period and do not want to punish ourselves. If we get into a drought and it was not poor management but Mother Nature. The cycles of Mother Nature are harder to grapple with.

Response: CA is already a state with wild averages and extreme averages.

Comment: Depending on the numbers, throw out two or three highs and lows to get average – normalize data.

Comment: If wells are drying up in one area, it's almost not how many wells do or what percentage do, you have to have to say it's an endemic problem, instead of a failing well. I wonder if we can set a minimum threshold without including both. It may be that you need more than one trigger for this if certain well users are experiencing a loss of use.

Comment: I think most of the attention is on use. I don't think we want oak trees dying. Vegetation is another user.

Comment: If we are trying to find a sweet spot, try to make sure groundwater level is good for some but not bad for other. Staff could make a chart with all interest charted to see how adjusted and all interest are represented

Comment: If we set out a groundwater level that is conservative, then we find out down the road that it takes a big project and costs lots of money, it's an economic barrier and maybe we adjust the level because of the impact on the community / user.

Comment: My fear in this is that users pay for the sustainability projects. There are many beneficial users. I'm simply pointing out that users pay for projects.

Response: Whatever objective we set out on, we will look at projects and run future scenarios and set out future cost and projects for consideration.

Comment: 50% of beneficial use is Ag. Fear is that those who use groundwater the most pay for it.

Public Comments:
Roger Peters: This discussion is helpful. The more qualitative statement goes to Norman's statement that service is what we are focused on. I would look at Borrego, Santa Cruz and Cuyama, and their concepts. I don't know if historic low is important. I suggest you look at rate of change as you can accommodate beneficial uses. I think problem with Borrego is that it didn't refer to future beneficial uses – just existing beneficial use. When do we have to move actively to change course?
Data points, from north valley outside the basin, Kenwood subbasin is an important part. Suggestion to change boundary zones, it is important to focus on upstream area of basin.

Question: Do we have monitor wells in north area to include?

Response: Yes

Question: Is it expected that each basin adopt same criteria?

Response: Not necessarily, we want to share the work other basins are doing and there would be benefits to having similar approaches, but SMCs may need to be different in order to be reflective of the variable conditions in the three basins.

Action: Staff will provide AC feedback on SMCs in a format that organizes them into minimum thresholds, measurable objectives, etc.
Action: In follow-up to SMC discussion, AC would like staff to provide information on the percentage of wells that have increased, decreased or stay the same and their locations.
Action: Staff will provide information mid-meetings about what is happening with SMCs and what we will be discussing at the next meeting, so AC prepare.

Attending

Fred Allebach, Chair, Sonoma Water appointee
Caitlin Cornwall, Vice-Chair, environmental interests
Jim Bundschu, North Bay Water District appointee
Greg Carr, County of Sonoma appointee
Norman Gilroy, rural residential interests
Vicki Hill, At-large community interests
Ken Johnson, At-large community interests

Craig Lichty, Valley of the Moon Water District appointee
Taylor Serres, Sonoma RCD appointee
Matt Stornetta, Agricultural interests
Jane Whitsett, City of Sonoma appointee

Staff
Tim Parker, facilitator
Marcus Trotta, technical staff
Ann DuBay, administrator
Andrea Rodriguez, outreach staff