



Sonoma Valley Groundwater Sustainability Agency Advisory Committee Meeting Meeting Summary

Tuesday, April 13, 2021 | 3:00 p.m. – 5:30 p.m.

Location: Zoom

Contact: Ann DuBay, Sonoma Valley Groundwater Sustainability Agency (GSA), Administrator

Email: Ann.Dubay@scwa.ca.gov | Phone: 707.524-8378

Next meeting: May 11, 2021, 3:00 p.m. – 5:30 p.m.

MEETING SUMMARY

Welcome, Introductions and Agenda Review

Tim Parker, Advisory Committee Facilitator, welcomed the group. Fred Allebach, Sonoma Valley GSA Advisory Committee Chairman also welcomed the group then called the meeting to order at 3:01 p.m. and asked Ann DuBay to conduct roll call.

General Public Comments

None.

Agenda and Schedule Review

Tim Parker covered meeting protocol, and reviewed the day's agenda and the general meeting objectives.

Review Action Items and Approval of Previous Meeting Summary

- ✓ Norman Gilroy sent article as requested to Tim Parker for distribution.
- ✓ Staff notified the Advisory Committee that Section 3 is available for review.
- ✓ Cargill Salt Pond update (Napa Sonoma salt marsh) – Ann DuBay reached out to Kevin Booker and the Environmental Research contact. It will be several years before the project is considered restored. There will always be low-level baseline of recycled water that will go to that project. No specific date for the project to be completed; it depends on CA Fish and Wildlife's assessment of restoration and when the goal is achieved.
- ✓ Ann DuBay asked SCI Consulting if Advisory Committee members can join Rural Residential focus groups: SCI would prefer that folks who are familiar with the project not participate. The consultant hasn't looked at the breakdown of areas yet, but when they do and we see the focus group lists, we will see what the geographical area looks like.
- ✓ Staff to come back to Advisory Committee with information from basins that have already submitted their Groundwater Sustainability Plans – formulas, Measurable Objectives, projects, etc. Action not completed yet. ****Could the individual who made the request at the last meeting, clarify exactly what is being requested.*

Comments/Questions

Jim Bundschu – Probably recycled water plays a role in our projects into the future. Who do you suggest one talks to, to find out exactly what the program is with the saltwater marshes?

Ann DuBay – I will communicate with you offline and then we can report back at the next meeting.

Vicki Hill, Fred Allebach and Caitlin Cornwall requested minor changes to the previous meeting summary. Caitlin Cornwall moved to approve the previous summary with the changes, the Advisory Committee agreed.

No public comment.

Recommended Surface Water Depletion SMC

Objective: Provide overview of Surface Water Depletion SMC, AC opportunity for clarifying questions, and AC recommendation

Marcus Trotta gave an update on Surface Water Depletion Sustainable Management criteria. He said that a fair amount of work has been done on this SMC along with the practitioner work group. Compared to other basins in the state, Sonoma Valley has a good data set and modelling tools available. This SMC has some key challenges: data and information limitations; technical complexities in identifying the fraction of surface water depletion caused by groundwater pumping; and surface water rights.

Questions/Comments

Vicki Hill – The statement that you don't have adequate data to determine what is needed for the flow rate so the GDE's can survive – have you had the chance to look at any studies about minimum flows required for species? Maybe it should be put on the list to do further research.

Trotta – We did look for any specific minimum in stream flows that have been identified. If there is any additional information we didn't capture, we would love to receive it.

Caitlin Cornwall – I am concerned about using the period 2004 onwards, it is a small slice of time. If there is less water in the streams, there are fewer aquatic species. My read of the research scene is that there are a lot of studies, but not a lot of top-down targets from the government. What is being proposed is to use research, not policy, to guide adaptive management. We should use the research available. On the question of causes of streamflow depletion, if you take away the effects of climate change on streamflow diversion and take away the effect of surface water diversions, what is left is pumping.

Trotta – That is a good suggestion, thank you.

Bundschu – Flow should be based on research not policy.

Greg Carr (chat) – Shouldn't we include a program to find out about any surface water rights holders that may be involved?

Trotta – That was one of the items -- for us to get better information on surface water diversions. We are doing some coordination with the State Water Resources Control Board to develop that information.

Carr (chat) – Can we move "more monitoring wells" into group 1?

Fred Allebach (chat) – Arroyo Seco?? Why are steelhead much reduced? What other factors besides groundwater pumping?

Craig Lichty (chat) – Isn't it flows and temperature?

Cornwall (chat) – GDEs have had continually reduced viability for almost 200 years. That we would set our thresholds in relation to the worst drought in decades is seriously concerning.

Stephen Maples presented the integrated groundwater modeling. He said we have some advantages in Sonoma Valley. While we need more data, the method we are approaching leverages the different pieces. We can use the model to go back in time and create various scenarios.

Questions/Comments

Allebach (chat) – Can you explain how the driest drought years are being accounted for and offset in our Minimum Threshold? When I read the packet, I thought the drought baseline would be offset by using the 2004-2018 average, not using 2014-16 as Minimum Threshold, which is essentially the same as using 2015.

Maples – It was a comment that came up in the workgroup. Rather than focusing on one year, we are focusing on an average of three years. It is not something we are aiming for, but something we are avoiding. Think of 2014, 2015, 2016 average, we don't want to go below that.

Carr (chat) – How much do wells in the watershed above the basin affect streamflow depletion in the subbasin?

Allebach (chat to Greg Carr) – Andy Rich said that volume value is accounted for in the model, I was thinking the same today as I was at Arroyo Seco outside basin, with many uses and wells right upstream of east side depletion area.

Trotta (chat) – Fred Allebach is correct that pumping from wells outside of the basin and within the contributing watershed area are incorporated into the model. They do not directly impact streamflow depletion within the Subbasin but would potentially reduce the amount of streamflow entering the basin.

Cornwall (chat) – In this location the Measurable Objective would be artificially low because the short record is dominated by the drought years.

Cornwall (chat) – For context, SEC is seeing streamflow levels in Sonoma Creek's tributaries this year that are lower than we've ever seen.

Jane Whitsett (chat) – Not exceeding Minimum Threshold does not necessarily achieve instream flows adequate to support GDE.

Cornwall (chat) – Shallow aquifer is different than surface water.

Cornwall (chat) – I would like to hear more from the technically sophisticated nonprofits (EDF, TNC, TU, WCS) on their recommendations.

Carr (chat) – Are we not going to weigh in on the proposed Measurable Objectives and Minimum Thresholds or did we already do that?

Cornwall – It seems like locations that have a short record, the three years concerns me. Those three extremely hot dry years are going to be a bigger proportion of their total record and that is going to drag downward the management objective. It means that a lower bar will be set for locations, just because of a historical accident that they have a short record. It seems like it is an undesirable effect.

Maples – When thinking about it from a Minimum Threshold standpoint, the MT is focusing on a number you don't want to exceed.

Cornwall – I am referring to the objectives.

Maples – Good point.

Trotta – We looked for adjacent wells to establish a correlation for the two wells in the northern portions of the basin.

Cornwall – We know what the water years were like before the drought. We know we have a certain range of water years, even for the ones with five years of record. I don't know what the solution is but that seems like an artificial effect of a short record that is not desirable.

Trotta – For this basin, because our shallow groundwater level trends have been relatively stable over time, particularly in the upper reaches of Sonoma creek those gaining conditions do persist, those minimum thresholds would still be promoting the condition of continuing those gaining groundwater conditions with the basin.

Carr – It bothers me that we are using the worst-case basis for establishing the SMCs. I wonder what we would do if we had 13 Minimum Thresholds exceeded. It bothers me that the Measurable Objective is so low. What would help me feel better is an idea of recharge projects – is that what methods you would use to offset streamflow methods.?

Trotta – Two kinds of methods to help achieve goals are 1) recharge and 2) demand – coordinating pumping or reducing pumping so it isn't near streams and as impactful.

Carr – We really don't know what the historical depletion is. As this unfolds and we begin to understand what the real depletion is, would it make sense to say "estimated" in the Significant and Unreasonable statement, until we know?

Trotta – Even as we get better information, there will always be some estimates.

Allebach – Where I live, we had a shallow well that came back quickly after one short rain, so I was under the impression that the shallow aquifer system is generally sustainable at a diminished rate. I feel uncomfortable setting a level like just after having a heart attack. I want to be sensitive to the beneficial users here of the environment and the groundwater dependent ecosystems, and set these levels as high as we can, so that we show sensitivity to that beneficial use and balance it out. When I look at the Undesirable Result statement, I like Option 3.

Bundschu – Until the potential instream flow targets are available, what difference does depletion mean? What is the goal so we can relate it to people?

Whitsett – I have the same question. I don't know if there is a way with the existing stream habitat data that we have. Could we look at the habitat data and grade it – is it suitable or not? And relate it to this data.

Cornwall – One of our challenges is the system is so degraded from its original condition and the degraded condition is what we are used to. The volume of water that stayed on the land in the

past was enormous: big wetland complexes and artesian springs. It is hard to connect that with the land and water use patterns we have now.

Whitsett – That is a big challenge, but it is a 50-year plan. And with the right projects there are ways to bring these stream flows to more optimum habitat.

Marcus Trotta – A lot of the points regarding groundwater dependent ecosystems and flow targets are what led us to focus on adaptive management activities.

Bundschu – We are just leaving this up in the air floating around. I would hope it would be some sort of an action item even if we don't act on it for another two or three years until the Plan is at stake but part of the Plan should be that we determine what that is so that our stakeholders understand what it is and what they're being asked to do as a community. We need the other half of the equation.

Trotta – The other half of the equation is what we've proposed earlier in terms of a better understanding of the causes and effects and compiling information on those conditions that could lead to those bad effects.

Parker – Maybe it can be woven into this Sustainable Management Criteria in terms of how you're moving forward.

Allebach – It was my understanding that after we have all the SMC together, we would come back as a group to review them.

Trotta – Good reminder, we are in the process of evaluating them all together. We will use the model to simulate different projects and actions which will further inform how these Sustainable Management Criteria could play out. There may be opportunities to revisit how we set Minimum Thresholds and Measurable Objectives depending on output.

Marcus Trotta provided the Undesirable Results options for the Board to consider for determining Undesirable Results:

1. 25% of RMPs (3 wells)
2. 25% of RMPs (3 wells) for 2 consecutive years
3. 25% of RMPs (3 wells) during drought years and 10% of RMPs (1 well) during non-drought years
4. 40% of RMPs (4 wells) during drought years and 10% of RMPs (1 well) during non-drought years.

Questions/Comments

Cornwall – I am thinking about the timing of management response. Surface water is the most rapid part of the water system we are dealing with. Seems we wouldn't know if any exceedance happens until we are in the middle of it. I am thinking of management responses and could they be put in place quickly. My inclination is that I wouldn't want exceedances to go beyond one year.

Allebach – I agree with what Caitlin Cornwall just said. An exceedance here is going to result in the decimation of groundwater dependent ecosystems rather quickly. A quick response needs to be qualified into this. I would like to see some red flag markers built into it that staff would take action within one year and within a bandwidth so you can catch it before it gets too bad. I am leaning towards Option # 3.

Carr – In response to what Caitlin Cornwall and Fred Allebach just said, anything you do will take time. Waiting two years is a mistake. What is a drought year, what is not a drought year? If we do Option #3, what is the distinction?

Trotta – Different jurisdictions declare water years differently. It would likely be our water year classifications that we've developed specifically for our GSP.

Carr – It would be good to have something numerical, there should be some measurable standard for that.

Cornwall (chat) – Can someone tell me a realistic scenario in which we could see an exceedance during a non-drought year?

Trotta – That is what the SMC is set up to determine. If you are seeing groundwater condition impacts causing surface water depletion above your baseline, that is what it would be set up to detect.

Cornwall – So a land use change?

Trotta – Yes, or a new well, etc.

Carr (chat) – If we go for Option #3, what would be considered a "drought year" for this purpose?

Cornwall (chat) – I'm leaning toward Option #3.

Whitsett (chat) – Option #3 is where I am leaning too but did wonder how drought year was defined. Could we say "dry" year instead of drought year to be more protective?

DuBay (chat) – Water Year classifications description is Appendix 3-A of the GSP Section 3. Another reason to read it! <http://sonomavalleygroundwater.org>.

Matt Stornetta – When talking about three wells, is three within the area or within the entire basin?

Trotta – The entire basin. We have a total of 10 existing locations with representative monitoring point wells, with the plan to have three more.

Whitsett – What do you think about using the dry years instead of drought years to better address projects and actions?

Trotta – That is something we can consider.

ROLL CALL Undesirable Result Preference

Option 1 = 0

Option 2 = 1

Option 3 = 6

Option 4 = 1

Any option you can't live with? Not everyone responded.

Option 1 = 0

Option 2 = 5

Option 3 = 0

Option 4 = 0

Norman Gilroy (chat) – I can't live with Option #2.

Lichty (chat) – I want to talk with some of my hydrogeology friends about the options.

Carr (chat) – Did we get Ken Johnson’s list from the last meeting?

If Advisory Committee members have additional input, please send it to staff.

Cornwall – We haven’t really talked about Minimum Thresholds and Measurable Objectives.

Carr – I would like to talk about them but there aren’t any options. May we have some options brought back?

Trotta - We can revisit it, maybe do something on email, because we are planning to bring this to the Board at their April 26 meeting.

Allebach (chat) – Email is fine with me. The Advisory Committee should weigh in on Measurable Objectives and Minimum Thresholds.

Projects and Management Actions Updates

Objective: Provide details on Projects and Management Actions and model scenarios, and AC opportunity for clarifying questions

Marcus Trotta gave an overview of projects and management actions including next steps:

1. Develop process for simulating/evaluating conceptual projects with computer model
2. Simulate conceptual projects using baseline 50-year projected water budget
3. Identify and prioritize conceptual projects and management actions for inclusion in the GSP

Questions/Comments

Cornwall (chat) – How do the rough costs compare between recycled water and Aquifer Storage and Recovery?

Allebach (chat) – One of the take homes from the GRA conference was that many Groundwater Sustainability Agencies wanted supply enhancement, but in a dry state, demand reduction is more realistic.

Cornwall (chat) – When considering water use limitations (the management action no one wants), seems like limiting existing uses should be considered alongside limiting new uses.

Allebach (chat) – I like losing reach of Arroyo Seco, a city supply line already crosses it, just make a valve, and open it.

Carr (chat) – Hopefully we can combine Group 1 and Group 2 projects/actions in one location where appropriate.

Gilroy (chat) – How would we know if limiting existing users is working? Not so easy without meters. New projects are a bit easier to monitor, but they may be the minority in the overall picture.

Cornwall – It seems OK to me.

Carr – If we are going to ask folks to pay for an ASR project or an expensive project to replace or refill depleted areas of the aquifer, it is critical that we have some limitations in place. We can't ask people to pay for an expensive recharge project when they can keep drilling new wells with no restrictions, it's a loser. Otherwise, I like the list, it is comprehensive.

Trotta – Some of the projects touch the city, we may need to work with them on pricing. These projects were considered pre-SGMA and other agencies may be funding them.

Carr – Well, no, I recognize that, but that doesn't mean our GSP can't make a recommendation, that those districts or entities take that approach.

Allebach – I agree with that. My comment is on landscape irrigation, it is a huge portion of household use. What kind of incentive is there to reduce use? You wouldn't know the percentage you've reduced without metering. How would you know when we can't meter? Some of these things could be addressed in Rural Residential conservation. (chat) – What are the incentives to conserve? A tax--break? A gold-star?

Trotta – Good point, we should address some of these things in the GSP and have them well described. I am also checking with our water conservation manager at Sonoma Water to make sure these estimates are reasonable.

No public comment.

Updates

Objective: Provide relevant updates that inform the Advisory Committee and for AC to ask questions if needed.

Ann DuBay – There will be a special Board meeting in April to discuss Surface Water Depletion SMC so it can be included in the SMC chapter section for sending out in May. The meeting will also finalize next year's budget, discuss starting a new rate and fee study, and amend the contract with Sonoma Water to reflect the Prop 68 tasks.

On Permit Sonoma, we have approval from Sonoma Water and County of Sonoma to move forward with this contract.

GUIDE (Groundwater User Information Data Exchange) – To date, over 100 survey responders have emailed or phoned with comments regarding GUIDE. It will be helpful for improving data in Santa Rosa Plain. Similar programs will be done in Sonoma and Petaluma Valleys.

Rural Residential Outreach – The focus groups are going to take place in April and May with the engagement plan; hopefully it will be completed in June. Thank you to Caitlin Cornwall and Greg Carr for coordinating the environmental stakeholder meetings and to Fred Allebach for participating. The next Board meeting is April 26 and the next Advisory Committee meeting is May 11. Section 3 comments are due on May 3. If you need any help with stakeholder outreach, let us know.

No public comment.

Review Action Items and ask for any Closing Comments

Tim Parker thanked everyone for attending and their comments. He reviewed the list of action items:

- Section 3 review – Advisory Committee to provide staff with input by May 3.
- Staff to follow up via email with Advisory Committee on Measurable Objectives and Minimum Thresholds discussion.
- Project/Management Action slides – staff to send them out/post.
- Project/Management Action slide – Advisory Committee to add ideas and send to staff.
- Ann DuBay to communicate with Jim Bundschu about recycled water on Napa Sonoma Salt Marsh project.
- Staff to correct previous meeting summary and remediate/post.

Adaptive management approach covered in the SMC Section.

Bundschu – It would be very helpful for the community if everything was measured in acre-feet; we need a transparent goal of what we're shooting for – adaptive management.

Cornwall (chat) Jim Bundschu raises a good messaging need: Where does water go, and how much, and why do we care?

Jane Whitsett – I agree with Jim Bundschu's comments. We don't really know how much water we need. It would be helpful to see where we are.

Trotta – We need to come up with that number. The next phase will be focused on simulating conditions and Sustainable Management Criteria. We need to come up with a sustainable yield for the basin – which is the amount of water that can be pumped without causing undesirable results, so we'll be using those preliminary SMC to determine what that is. The various iterations of the projects and management action scenarios will be informative as to what types of projects will help achieve that.

Bundschu – It's pretty threatening when you're saying that we should reduce our production again without that figure, that we reduce our capacity to farm by 5% and rural owners 10%, and then we can ramp it up in 2025 for agriculture.

Allebach – We do have depletion areas and a diminishing resource, so it's unrealistic to think that we would continue with business as usual without some sort of conservation.

Bundschu – I couldn't agree with you more, but we need to know why it is happening.

Fred Allebach thanked the Advisory Committee members for their participation and ongoing feedback. Please send additional comments to Ann DuBay and Marcus Trotta. Allebach adjourned the meeting at 5:36 p.m. The next meeting is May 11, 2021.

Attendees:

Advisory Committee Members (present)

Caitlin Cornwall

Craig Lichty

Fred Allebach

Greg Carr

Jane Whitsett

Jim Bundschu

Matt Stornetta

Norman Gilroy

Vicki Hill
Steve Wolf (joined late)

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

Kenneth Johnson
Taylor Serres - excused

[Staff/Presenters](#)

Ann DuBay, Sonoma Valley GSA Administrator
Marcus Trotta, Sonoma Water, Technical Staff
Stephen Maples, Sonoma Water, Technical Staff
Simone Peters, GSA Administrative Aide (recording meeting summary)

[Facilitator](#)

Tim Parker