MEETING MINUTES

Groundwater Sustainability Agency for the Eastern Management Area in the Santa Ynez River Groundwater Basin
April 15, 2021

A SPECIAL meeting of the Groundwater Sustainability Agency (GSA) for the Eastern Management Area (EMA) in the Santa Ynez River Groundwater Basin was held on Thursday, April 15, 2021 at 6:30 p.m. As a result of the COVID-19 emergency and Governor Newsom's Executive Orders to protect public health by issuing shelter-in-home standards, limiting public gatherings, and requiring social distancing, this meeting occurred solely via video and teleconference as authorized by and in furtherance of Executive Order Nos. N-29-20 and N-33-20 and in accordance with Santa Barbara County Health Office Order 2021-12.2.

EMA GSA Committee Members Present: Joan Hartmann, Mark Infanti, Brad Joos, Brett Marymee

EMA GSA Alternate Committee Members Present: Cynthia Allen, Meighan Dietenhofer

Member Agency Staff Present: Bill Buelow, Paeter Garcia, Amber Thompson, Kevin Walsh, Matt van der Linden, Matt Young

Others Present: Steve Anderson, Joe Barget, Jeff Barry (GSI Water Solutions), Bryan Bondy, Mike Burchardi, Doug Circle, Sam Cohen, Elizabeth Farnum, Tim Gorham, Mary Heyden, Gay Infanti, Curtis Lawler (Stetson Engineers), Austin M., Michael McAlpin (GSI), Kevin Merrill, Tim Nicely (GSI), Tony Nisich, Nate Page (GSI), Anita Regmi (DWR), plus 2 other members of the public whose names were not registered.

I. Call to Order and Roll Call

GSA Committee Member Marymee called the meeting to order at 6:35 p.m. and asked Mr. Buelow to call roll. All GSA Committee Members were present. A quorum was met.

II. Introductions and Review of SGMA in Santa Ynez River Valley Basin

Mr. Buelow announced names of phone attendees and provided a review of SGMA activities in Santa Ynez River Valley Basin.

III. Additions or Deletions, if any, to the Agenda

No additions or deletions were made.

IV. Public Comment

There was no public comment.

V. Receive Staff Memorandum regarding letter from the Santa Ynez Water Group

Mr. Buelow presented a Staff Memorandum dated April 12, 2021 regarding a letter received from the Santa Ynez Water Group dated March 22, 2021. Discussion followed. Mr. Doug Circle encouraged the GSA to reach out now to DWR regarding a process to consolidate the current three GSAs to one GSA managing the three GSPs in the Basin. Supervisor Hartmann asked whether a cost/benefit analysis should be prepared regarding the different potential governance models. The GSA Committee Members unanimously supported the recommendations set forth in the April 12 Staff Memorandum.

VI. Receive Presentation from GSI on the Sustainable Management Criteria

Mr. Jeff Barry and Mr. Nate Page (GSI Water Solutions) presented "Sustainability Management Criteria Summary for the Santa Ynez Basin - EMA GSA." The presentation included a review of the process for setting Sustainable Management Criteria, Selection of "Representative Wells", and summary of Sustainable Management Criteria for chronic decline in groundwater levels, chronic reduction of groundwater in storage, degradation of groundwater quality, depletion of interconnected surface water and impacts to GDEs, and subsidence.

Public comment, GSA Committee Member discussion, and follow-up from the consultants and staff from the GSA member agencies occurred during and after the presentation.

- Mr. Doug Circle asked for clarification on Slide 6 – map of representative monitoring wells and how the wells compare to those referenced in the Draft HCM document. Mr. Tim Nicely stated that Well No. 25K01 stopped use in 2021, and Well No. 22A03 was discontinued 2018, so the GSA cannot use those for future measuring/monitoring. Mr. Barry identified this as a data gap and advised that the GSA needs to work with landowners for more available wells.

- Mr. Doug Circle asked about Slide 7 and if the 10 ft. level referenced is below historical water levels. Mr. Barry explained why 10 ft. was used and stressed that the average balance is negative 1800 acre-feet per year now, so if the trend continues it will keep depleting groundwater in storage.

- Mr. Tim Gorham suggested that well data from Santa Ynez Rancho Estates MWC may be good to include as a representative sample for the Happy Canyon area. Mr. Barry replied that the area in itself is not a principal aquifer. Mr. Nicely added that as seen in the hydrographs, there is good representation in those areas.

- Mr. Kevin Merrill agreed with Mr. Circle's comments and requests that the consultants revisit the proposed 10 ft. Minimum Threshold. He asked why 1969 is showing as a dry year when it was a year of large rain. Mr. Barry clarified there can be one or two years of wet in the "dry periods" since images are not exact for every year, but that time period averages as a dry period.

- Ms. Anita Regmi asked about the current status of the Basin. Mr. Barry stated the Basin appears to be in a sustainable state now. Ms. Regmi asked if any significant and unreasonable levels have been defined. Mr. Barry reviewed Slide 7. Ms. Regmi asked if a study regarding impacts of proposed Minimum Thresholds and Minimum Objectives to all beneficial users, especially domestic well users, has been completed. Mr. Barry confirmed it will be done. He reiterated that this is just a summary of Sustainable Management Criteria and the Minimum Thresholds and Minimum Objective levels will be developed as part of this chapter. He indicated that undesirable results have not been defined yet because the Minimum Thresholds and Minimum Objectives are still being developed.

- Committee Member Brad Joos agreed with Mr. Circle that 10 ft level could be too shallow. He requested more information and stated that the charts provided do not show the bottom of the aquifer to show how much water is below the Minimum Threshold level. Mr. Barry advised that total volume is difficult to measure. The issue at hand is to make sure levels are in balance between output and input, and not to focus on the total volume existing in the Basin. The consultants intend to use the Groundwater Model to make sure the groundwater levels do not chronically decline and will pay attention to storage levels. Committee Member Joos requested aquifer depth be added for the test/monitor wells.

- Ms. Mary Heyden commented that the charts show the water table bouncing up and down. She asked why one well shows water going up while another is going down in the same time period (1960-80). Mr. Barry replied that aquifers behave differently in different parts of the Basin. The Groundwater Model takes this into account plus future pumping and climate change. Ms. Heyden agrees with Committee Member Joos in having aquifer depth added to the charts to give a better perspective. Mr. Barry confirmed that aquifer depth can be added to the hydrographs.

- Mr. van der Linden warned that if the Basin is pumped significantly below historical levels that we seriously risk permanent loss of storage, called non-elastic subsidence, if thresholds are set too low. Mr. Barry agreed this is a concern.

- Committee Member Brett Marymee asked for clarification on Slide 7 and why water levels being observed in 50% of representative wells is chosen as the threshold. Mr. Barry does not think there are enough wells to serve as monitoring wells. He suggested this item will be added to the proposed Management Actions in long term, and that the GSA will need to improve the monitoring program/network. This is a starting point and can be changed in future.

- Mr. Bryan Bondy stated that the Minimum Threshold should be set at a level where significant and unreasonable effects occur and the level should be adjusted to reflect that. He stated that significant and unreasonable effects have not been shown yet. He suggested setting a water level where, if reached, the Basin could not recover and thus would be considered an impact to all beneficial users. As an example, Mr. Bondy said that Well No. 08P01 is 237 feet deep, but the Minimum Threshold level looks to be lower than the well depth.

- Mr. Barry presented information regarding possible degraded water quality standards.

- Mr. Kevin Merrill stated that the irrigated lands program regulates water quality. He stressed the need to be careful of salts and stated his concern that agriculture pumpers are not double regulated for water quality. He stated there is not a correlation between pumping and salt levels. Mr. Barry agreed this is important because it affects both agriculture and all beneficial users. He stated that the SGMA program cannot make water quality levels worse and should not draw salts from one aquifer to another.

- Ms. Mary Heyden asked if there are other reasons for concentrations of salts/nutrients other than pumping. Mr. Barry stated that many agriculture areas have problems with nitrate levels, but that does not appear to be a problem in the EMA. He noted that deeper water tends to have a lower quality and has more time for salts to buildup in groundwater from natural marine sediments in the vicinity.

- Mr. Bryan Bondy expressed concern that the Draft HCM does not establish a relationship between water quality and groundwater pumping but the SMC does. Mr. Barry agreed the Draft HCM does not show a relationship between quality and pumping but the GSP is still required to set thresholds. Mr. Bondy asked if it is possible to screen out that relationship.

- Mr. Barry and Mr. Page presented information on the SGMA standard regarding depletion of interconnected surface water.

- Committee Member Mark Infanti asked for clarification about an area in Solvang denoted by a circle and showing as "excluded from EMA" on the Map of Categorized Potential GDEs. Mr. Barry stated that a land survey provided by DWR shows that area as raised bedrock and is excluded from SGMA. The EMA GSA and consultants can therefore ignore the "excluded area" and will work with DWR when the next mapping is done.

- Mr. Bryan Bondy commented about the map of categorized potential GDEs and stated that the Paso Robles principal aquifer in the upper areas of the EMA should be removed. He requested that the consultants look more carefully at the red patches along Alamo Pintado Creek because those areas may not actually be potential GDEs associated with a Principal Aquifer. Mr. Barry stated the consultants will revisit those areas.

- Mr. Bryan Bondy asked about Potential GDEs after the 30-foot depth to groundwater screening. Mr. Barry identified this as a data gap that should become a proposed Management Action in the future.

- Mr. Bryan Bondy asked if the wastewater treatment plant located on the Chumash Reservation may be supporting some of these GDEs.

- Committee Member Brad Joos agreed with the need for verification of shallow ecosystems. He further asked if natural springs have been identified. Mr. Barry confirmed they have been identified but just need to be verified.

- Committee Member Joos asked if any wells are located near the shallow ecosystems. Mr. Barry stated that issue is also being researched.

- Committee Member Brett Marymee asked the consultants to revisit Mr. Bondy's question regarding the wastewater treatment plant and potential GDEs. He asked if any reports already exist or is there a need to hire a biologist and do more research. Mr. Page confirmed he reviewed a few EIRs and compiled a list of sensitive animal species but none of the plant species are considered sensitive plant species. Possible invasive plant species exist but are unknown. Committee Member Marymee encouraged the consultants to look for more and better data sources. Mr. Barry responded that they may need further verification on these issues.

- Mr. Barry presented information on the SGMA standard regarding land subsidence.

- Mr. Kevin Merrill stated that satellites measure subsidence but cannot determine if it is due to pumping or tectonic activity.

- Mr. Bryan Bondy stated there is one continuous GPS monitoring station in the Basin which is good for separating tectonic signals from groundwater signals. He suggested the possible need for a second one. He asked what amount of subsidence has been documented and at what locations would subsidence be significant and unreasonable.

- Committee Member Brad Joos asked if there is any research into large wildfires impacting water sources. Mr. Barry stated it was not considered in this context and he has not read where it has been considered.

VII. Receive Draft Water Budget chapter of GSP and consider public comment period

Mr. Buelow announced the Draft Water Budget was posted on the SantaYnezWater.org website and released for public comment for 21 days, April 6 through April 28, 2021. GSA Committee Member Brett Marymee stressed the importance for the public to review this document and provide comments using the portal. Mr. Buelow announced an EMA CAG meeting will be scheduled to discuss the document later as part of the public comment process.

VIII. EMA GSA Committee requests and comments

GSA Committee Member Mark Infanti requested upcoming meeting dates. Mr. Buelow confirmed a Special Meeting is planned for April 29, 2021 and a Regular Meeting is scheduled for May 27, 2021.

Mr. Buelow announced that SGMA Newsletter Issue No. 3 has been released. Member agencies of all three GSAs are distributing the Newsletter in utility bills, groundwater production mailings, and online.

IX. Adjournment

There being no further business, GSA Committee Member Marymee adjourned the meeting at 8:46 pm.

Brett Marymee, Chairman

William J. Buelow, Secretary

STAFF MEMORANDUM

DATE: April 12, 2021

TO: WMA, CMA and EMA GSA Committees

FROM: GSA Member Agency Staff

SUBJECT: Santa Ynez Water Group Letter of March 22, 2021

Please see the attached March 22, 2021 letter from Mr. Doug Circle, representing the Santa Ynez Water Group (Water Group).

In the letter, Mr. Circle explains the Water Group's requests to "minimize GSP implementation costs to the maximum extent possible". To date, many of the Water Group's comments have focused on the reduction or elimination of data gaps and additional data acquisition that are not required to implement SGMA or manage groundwater in the Santa Ynez River Valley Groundwater Basin (Basin).

The Water Group further requested that the three GSAs combine to submit one Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) instead of the planned three GSPs, indicating that a single GSP approach would save costs. However, staff advises that submitting one GSP instead of three is not feasible at this time, as it would require changing the three Memorandum of Agreements (MOAs) that established the three GSAs. There is not enough time in the schedule to modify the MOAs with concurrence of the eight agencies and approval by their Boards and Councils, much less revise the current versions of the GSPs into one in the remaining time. It also must be noted that the three GSAs would need to renegotiate the various consulting agreements currently in place for preparing the three GSPs.

The three GSP documents are scheduled to be ready for review this summer. Changing the format of the documents and coordinating with the three GSAs and two consultant teams would put the submission of the GSPs by the SGMA deadline of January 31, 2022 in jeopardy.

- **Staff recommendation:** Maintain current structure under the MOAs to submit three GSPs.

Additionally, the Water Group asked that the three GSAs consider consolidating into a single GSA to further reduce costs for meetings and other administrative requirements. The GSAs will consider potential options for future governance of SGMA in the Basin once the GSPs are submitted.

- **Staff recommendation:** Prior to submittal of the GSPs, Staff from each of the eight agencies in the Basin will discuss various governance options and present the topic to each of the GSA Committees.