

Santa Rosa Plain Groundwater Sustainability Agency Advisory Committee Meeting

Monday, May 22, 2023 | Meeting Summary

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MEETING SUMMARY

Welcome and Call to Order

Bill Keene, Administrator for Sonoma Valley GSA, replacing Andy Rodgers for the day, opened the meeting at 3:02 p.m. and Bob Anderson, Chair, welcomed the group.

General Public Comments

None.

Agenda Review, Approval of Previous Meeting Summary

Objective: Confirm agenda and approve February 13, 2023 meeting summary.

Bill Keene provided an overview of the agenda.

Arthur Deicke approved the previous meeting summary without changes, Matt O'Connor seconded, and the other members agreed. David Long abstained as he wasn't at the last meeting. The summary will be posted as written.

Keene said that DWR announced their preliminary grant awards: Santa Rosa Plain and Petaluma Valley both were recommended to receive their total grant requested; the grant includes four components. Unfortunately, Sonoma Valley was not recommended to receive any funds.

Bob Anderson – Why the difference in funding? Why \$5+ million instead of \$1.7 million?

Trotta – I think there were a lot of placeholders added since we discussed it at the October meeting.

Anderson – What is the timeframe?

Trotta – We have until March 2026.

Anderson – We are celebrating, should we?

Trotta – This is a draft recommendation, there is a two-week public comment period. It could be fall until everything is final.

Anderson – Statewide amount?

Trotta – I believe there were 80 applications and 31 were funded.

Keene – The basins that were awarded funds received the entire amount requested. We weren't expecting the full amount.

Anderson – Did Sonoma Valley get zero?

Keene – Yes. There is a 15-day review period to turn around comments for consideration before the final appeal. We are looking at other grant possibilities as well.

No public comment.

Spring Monitoring Update

Objective: Share initial data from Spring 2023 monitoring

Mitch Buttress, Technical staff provided an update on the current groundwater levels as measured from the voluntary and dedicated multi-level monitoring wells this spring. Total rainfall received in Santa Rosa Plain for Water Year 2022 (October 1 to present) is about 42 inches compared to 27 inches in Water Year 2022 and 13 inches in Water Year 2021. Groundwater levels are generally higher than normal spring conditions.

Questions/Comments

Matt O'Connor – Is there a way to query your water model to see what the model says groundwater levels would be with this year's rainfall?

Trotta – We haven't been running the model since completing the scenarios for the GSP. It could be something we look at and possibly start running scenarios. We are also waiting for an updated version from the USGS.

David Long – Is the deep well recovery an expected thing?

Buttress – The one in Rohnert Park could be due to less pumping rather than recharge.

Trotta – The deeper aquifer is generally more confined and pressurized; it is quicker to see results, and sometimes more dramatic, than in an unconfined aquifer.

Anderson – Five feet recovery at the Cotati well, is it because it is bigger than other numbers, or what?

Buttress – It is the same thing Marcus Trotta was saying about unconfined/confined aquifers. It is also a newly drilled well, but it is a little surprising.

Deicke – I was expecting more lag from the shallow to the medium to the deep aquifers. A confined aquifer, how is it getting water from the surface?

Buttress – I feel with the deeper ones, it is because of less pumping this year.

Deicke – There are lots of variables out there and we can't pin it on one thing.

David Noren – You have pressure transducers on these wells. How often are the readings?

Buttress – It is hourly data; I graph daily averages.

Noren – Do you have an opinion on the metering lag, do you think it is this year's response?

Trotta – I think when you plot this up with rainfall and stream flows, there is a big correlation and a connection between the shallow and deep aquifers.

Rue Furch – Historically, deeper aquifer takes a long time to replenish, the shallow takes less. How is it that deeper aquifers are experiencing recharge in one year?

Buttress – The spring measurements rebound to similar levels. The spring levels in deeper zones aren't much higher than normal, probably mostly due to more pumping.

Wayne Haydon – After the wells were installed, did you do a pump test on individual aquifers?

Buttress – Not on the monitoring wells.

Trotta – If we get the award funding, we have aquifer tests as part of our projects.

Anderson – I find the graphs limited in explaining to the public. It would be good to know how it compares to other years. I would also ask you to include changes to run-off, etc.

Indigo Bannister – The Outreach team created an Annual Report fact sheet, copies are available here at the meeting and online.

Trotta – We will have estimated amounts of water leaving/entering the basin from this data and data collected in the fall. For next year’s Annual Report, we need to report on the change in storage in the basin.

Furch – I second Bob Anderson’s request to get something more user friendly for the public to understand.

Ryan Crawford – I think the decade old hydrographs are more helpful than the one year ones.

Furch – This information would be very confusing. We say it takes decades to replenish deep aquifers, but the one-year data shows otherwise.

Deicke – Sonoma Water has good explanatory information and a fact sheet on Lake Sonoma. Simple and self-explanatory. We need something like that.

Haydon – Create graphs/maps and show the depth/elevation of the water; it is easier to grasp the idea.

Public Question/Comments

None.

Voluntary Monitoring Program Planning

Objective: Receive AC feedback on design of voluntary monitoring program, including the following questions:

- *What should the GSA consider when designing the voluntary monitoring programs?*
- *What should outreach look like for the voluntary monitoring programs?*

Mitch Buttress presented an overview of the existing volunteer well monitoring programs and initial ideas for the design and expansion of voluntary monitoring program planning in the Santa Rosa Plain.

Buttress presented areas of data gaps for focusing volunteer well monitoring outreach efforts. With the GSA’s limited funding and staff resources, it could make sense for the GSA to help organize and support community volunteer programs, provide outreach materials, and offer guidance on monitoring and data collection protocols for well owners to collect their own water-level measurements.

Permit Sonoma is setting up an online portal where well owners can input meter and water-level data. This portal could potentially be used for volunteer programs. Alternatively, the GSA could set up its own portal.

Marcus Trotta – We envision having some sort of monitoring sub-committee as we are monitoring all three basins.

Questions/Comments

Noren – I recently conducted a workshop with the Bennett Valley Grange providing training and information to help the group set up their own community water-level monitoring program. The information received is interesting and I believe it was a great outreach in Bennett Valley, there were approximately 30 attendees. I have a meter on my well which I installed eight years ago. We use 68 gallons a day in our home.

Furch – The information year to-year is a confidence builder because you see a trend. Spring and fall data monitoring data are mostly what people need; they are hungry for the information. You mentioned that Permit Sonoma is setting up an online portal. If they are interested in this data, we should set up a joint

portal with some of the funding we receive. Permit Sonoma is understaffed and unless they get special funding to do it, it won't get done. If the GSAs can collaborate with the planning department, it would be the best way to achieve 'knowing' anything in a shorter timeframe.

Trotta – With the revised well ordinance, there is an opportunity to get additional collaboration and coordination. If the funding comes to fruition, we could create a water data dashboard.

Furch – We need the information for planning purposes and the public needs to understand.

Noren – The standard operating procedures that you develop, it would be good if you could standardize it from this point moving forward. I would be willing to modify what I am doing so it is a standardized format. Anything that could be done to make it simple and easy to use, would be a benefit.

Furch – David Noren and I are volunteering to serve on your committee.

Crawford – It would be good to capture information over the years in spring and fall.

Noren – Maybe put in a transducer or two, they aren't that expensive. That would be great.

Anderson – Of DWRs monitoring wells, 13 are discontinued. If funding is received, maybe we can get a few back online. Will they provide the historic information, or will the gap mean you are starting over?

Buttress – A lot of them go back to the 70s's and 80's.

Crawford – The answer right now is 'no'. They argue that now the GSA is established, the GSA can do it.

Trotta – Mitch has been trying to do direct outreach to those well owners, maybe GSA can pick those up.

Deicke – David Noren says he uses 68 gallons/day. That is only 4% of the two acre-feet allocation/year. Can we look at a credit program or revise the allocation amount to something more realistic?

Trotta – That will be covered in the next presentation.

Deicke – I read that you will be requiring that wells be surveyed; that is expensive. David Noren mentioned transducers; they are only a few hundred dollars each.

Elizabeth Cargay – Thinking about the gap areas where we want the monitoring wells, I am wondering what the best way is to do that. Maybe send a postcard? In Windsor, we are trying to figure out where the arsenic is, so we sent a postcard. We received few responses. The Grange was a great idea. Transducers are a good idea as well.

Furch – There are at least three or four other granges that would be thrilled to host the training.

Noren – It is an easy sell, an easy investment.

Anderson – The GUIDE program asked who might be interested in volunteering well data and many people said yes.

Furch – Maybe we should look at that list and then follow up with the owners around the gap areas.

Trotta – We need to be strategic with how many wells to include.

O'Connor – We may even get too many. Active wells aren't ideal for monitoring.

Haydon – One slide shows data gap areas outside the basin.

Trotta – Included a boundary monitoring network in the GSP. Those are areas where a voluntary program might be a particularly good option because it would be more challenging for the GSA to expend resources on a \$100,000 multi-level well outside its jurisdiction.

Furch – Would it be possible to have maps with gap areas that include streets or major roads?

O'Connor – There is lots of information like this. There are simplified versions of GIS software that one can access online.

Haydon – It would be nice if there was a portal where we could access the data.

Bannister – We could make a web map with this information quite easily and make it available to you without too much trouble.

Furch – One of the roles of the Advisory Committee is to help with outreach communication.

Peter Martin – If there is a way to create companions or clusters? Property owners may drop out of long-term monitoring, for whatever reason.

Public Questions/Comments

None.

Policy Options Study Kickoff

Objective: Receive AC feedback on design of policy options study, including the following questions:

- *What policies are missing from the Policy Options Matrix that should be considered?*
- *Do you have concerns about any of the policies identified in the Policy Options Matrix?*
- *Do the initial implementation rankings in the Policy Options Matrix seem reasonable?*
- *What policies identified in the Policy Options Matrix do you think are the most important to implement first?*

Marcus Trotta gave an overview of the study including the process and scope of the study. The goal is to develop, prioritize, vet, and consider policies within the authorities of the GSA and local land use agencies that support and advance achieving the sustainability goal for the Subbasin.

There are a total of 16 policy options on the list grouped by primary benefits. This is a living list of options that will periodically be updated based on new information and GSA priorities.

Initial implementation Ranking

- 1a – Able to advance (funding available / 2 options)
- 1b – Able to advance (pending funding availability / 3 options)
- 2 – Able to advance pending consultation with adopting agency (3 options)
- 3 – Develop more information, reconsider later (5 options)
- 4 – Reconsider based on future potential need or additional information (3 options)

Trotta asked for input from the Advisory Committee on preliminary policy option approaches and implementation ranking.

Questions/Comments

Furch – On the Benefit Objectives, slide 35, add a bullet number 6 “Outreach”.

Trotta – It is currently in point 4 “Improve management of groundwater resources” but could be done differently.

Martin – It is hard to weigh in without understanding the magnitude of what some of the options could help offset. It would be an easier sell to undertake some of the more controversial things, if we knew it would result in a large benefit across the beneficial users.

Anderson – Did the three basins all look at the same 16 options to come up with the same number?

Trotta – Not necessarily, there may be differences. Sonoma Valley has more serious groundwater level declines occurring that other Boards might not consider moving forward with initially.
Keene – We need to be cognizant of how what happens in one basin affects all three basins.

O'Connor – When putting this together, were you able to access any state level best practices? Is there a state level resource for this? Everyone is re-inventing the wheel.

Trotta – I wouldn't say there is a 'go to' resource. But for policy options higher on the list, we will investigate if they have been done in other areas and then do some research.

Furch – Permit Sonoma has six months to create the Implementation Plan for the Well Ordinance. Is the GSA coordinating with Permit Sonoma?

Trotta – Yes, lots of work is related to the GSAs.

Furch – Anytime we can minimize duplication, would be good.

Anderson – The GSA doesn't have authority. The whole list needs to be re-thought. The Annual Report fact sheet says we have a sustainable yield of 24K acre-feet (AF) and under dry conditions we used 18,000 AF.

Trotta – Other areas the GSA could comment on are recommending monitoring needed for specific projects, and mitigation.

Anderson – We want to say that we are doing OK. We are monitoring, watching, and using less than our sustainable yield. Municipal hook-ups aren't going to happen with the GSA deciding.

Furch – Urban users are probably a little nervous because the surface water supply isn't guaranteed anymore either.

Crawford – I agree. What is the GSA going to say?

Haydon – We are not the agency making the decision, we are a reviewing body. I don't want to be doing something that someone is already doing/redundant.

O'Connor – We don't want to be redundant, but we want to coordinate and have similar standards to the county.

Furch – We need to ensure there is as much coordination as possible. Two things are easy: 1) to continue to maximize data collection and 2) public outreach to educate people on what they need to do to achieve conservation. Education should be included to decision-making policies; it my understanding that the GSAs don't have authority.

Noren – There is information available. Push the information that is already available. It should be a policy for this agency to promote and share information, especially on the water use side.

Furch – All the websites should have a Resource page.

Noren – The policy would be to promote resources that are available.

O'Connor – The purpose of this list is that you have a place to go when you run into a problem and hard decisions need to be made.

Furch – The data collection will fortify this.

Martin – In terms of policies that might be missing, maybe an opportunity for offsetting a well in another area. I have concerns about policies overlapping jurisdictions. The ranking of the list is great. The only policy we might be forced to prioritize is crediting for recharge, it may need to be moved up on the list.

Deicke – We don't address water quality, especially for shallow wells. We look at capacity and volume but not quality.

Trotta – Yes, it is something to think about. Maybe a voluntary water quality program.
Crawford – That is a tough one. The state is already heavy in regulating groundwater quality; California is the most stringent in the country.
Trotta – Water quality is one of the sustainability indicators the GSA is responsible for tracking. But there are other regulatory structures that are involved.
Cargay – It could be as simple as obtaining the information from different agencies and coordinating.
Noren – When we were doing early work for the GSP, I was hesitant to bring water quality issues into this agency because there is a Regional Board; it is a step too far for this agency.
Martin –The GSA and Regional Board overlap where the GSA activities potentially cause water quality issues. There needs to be a correlation of activities of the GSA and responsibilities of the Water Quality Board. There may be situations where water quality continues to decline. In that scenario you may offer treatment for the greater benefit of the basin.

Maureen Geary – How did you come up with the list?

Trotta – Many of them were examples in the GSP, some are what other GSAs are working on, and some came about through the well ordinance revisions.

Geary – Some of these may be litigated. Maybe it would be good to go over the list and cut it down to policies that are only possible for the GSA to achieve. Ask for Holly Roberson’s input on what is doable.

By September, will we have a sense of the funding available?

Trotta – Yes. Depending upon DRW’s schedule for finalizing awards, I think they will be finalizing recommendations in October. They will have a lot of comments.

Anderson – Between now and our next meeting there will be feedback on our comments and the Board’s comments on policy options. In September, we will review it one more time; please submit your input.

Public Questions/Comments

None.

Standing Item: GSA Operational Updates

Objective: Provide progress updates on GSA administration and operations

Bill Keene gave an update on miscellaneous items.

- John Nagle has been elected Board Vice Chair. Emily Sanborn replaces Pam Stafford.
- Santa Rosa Plain GSA grant application was recommended for full funding at \$5,383,730.
- The preliminary budget was approved at the March Board meeting.
- The groundwater sustainability fee will stay at \$40/acre-foot for the next fiscal year.
- The Integrated Climate Adaptation and Resiliency Program (ICARP) will award \$125 million over multiple rounds in resilience efforts. The planning focus is on the first cycle, \$25 million is available in Round 1. Subsequent focus will be on implementation.
- Legislative Advocacy: We have a small work group with other GSAs in the state working to get additional funding for administrative costs, especially for small basins.

- Sonoma County Well Ordinance Updates were approved by the Board of Supervisors on April 4, 2023. Key components include 1) Level 1 water conservation requirements were added for all well permits; 2) established discretionary public trust review process for well permits in portions of the county. If within GSA, it will be referred to GSA for opportunity to review; 3) established water meter reporting for new wells using more than 2AFY and a voluntary program for existing and low water use wells; and 4) established monthly water level reporting for new wells using 5+ acre-feet pre year.

No questions or comments.

Closing

Bob Anderson thanked Bill Keene for filling in for Andy Rodgers.

Bill Keene thanked everyone for their attendance input and closed the meeting at 5:27 p.m.

The next Board meeting will take place Thursday, June 8, 1:00 – 3:30 pm and the next Advisory Committee will be Monday, September 11 from 3:00 pm – 5:30 pm.

Attendees:

Advisory Committee Members (present)

Agricultural representative, Bob Anderson
Agricultural representative, David Long, (departed 5:00)
Business representative, Arthur Deicke
City of Santa Rosa appointee, Peter Martin
City of Sebastopol appointee, Ryan Crawford
Environmental representative, Rue Furch
Gold Ridge RCD appointee, Matt O'Connor
Rural Residential representative, David Noren
Rural Residential representative, Marlene Soiland
Sonoma RCD appointee, Wayne Haydon
Town of Windsor appointee, Elizabeth Cargay
City of Rohnert Park appointee, Justin Brandt
Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria representative, Maureen Geary (arrived 3:12)

Advisory Committee Members (absent and/or excused)

City of Cotati, Craig Scott
County of Sonoma appointee, Mark Grismer
Environmental representative, Shirley Johnson
Independent Water Systems appointee, Sarah Davis

Staff/Presenters

Bill Keene, Sonoma Valley GSA Administrator
Marcus Trotta, Sonoma Water, Technical Staff
Mitch Buttress, Sonoma Water, Technical Staff
Indigo Bannister, GSA staff
Simone Peters, GSA staff, *recording meeting summary*

Other Attendees

Colin Close, City of Santa Rosa Staff
Bill Pasqueretta, Member of Public