

Santa Rosa Plain Groundwater Sustainability Agency Advisory Committee Meeting Meeting Summary

Date/time: Monday, March 9, 2020; 3:00 pm-5:30 p.m.

Meeting Location: Santa Rosa Utilities Field Office, 35 Stony Point Road, Santa Rosa

Contact: Andy Rodgers, Santa Rosa Plain Groundwater Sustainability Agency (GSA), Administrator

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Next meeting: May 11, 2020, 3:00-5:30 pm, City of Santa Rosa Utilities Field Office (UFO), 35 Stony Point Road, Santa Rosa.

MEETING SUMMARY

Welcome, Introductions and Agenda Review

Sam Magill, Facilitator, Sacramento State University – Consensus and Collaboration Program, welcomed the group, suggested a round of introductions and reviewed the agenda in detail.

General Public Comment Period

Joe Gaffney – A comment regarding page 4, second paragraph of the January 13 draft meeting summary, change “incorporated” to “unincorporated” area. The sentence should read “When you first brought the model to us in 2016, you estimated that about 85-88% of the groundwater was being pumped in the unincorporated area, was there a marked change to that in what you called the 1.0 Plus?”

Advisory Committee Update

Bob Anderson, Advisory Committee Chairman.

Initial Advisory Committee feedback, slide 17. The way I view the Chair’s report is to be brief and avoid things we don’t know. The Board is looking for recommendations from the Advisory Committee. Until we have them, don’t bring ideas to the Board.

Questions/Comments Advisory Committee

Furch – I was at the Board meeting. I think Mr. Anderson tried to summarize what happened. We didn’t come up with anything conclusive. I agree if someone is reporting that they can’t represent a vote. I understand the dilemma, the issue of identification.

Magill – Is the primary concern the way the information is portrayed to the Board?

Anderson – In that conversation we raised the issue of voting, we haven’t done that yet. It was also said that the Advisory Committee will bring back multiple scenarios for the Board to consider. I want to say that I am putting the Advisory Committee on notice that what they say may be brought to the Board.

Potter – Mr. Anderson, I was also at the meeting. I am looking at slide 17, which specific aspects are you suggesting weren't correctly portrayed?

Anderson – As concepts that are floating around, they aren't recommendations, and what we as the Advisory Committee, are putting forward.

Potter – Perhaps Mr. Anderson could recap at the end of a meeting so we could hear what he heard/summarizes.

Trotta – I think something along those lines will be important moving forward. It would be good to bring some concurrence to the Board. I don't think we should spend time voting on preliminary metrics until things have been vetted.

Rodgers – Valuable conversation, we want to make sure we are representing what you say correctly. The Board will want to know the range of things we are discussing and where we are in the conversation. This seems more about framing than anything else. We need to bring the Board along as we describe things during the year but put it in a frame that is more conversational.

Magill – I agree with Andy Rodgers' recommendation to frame things in a more conversational way rather than as recommendations. Does this summarize it?

Anderson – Yes, I think so, maybe a couple paragraphs rather than bullets to describe things.

Magill – Point well taken and we should be able to make changes as we move forward.

Updates

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

Andy Rodgers said the February Board meeting included updates on Sustainable Management Criteria and the Groundwater User Registration Program. The Board approved the audit, preliminary FY 20/21 budget, and accepted Beth Lamb to replace Sebastian Bertsch through the end of December 2020 and gave their approval to advertise the open Rural Residential seat.

Marcus Trotta, Technical Staff, mentioned that the Prop 68 grant looks like good news for \$1 million worth of projects. The Department of Water Resources has recommended the project for approval and we expect a final decision in a few weeks. Various projects put forward include: construction of four deep monitoring wells in the basin, rural residential outreach, better refining our water demand estimates, surface water-groundwater studies in the basin, and seepage runs. Hopefully, we will hear soon.

Review Action Items and Advisory Committee Charter

Mr. Magill directed meeting participants to the Advisory Committee charter. It is our highest priority that we accurately record and reflect what you are saying at the meetings. It is always our goal to get consensus at our meetings. You have asked for general levels of support. See if the model set up in the past still works for you or if we need to make adjustments.

Questions/Comments Advisory Committee

Anderson – My view regarding page 3 is that the reports accurately reflect what has been said and agreed.

Magill – At the end of the day the Board will want to see a range of options and know if there is support for ideas. If the majority of the Advisory Committee says not to proceed with a concept, we can record that so there is a good understanding from the Board to know if there is support, and if there isn't, why?

Furch – At the end of our meetings/close of issues that will be recorded, the Facilitator should restate what has been heard. It will make it easier to report to the Board and makes it clearer for the group to know what the Advisory Committee is doing.

Magill – Excellent point, I can commit to doing that on a regular basis.

O'Connor – I find the range of options a little surprising, I don't see why as we are deliberating, we need to provide a range of options.

Sustainable Management Criteria: Potential Representative Monitoring Point (RMP) Network

Objective: Review and discuss potential network of monitoring wells for measuring SMCs related to Lowering of Groundwater Levels

Mr. Trotta provided an overview on the potential RMP network including suggested methodology and criteria. There are two general types of monitoring networks required for each applicable Sustainability Indicator: the RMP network where SMCs are established and tracked and the entire (more extensive) monitoring network. The current proposed RMP network includes 14 shallow and 12 deep wells for a total of 26. We are also including the locations for the four proposed deep wells proposed for the SGMA Round 3 grant application. Groundwater levels can also be used as a proxy for other sustainability criteria.

Additional guidance – the selection of wells should be aquifer specific. If active wells are being used for monitoring, we need to take extra precautions. The current proposed RMP network is currently only focused on the lowering of groundwater levels. The total existing groundwater level monitoring network includes about 154 wells with measurements from within the last 10 years. We looked at wells throughout the watershed; all wells for discussion today are part of the existing basin. Mr. Trotta then covered criteria used for selecting representative monitoring point networks, and approaches for filling data gaps.

Questions/Comments Advisory Committee

Furch – When you are looking at potential wells, are you looking at possible recharge? There is a lot of concern. In some distribution areas, it might be worth looking at recharge in the aquifer.

Trotta – Ok, thank you.

O'Connor – Why the 98%, is that state guidance?

Trotta – No, it is a starting point.

O'Connor – Can you expand on data gaps in the proposed RMP network?

Trotta – The data gaps represent areas within the basin currently lacking monitoring data in the proposed RMP network. We are looking at geographic and spatial distribution of wells in the basin. There is no specific guidance on the density of wells in the basin from the California Department of Water Resources (DWR). There have been studies referenced in the basin. We looked at some of the larger data gap areas in the deeper zone. We are also looking a little more closely at data gaps along some of the basin boundaries. This is an initial assessment and we welcome additional comments.

O'Connor – No data gaps for any areas of hydrogeologic complexities in the basin at this point?

Trotta – These initial data gaps are for the RMPs. Additional data gaps will also be developed for the larger entire monitoring network that would take into account data gaps related to groundwater flow near faults and other boundaries.

O'Connor – So, the comparison graphics between proposed monitoring wells and some other wells - some examples are good, some less so. What is the process?

Trotta – Looked at every well we had records for, then plotted each one represented on the hydrographs. For some of the wells we don't have construction information. We tried to make sure they are in the same aquifer. Keep in mind, for initial RMPs, DWR understands everything won't be perfect at the outset and SGMA allows us to improve it over time.

Martin – Based on discussion earlier, have we decided on significant/unreasonable effects we are trying to avoid with lowering of groundwater levels?

Trotta – The SMCs will inform our representative monitoring point network and help guide it, we dive into a little more and refine it as we go along. This is a working draft and there is room for modifying it as we go along. We feel we have done an initial screening and have real examples of what the sustainable management criteria will look like at the wells we are proposing.

Martin – I guess you will narrow it down moving forward?

Martin – Groundwater recharge is kind of dictated by underlying geology. I know Andy Rodgers said there are USGS studies forthcoming. Is there some sort of mapping exercise that show areas with groundwater recharge potential?

Trotta – We have a pretty good understanding of where recharge is likely to be higher than other areas, which are identified in the current draft of the Basin Setting section of the GSP.

Martin – I appreciate there are data gap areas identified, it is an important piece, are there areas with known issues?

Trotta – In this basin, for the most part, most groundwater levels appear to be stable or increasing over time. There are some increasing trends over time especially south of Sebastopol area, as well as Rohnert Park, where there were historical groundwater level declines but have since recovered.

Anderson – How many aquifers are there in this basin?

Trotta – For purposes of this GSP, we define two: 1) shallow, generally less than 200 feet, and 2) deep, generally more than 200 feet.

Anderson – Of the fourteen shallow-well RMPS, if one of my wells is in this basin and one in the other, what will happen to me?

Trotta – It will depend how we set management criteria. We will have to set minimum thresholds for each of these representative monitoring points but how we define undesirable results could be if 10% or 40% of the wells drop below the minimum thresholds. It is a decision point that we will be discussing.

Anderson – 10% of the 14 shallow wells or 10% of deep wells?

Trotta – 10% of the total representative monitoring point wells.

Scott – Can it be done by group of wells rather than by individual well? It seems the risk would be less if done by grouping.

Trotta – Yes, regulations allow flexibility for how we define how undesirable results occur. It could be a percentage of wells, or other way.

Furch – I want to say that this is an issue that comes up often. Some of the answer may be in the depth of the well rather than the depth of the aquifer. At some point we need to start looking at land uses and what kind of operations are intensified or reduced where say 2% of wells aren't functioning, and impact on the aquifer.

O'Connor – In selecting the proposed RMP network so far, you probably started with the best candidate wells or are there other reserve wells available?

Trotta – We need to get additional information on privately owned wells and such. We started with wells that are measured by member agencies of the GSA. There are other dedicated wells that could be brought forward. We also would need to look at constructing a new monitoring well in those areas.

Sustainable Management Criteria: Lowering of Groundwater Levels

Objective: Continue discussion of Sustainability Management Criteria for Lowering of Groundwater Levels

Mr. Trotta asked for continued input on methodology and considerations how we set measurable objectives for the lowering of groundwater levels. This input will be used to update the Board on what we are hearing from the Advisory Committee: if the Advisory Committee is generally comfortable with the proposed methodology, we will move on to the next indicator at the May Advisory Committee meeting. After receiving input on all the sustainability indicators, the GSP team will create a unified package of indicator information for the Board's consideration.

Mr. Trotta then displayed a high-level process diagram: the process involves developing a qualitative sustainability goal which we have already discussed at prior meetings. Once we submit our Plan to DWR, there are requirements to give five-year updates. We need to track progress on five-year intervals, DWR allows you to make adjustments based on new information

that the GSA is able to obtain during that time. Mr. Trotta also provided an overview of the six sustainability indicators, identified general patterns/trends within the basin for grouping wells, and walked through hydrographs: 1) wells with relatively stable longer groundwater levels, 2) wells with historical declines and subsequent recovery and, 3) wells with increasing trends.

Sam Magill to the Advisory Committee Members – Do the two general approaches seem appropriate? Can you live with them? Do you have key concerns?

Questions/Comments Advisory Committee

Furch – I am looking at the draft framework supplied to the group electronically. Based on this you are asking for input. Relative to this, one of the things to bear in mind is water quality risk increase. It shouldn't be either/or percentage, it should be both. Some of the impact will be seasonable. Seasonal availability is important. Following up on Matt O'Connor's question, 98% historic groundwater conditions, you mention 50% average of seasonal range. Is that 50% based on something that is required? Where does that come from?

Marcus – We were looking at average responses of wells over the most recent drought period, for ones exhibiting decline during that drought it looked like their annual decline was about 50% of the seasonal fluctuation. We took that as an initial metric to calculate what the effects could be of a four-year drought. When those model runs are complete, we can compare that with initial projections, and we may want to revisit where we put the minimum threshold.

Furch – Whatever percent should also be analyzed in conjunction with time and recovery. It is an important part of the equation.

Martin – We are looking at a data set that goes up to 2019. A lot of folks are choosing to take the DWR guidance strictly (pre SGMA, pre 2015, and beyond). It is important that this group sees there is a good story to tell. Tell that at future check-ins, success stories. I am curious to see benefits of going beyond 2015. I guess we have a lot of historic data. Not sure when you want to end the data set.

Haydon – I have a question about the 98% of the shallowest well depth. So that means we want to prevent impacts on 98% of the wells when ranking the wells deepest to shallowest?

Trotta – Good point, and something that can be looked at later. There are different levels of protection that can be built into that.

Haydon – You also mention “Operational factor” – curious where the 50 feet came from and the well that is used as an example.

Trotta – That was an initial number that takes into account that a pump is set at 20 feet above the bottom of the well and you will need 20-30 feet above the bottom to operate the well.

Haydon – I understand but declines of hundreds of feet seem undesirable.

Trotta – Are you speaking to example number two of the well that exhibited decline and then recovery?

Haydon – Yes, but water supply wells are generally deeper than the average well, perhaps 1000 feet deep, so in general to lower water levels with 50 feet of the bottom of a deep-water supply well would allow the groundwater table to decline over 900 feet and this seems pretty drastic. I am not sure that is good criteria for us as a goal

Wayne – We keep talking about historical low water tables, are we differentiating between the climate-controlled natural historic low water table or the historic low water table created by pumping, like in Rohnert Park scenario? Are we distinguishing between the two or are we mixing them up?

Trotta – The historical lows are the historical lows for both. For the stable wells exhibiting stable trends, those historic trends are based on past natural variability for the most part. Four wells that have exhibited lows in the past are based on pumping. One question to ask yourselves – those historic lows that have occurred, are they a good place to start?

Anderson – If I have an increasing well, you are concluding that now that levels show increasing levels, I should stay higher instead of maintaining historical levels? This may create a disincentive for well owners in areas with current high levels versus maintaining stable lower historical levels.

Trotta – Yes, one of the issues of most of the wells that have the increase in well levels is that a lot have a short timeframe. Maybe it did decrease in the past and is now recovering. Good point.

O'Connor – These patterns are drawn from these examples. We are trying to find wells that are representative of other wells in the area. How much do you know if these wells are representative of the things that can happen in the area that these wells are meant to represent? Do you think it is necessary to back check other wells in the area so you are sure you are accounting for the different things that could happen?

Trotta – Yes, certainly something we will do to look at the criteria will apply to each of the RMPs. There could be areas where there are outliers. We use these as a good starting point, I don't think we want completely different methodologies.

O'Connor – Maybe you got the pattern right but there is evidence in the area, maybe there is evidence it falls out of a certain range you are looking at. Think about if these boundaries are going to account for things you will see in the area.

Gaffney – I think for numbers 1 and 2 we still need to account for population growth in the area. The GSA isn't going to become responsible for land use and the County General Plan provides for it. We are going to see population growth and we don't want that to be an Undesirable Effect.

Trotta – Future water demand projections are something we will be working on and building into our criteria.

Anderson- Slide 30, very dry year 1976-77 doesn't appear.

Trotta – These water year types were classified based on three-year averages. We did that because groundwater levels don't show effects for some years.

Potter – It seems well thought out. I was interested in Peter Martin's questions about a baseline of what year we started from. Is there a way to articulate one general rule that captures where we want to be against historic levels?

Trotta – With respect to 2015, it is the end of a four-year drought. We could pick a certain timeframe instead of looking at historic lows.

Magill – Checking in with the group. Are you comfortable with these two approaches?

Furch – Generically, it is hard to argue with these. I was thinking about what Bob Anderson said earlier, they don't tell you a lot. What you heard are issues of concern. If that was all we had, I would have concerns. I think Sandi Potter's and Peter Martin's point about 2015, we already heard a lot at public meetings, that 2015 isn't a good place to start. It shouldn't be our baseline. We shouldn't start with a worst-case scenario. I have problems with that as well.

Anderson – I have concerns about Sam Magill's first summary. We talked about climate and population; those are things to come. We can't say they won't have an effect, but we haven't seen suggestions.

Magill – What is your concern regarding the two approaches you see here?

Anderson – I support the basic summary that groundwater levels fall into three categories and suggesting that more work will be incorporated, I am flagging I don't know how we incorporate intensity of use and population at this time. What is the scale of those numbers?

Martin – I would like clarification on the 2015 date. Would like to be protected, appreciate breaking out of shallow and deep aquifers, I like that approach.

O'Connor – To stay consistent with my previous point, I want to encourage the process to keep asking the question that the monitoring wells are representative of all the wells. Keep in mind we are making assumptions. Maybe the range of things that could change might be broader than we think, such as population growth.

Potter – When I asked about the 2015 date, if we move forward, will we see a graph on the chart of that year, so it measures up to the other thresholds?

Magill – We aren't hearing lots of pushback on what is being presented but there are lots of nuances that need to be explored and incorporated.

Key Takeaways:

- Approaches to group Representative Monitoring Points (RMPs) into three general categories based on types of observed patterns in historical and recent groundwater-level trends (wells with relatively stable longer groundwater levels, wells with historical declines and subsequent recovery and, wells with increasing trends) for the purpose of considering preliminary SMCs generally agreed to.
- Approaches to maintain groundwater levels within or above historic ranges generally agreed to, with caveats that projections and simulations of future climate conditions and groundwater demands are needed to fully evaluate the methodologies and individual RMPs may require specific criteria/additional nuance to accurately reflect conditions

New Unacceptable Conditions Discussed (will be addressed through Water Quality Sustainability Indicator):

- Risk to water quality degradation

General Feedback:

- Seasonal availability of groundwater may impact individual RMPs
- The degree of uncertainty related to the “representativeness” of the RMPs should be evaluated
- Setting baseline years for SMCs is important: 2015 may be unrealistic starting point, as California was just emerging from a four-year drought
- SMCs should differentiate between natural low groundwater levels and low levels due to over pumping
- RMPs exhibiting increasing groundwater levels may be at a disadvantage if they are expected to maintain or increase already high levels
- Population growth and intensity of use must be taken into account in SMC development

Differentiating between shallow and deep aquifers is important in the development of SMCs

Groundwater User Registration Program (GRP)

Objective: Walk through Groundwater User Registration Program website and conduct beta test with AC members. Discuss timeline for implementation.

Mr. Rodgers gave an overview of the current GRP schedule. We are developing a Beta test including online registration form and interactive map and are on the cusp of sending it out. We are looking for more information and feedback. The hardcopy form and draft mailer are in your packet. We are not ready with the electronic version yet: the software program needs to be fixed (auto-populate not working yet) but will be soon. If you have any input, send to us. We hope to launch beta test during March 2020.

Questions/Comments Advisory Committee

Gaffney – Can we work on the acronym for this?

Rodgers – We will not role this out with the acronym.

Scott – If there is a way you can inform folks in the letter that everyone that is registered will get a mailer – that is, they are already registered and do not need to complete the form to get registered.

Rodgers – I am hoping the web page addresses that and if you have some suggestions for the mailer, it would be great.

Scott – I did send some input but haven’t seen it incorporated yet.

Rodgers – I will look for that input. I will take any additional input through today.

Martin – Do we have an idea what the success rate will look like in terms of response rate?

Rodgers – Success is if we get additional information we didn’t have before, or corrections to information we had before. Essentially, bettering our data set would be success.

Update on Model Refinements and Water Budget Approach

Objective: Describe Ongoing Model Updates and Water Budget Approach

Andy Rich gave an overview of the work being done on updating the Santa Rosa Plain hydrologic model, or 'SRPHM'. Surface processes are linked to groundwater flow itself. The model incorporates all kinds of datasets. SGMA requires we come up with a variety of groundwater budgets: 1) historic conditions; 2) current conditions; and 3) projected conditions over the 50-year planning horizon. Work currently includes updating the time horizon the model covers, updating land use changes for input into the Ag package. Sonoma Water is currently making improvements on the model and updating rural residential domestic pumping estimates for indoor and outdoor use. Once these updates are made, we will need to re-assess whether any model recalibration will be needed. Mr. Rich closed by reviewing next steps: the model should be updated by the end of March or April. Sonoma Water will update the model to create new water budgets and present results at the May Advisory Committee meeting. Future work includes developing future climate scenarios incorporating potential land use changes/intensification of existing uses.

Questions/Comments Advisory Committee

Furch – If you look at Permit Sonoma re zoning about the parcel maps.

Rich – We are starting a process with PRMD.

Furch – I am really interested in the predictions.

O'Connor – I am glad you are doing work with the Ag package but am a little worried that the crop coefficient values are coming mostly from Central Valley as they seem to have applied some things that may not apply to this basin.

Rich – A couple years ago we hired David's Engineering. I can send you that report.

O'Connor – Is there an opportunity to ask water users how much they use?

Rich – We held a meeting with as many growers as we could to run our methodology past them. We would be happy to receive more information.

Public Outreach Opportunities and Assignments

Objective: Review Public Outreach Opportunities, Advisory Committee and Staff Assignments

Andrea Rodriguez asked that the Advisory Committee save June 4 for a Santa Rosa Plain Community Meeting. Advisory Committee members were also directed to review the draft stakeholder list and create potential partner/pairing opportunities with other stakeholder groups. She also expressed interest in creating a training, including basic talking points, for all Advisory Committee members conducting public outreach.

Gaffney – Can you make the PowerPoint available digitally?

Rodriguez – Yes, I will.

Furch – Is there a date by when you require input before the June meeting?

Rodriguez – It is ongoing. If you can provide some before the June meeting it would be great, some can be done afterwards as well.

Meeting Adjourned 5:35 p.m.

Attendees:

Advisory Committee Members (present)

Agricultural representative, Bob Anderson

Business representative, Joe Gaffney

City of Cotati appointee, Craig Scott

City of Santa Rosa appointee, Peter Martin

City of Sebastopol appointee, Henry Mikus

Environmental representative, Rue Furch

Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria representative, Maureen Geary – arrived 3:15

Gold Ridge RCD appointee, Matt O'Connor

Rural Residential representative, Marlene Soiland – arrived 3:20pm

Sonoma RCD appointee, Wayne Haydon – (by phone)

Town of Windsor appointee, Sandi Potter

Advisory Committee Members (absent)

Agricultural representative, David Long

City of Rohnert Park appointee, Mary Grace Pawson

County of Sonoma appointee, Mark Grismer

Independent Water Systems appointee, John Rosenblum

Sonoma County Water Agency appointee, Carolyn Dixon

Staff/Presenters

Andy Rodgers, SRP GSA Administrator

Marcus Trotta, Sonoma Water, Technical Staff

Andy Rich, Sonoma Water, Technical Staff

Andrea Rodriguez, Sonoma Water, Outreach

Simone Peters, GSA Administrative Aide, (notes taker)

Facilitator

Sam Magill, Sacramento State University – Consensus and Collaboration Program

Other Attendees

7 members of public