

**MID-KAWEAH GROUNDWATER SUSTAINABILITY AGENCY
ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING**

MINUTES

August 3, 2021 – 3:00 p.m.

This Committee Meeting was held as a hybrid meeting, teleconference for the public with no physical location due to the COVID-19 Pandemic and the Governors Executive Order N-29-20. Committee members had an in-person option at the Visalia Wastewater Treatment Plant for those electing to attend. The attendance list below does not distinguish whether members elected for in-person or virtual.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Blake Wilbur, Eric Correia, Geoff Vanden Heuvel, Mike Lane, Richard Garcia, Soapy Mulholland, Jessi Snyder

MEMBERS ABSENT: Lee Johnson

GSA MEMBER STAFF PRESENT: Aaron Fukuda (Interim General Manager), Trisha Whitfield, James Fisher

PUBLIC ATTENDEES: Andrew Hart, Angela Islas, Derrik Williams, Hylon Kaufmann, Johnny Gailey, Leland Mayberry, Lisa Walsh, Rhett Anderson, Tim Leo, Tim Mendonca

1. **CALL TO REGULAR ORDER**

Chairman Wilbur called the meeting to order at 3:00 p.m.

2. **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Chairman Wilbur called for comments from any members of the public present at the meeting. None were forthcoming.

3. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

Director Vanden Huevel motioned to approve the minutes without edits, seconded by Director Lane. The May 4, 2021 minutes were unanimously approved by all Advisory Committee members present.

4. **MKGSA ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP**

- a. **Vacant Seats** – Mr. Fukuda reported that the search for the vacant Disadvantaged Community (DAC) seat and for the agricultural at-large seat for this advisory committee was still ongoing.

5. **MKGSA GENERAL MANAGER – UPDATE**

Mr. Fukuda reported that the Tulare Irrigation District (TID) hired James Fisher, a licensed professional civil engineer from the Water Resources and Planning Department at Idaho Power Company (a hydroelectric utility company). Mr. Fisher will split his time between TID and the MKGSA, with the intent to transition to the MKGSA General Manager after becoming familiar with water resources and SGMA.

6. **KAWEAH SUBBASIN ACTIVITIES – UPDATE**

- a. **Kaweah Subbasin Managers Report**

- i. *Kaweah Subbasin MODFLOW model* - MKGSA hydrologic model transitioned to Montgomery & Associates (M&A). M&A will provide a report on the model on Aug 18th at the Kaweah Subbasin Manager's Meeting. Preliminary results show ties to the water budget and correlation to observed groundwater levels.
 - ii. *Kaweah Subbasin Water Budget* –The MODFLOW model will be to adaptively update annual water budgets. Mr. Fukuda explained that future groundwater allocations will be correlated to the volume of water recharged by the agency/grower (with an unspecified lag time).
 - iii. *Water Accounting Framework* – The initial framework has been developed and informally approved by MKGSA board and committee members. Currently this task accounts for most of the MKGSA's workload. Collaborating with stakeholders to settle on maximum pumping thresholds for native, foreign, salvaged, and transitional water will be applied and enforced in Fall 2021. Several non-regularly scheduled MKGSA meetings are anticipated in August and September to refine the proposed water accounting framework.
- b. Prop 68 Planning Grant** - MKGSA SkyTEM is complete. We learned eastern and western Kaweah aquifers are shallower and deeper than originally thought, respectively. And the boundaries of the Corcoran Clay are different than thought previously, which is expected to improve MODFLOW model performance. Stanford's program and grants covered most of the expenses, so it was virtually no cost to the MKGSA.

Fresno State University has completed a draft memo of agricultural meters on the market. Additional testing is ongoing, particularly accuracy sensitivity to common installation errors, and price considerations. While waiting for the final results on well meters, we will be relying on evapotranspiration (ET) measurements. MKGSA's contract with David's Engineering for had some problematic outliers, and the employee spearheading the program passed away suddenly with no successor. Therefore, all 3 local GSA's contracted with LandIQ to estimate crop-scale ET.

- c. **Prop 68 Implementation Grant** - Okieville Recharge Basin Project is ready for signature by the MKGSA board (August 11th, 2021). If signed, this will bring \$3.7M in grant dollars to the Kaweah Subbasin. This focuses on DAC's and drinking water quantity and quality. Estimated date of completion is 2023.
- d. **RCIS Program** – California Department of Fish and Wildlife's program can provide a mitigation credit agreement (MCA) within a year or two. For all construction projects that destroy habitat, growers in the Kaweah Subbasin that converted Ag land to habitat may sell credits to local entities, keeping both funds and land improvements local, instead of paying to a state mitigation fund that historically was distributed outside of the Kaweah Subbasin. The major concerns from locals are: (1) conversion to water intensive habitats that don't save water, (2) inability to halt a program with early signs of unintended consequences, (3) insufficient capital to convert Ag fields to habitat, and (4) lack of an memorandum of understanding between the three GSAs in the Kaweah Subbasin regarding termination of the RCIS. Committee member Vanden Heuvel suggested an MOU between the GSA's for funding and putting Sequoia Riverlands Trust in the lead of this program - keeping resources local.

- e. **Water Marketing Strategy** – MKGSA selected Stantec as the consultant to develop the water marketing strategy in the Kaweah Subbasin, with the sub-consultant of Matthew Feinup, an economist from Cal Lutheran University and developer of a successful water market in Ventura County. The Water Marketing Strategy will run over-budget because we asked for a more compressed schedule than originally quoted, so the initial market will be piloted by Summer 2022. To cover this overage, MKGSA staff will pursue DWR Facilitation Grants. The two other GSA's agreed they will request their boards to offset any additional overages.
- f. **Kaweah Water Foundation (CVSALTS)** – Provost & Pritchard (P&P) produced an Early Action Plan and Preliminary Management Zone Proposal, which were conditionally approved by the Regional Water Quality Control Board. Two replacement water stations are up and running: Farmersville and Okieville.
- g. **Stanford SkyTEM Project** – DWR awarded contract to Ramboll to map entire state in a coarse grid. The towTEM (tTEM) unit was purchased last year for higher resolution subsurface surveying. TID is cost sharing with Stanford, bringing the price of tTEM equivalent to a triple nested monitoring well. TID/MKGSA have been using it since June to map subsurface at a minimum of 140ft deep (up to 280ft), and will have UTV and trailer this fall to survey additional fields for on-farm recharge or recharge basins, or projects related to MKGSA.

7. MKGSA GSP

- a. **GSP Review – Update** – DWR reviewed 4 GSP's. M&A and Provost and Pritchard played a role in all four assessments. Therefore, the MKGSA will leverage M&A's and P&P's experience. M&A and P&P will draft a technical report on what portions of the GSP are most likely to be deficient so we can address those now. DWR did not formally give a timeline when the MKGSA will receive an assessment, but generally basins with multiple GSPs are more complicated and are anticipated around December 2021.
- b. **GSP Data Gaps**
 - i. *MKGSA Representative Well Monitoring Network – M&A Report*: Tim Leo of M&A gave a presentation outline of the Representative Monitoring Networks project.
 1. 25 wells have been selected for the representative monitoring network (RMN) in the MKGSA so far. 12 monitoring wells in upper aquifer, 7 in the lower aquifer, 6 in east aquifer (no Corcoran Clay in east aquifer).
 2. Currently identifying additional wells suitable for the RMN until 2025. Main criteria for suitable wells include (1) large historical dataset already tied to it (2) metadata associated with history and notes on installation and (3) must not be perforated on both sides of the Corcoran Clay, in order to assess each principal aquifer separately (4) not currently being used for pumping and (5) and has enough depth to provide long term monitoring if water levels persist.
 - ii. *Waukena School District Monitoring Well* – Paul Boyer and Jessi Snyder of Self-Help Enterprises brought a triple-nested monitoring well to the MKGSA's attention (depths = 540', 685', and 900') and prevented it from being filled in. The exact location was unknown, but TID found and georeferenced the well in the field. The Waukena Superintendent consented to unrestricted access for TID/MKGSA. This is

a known high subsidence rate area, and will be an asset to the monitoring well network.

- iii. *LandIQ* – MKGSA signed a contract with LandIQ in July. Monthly mapped data of precipitation and ET starting in September 2021 until September 2024 (3-year contract). MKGSA will also receive retrospective ET back to October 2020, and crop type maps twice annually. Mr. Fukuda mentioned the intent to convert ET to pumping. A collaborative group of GSA’s in the Kaweah Subbasin will meet with Semitropic Water Storage District this month. Committee member Vanden Huevel commented charging for pumping will disproportionately affect those who don’t drip irrigate most. He also suggested the MKGSA should consider charging higher rates to those pumping below the Corcoran Clay because that aquifer cannot be readily recharged.

c. GSP Implementation – Update

- i. *Projects And Management Actions – Update* – MKGSA will present a draft of the GSP projects and management actions, a formal process to add projects on a rolling basis (rather than every 5-year review). A draft of the application and process will be prepared by August 25th for advisory committee review before September 7th meeting.
- ii. *MKGSA Water Allocation Process* – Two consecutive drought years paired with unusually high water use in our GSA (capitalizing on high market values) accelerated the need to establish a groundwater allocation. The water allocation framework to be developed by Provost and Pritchard and Montgomery and Associates will not be done by this fall as originally planned. Therefore, the MKGSA proposes a maximum cap to prevent groundwater mining. This cap is scheduled for public comment by October and implemented by January. Director Correia commented that growers are already planning for next year, and sending out a notice with that timeline immediately to growers within the MKGSA.

8. SELF-HELP ENTERPRISES – DRINKING WATER WELL MITIGATION FRAMEWORK

This presentation has been postponed to the next MKGSA Advisory Committee. Angela Islas will be presenting.

9. COMMITTEE MEMBER REPORTS, UPDATES OR OTHER ITEMS OF INTEREST

Director Vanden Heuvel updated the council on a recently published article on Pixley and Lower Tule Irrigation Districts showing evapotranspiration by crop type. Alfalfa and Almonds were at the top of the list for consumptive use, but total water applied (pumped) would be billed much differently.

10. ADJOURN

Chairman Wilbur adjourned the meeting at 4:57.

Attest: _____
GSA Board Secretary

Advisory Committee Chair