



SANTA CRUZ MID-COUNTY GROUNDWATER AGENCY

Thursday, September 19, 2019 - 7:00 p.m.

Simpkins Family Swim Center

979 17th Avenue, Santa Cruz, California

MINUTES

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 by Vice Chair Mathews.

2. Roll Call

Directors present: Curt Abramson, David Baskin, Bruce Daniels, Zach Friend, Jon Kennedy, Jim Kerr, Cynthia Mathews.

Alternate Directors present: John Benich, Carla Christensen, Allyson Violante.

Directors absent: Tom LaHue, John Leopold, Rob Marani, Marco Romanini.

Staff present: Ralph Bracamonte, Ron Duncan, John Ricker, Tim Carson, Sierra Ryan, Isidro Rivera, Darcy Pruitt, Laura Partch.

Others present: A representative of the Department of Water Resources (DWR) and approximately 6 members of the public.

The Santa Cruz Mid-County Groundwater Agency (MGA) joined the local community in honoring Vaidehi Campbell and Kristina Finstad following their sudden passing. Vai worked at Soquel Creek Water District for 18 years and Kristy previously worked with the watershed team at the Santa Cruz Water Department for over a decade. Both women were deeply cherished and professionally respected for their contributions to water education, conservation, and sustainability.

3. Oral Communications

Member of the public Becky Steinbruner provided an update on her lawsuit against the Soquel Creek Water District (SqCWD) and its Pure Water Soquel (PWS) project.

4. Consent Agenda

4.1 Approve minutes from the July 18, 2019 Board Meeting

MOTION: Director Daniels; Second, Director Baskin. To approve the Consent Agenda. Motion passed unanimously.
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5. General Business

5.1 Receive Public Comments on the Draft Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP or Plan)

Vice Chair Mathews requested that staff summarize the written comments submitted before receiving oral comments.

Staff reported that after the opening of the public comment period on July 18, 2019, the MGA held several outreach events in July and August. Written comments were submitted by comment cards at each of these events, and by email through the MGA website. The Board packet includes written comments received through September 12th (the date of packet preparation).

As of September 19th, staff had received 9 emails/letters and 8 comment cards from the general public. The comments cover a range of topics but focus on water quality. They include comments supporting and opposing certain projects, on local geography as described in the draft Plan, contaminants of emerging concern, the monitoring and stream sampling program, draft Plan references, and other miscellaneous items.

The National Marine Fisheries Service and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife submitted letters focusing on the depletion of interconnected surface waters and species protection, groundwater dependent ecosystems, and groundwater as a proxy indicator for the sustainable criteria metrics.

Comments from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were received from The Nature Conservancy as well as a consortium of NGOs (The Local Government Commission, Audubon California, the Union of Concerned Scientists, The Nature Conservancy, Clean Water Action, and Clean Water Fund).

A letter was also received from the SqCWD.

The letters from public agencies and NGOs are lengthy and detailed, primarily addressing SGMA requirements and the impact of surface water depletion on species. Many of these came in close to or on September 19th, so staff has not yet had time to thoroughly review the issues raised in each.

Public Comment

Member of the public Becky Steinbruner appreciated the August 28th draft GSP Q&A session and that hard copies of the draft GSP were available in local public libraries.

Ms. Steinbruner requested that all comments be included verbatim in the final report that accompanies the GSP to the state. She expressed concerns with data used in the modeling, which did not include 1987 data developed for SqCWD regarding a salt water wedge, and felt this needed to be reexamined. She requested future monitoring systems be independent and not reliant on SqCWD data. Ms. Steinbruner requested public input on the selection of the Board committee that will work on the final GSP. She thanked the MGA for its work, but expressed disappointment that the public could not participate in the technical surface water working group that considered the groundwater-dependent ecosystems.

MOTION: Director Daniels; Second: Director Baskin. To close the public comment period. Motion passed unanimously.

5.2 Formation of a Temporary Board Committee to Consider Public Comments on the Santa Cruz Mid-County Groundwater Basin Groundwater Sustainability Plan

Staff understood from the July Board meeting that directors were concerned with having an adequate opportunity to review the public comments and participate in the drafting of the final GSP. In response, staff recommended that the Board form a temporary board committee (Committee), with less than a quorum of directors, to work with MGA staff to review public comments and provide guidance to staff on the consideration and incorporation of public comments in the development of the final Plan. Staff noted that temporary committees are authorized by the MGA bylaws and have been used by the Board in the past.

The Vice Chair invited questions from directors regarding a proposed Committee.

What does staff envision in terms of process and the involvement of members of the Committee?

- Staff anticipates 2 to 4 meetings, perhaps the first one in person, others by conference call, basically a nimble group that would assist with reviewing and considering all the public comments received and provide guidance to staff on the incorporation of comments into the final GSP.

Will there be other technical assistance?

- Yes, the Board previously approved funding to allow the technical consultants, Montgomery & Associates, to assist with responding to comments to the draft GSP.

The written comments do seem very technical.

- Yes, but the most detailed comments received focused on the interaction of surface and groundwater, which has been deemed a highly complex issue under SGMA, so staff anticipated these comments.

It was suggested the Committee reflect the Board composition and include a member of each jurisdiction represented by the Board.

Public comment

Member of the public Becky Steinbruner requested the Committee have a private well owner representative selected by the private well owners, reiterated her request that all comments be provided verbatim to the public, and requested MGA responses to comments be made public with an explanation be provided of how the comments were used in drafting the final GSP.

MOTION: Alternate Director Christensen; Second, Director Kennedy. To authorize the creation of a temporary Board Committee including a representative from each member agency and a private well owner representative to review public comments and provide guidance to staff on the consideration and incorporation of public comments in the development of the final Plan. Directors interested in being on Committee are to contact the Board Chair, who will then appoint the Committee members. The temporary Board Committee will report back to the Board at the MGA's November 21, 2019 meeting. Motion passed unanimously.

5.3 Approve Resolution to Apply to the 2019 Sustainable Groundwater Management Grant Program - Round 3 Grant

DWR recently released a grant solicitation for the 2019 Sustainable Groundwater Management Grant Program Round 3. Applications are due on November 1st, and require a Board resolution authorizing submittal of the grant application. While staff has not yet fully vetted this funding opportunity, because the due date is before the next MGA Board meeting, staff requested that the Board adopt a resolution so any application will have the required authorizing resolution.

The MGA may apply for up to \$500,000 in grant funds. The grant requires a local cost share contribution of 25% of the total project cost (total project cost = grant funding + match funding), approximately \$165,000 of MGA funds. The grant packet identifies a number of projects/activities potentially of interest to the MGA, including feasibility or scoping studies, costs related to data management systems, pilot demonstration projects on aquifer recharge, conjunctive use, storm water capture, installation of new groundwater monitoring wells and instrumentation or other monitoring equipment. While there is interest in pursuing these funds, staff will need to fully evaluate this opportunity within a short timeline.

Would the MGA likely be spending that \$165,000 anyway for extra monitoring wells or other necessary costs?

- Yes. A current grant from DWR is partially funding the GSP development and related monitoring, but given some of the preliminary comments on the draft Plan, an expansion of that monitoring network may be needed, as well as a new data management system.

Public Question:

Member of the public Becky Steinbruner noted the grant funds could be used to fund projects. She understood the MGA would not be involved in projects, and is concerned this grant money could support member-agency projects, including PWS.

MOTION: Director Kennedy; Second, Director Daniels. To adopt by roll call vote Resolution No. 19-01 for the submission an application and the execution of an agreement with the State of California for a 2019 Sustainable Groundwater Planning Program - Round 3 Grant. Roll call vote taken, 11 ayes, none opposed. Motion passed and Resolution adopted unanimously.

6. Informational Updates

6.1 Treasurer's Report

No comments.

6.2 Staff Reports

County of Santa Cruz (County) Water Resource Planner Sierra Ryan reported on a recent Groundwater Resources Association's Western Groundwater Conference. She said she presented on surface water/groundwater interaction to a packed room. Many state agency representatives were there, and she received many compliments on the

draft GSP and the work of the MGA. She encouraged the Board not to be disheartened by the few lengthy public comments to the Draft GSP.

Darcy Pruitt, Senior Planner, reported on meetings between MGA representatives and representatives of the County and the Cities of Santa Cruz and Capitola. These consultations served as either a substantive introduction to or an update on the work of the MGA; all were well received and mutually beneficial. Each entity appreciated information about the Basin and the draft GSP, appreciated that it took into account local issues such as land use planning, and the flexibility in moving forward.

A director noted that when asked about the GSP process, the two major issues are 1) wanting to know about distilled wastewater and 2) how the MGA and the issue of water availability interacts with ongoing planning/expansion processes.

7. Future Agenda Items

A written comment was submitted by a member of the public regarding the Draft GSP alleging false and misleading information related to the Pure Water Soquel project.

Member of the public Becky Steinbruner requested an agenda item on water and County planning, particularly as the County's 1994 General Plan is currently under environmental review.

The next board meeting will be November 21, 2019.

8. Written Communications and Submitted Materials

8.1 Email from B. Steinbruner dated August 29, 2019

9. Adjournment

The Vice Chair adjourned the meeting at 7:40.