



COUNTY OF COLUSA
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT,
WATER RESOURCES DIVISION
100 Sunrise Boulevard Suite A, Colusa, CA 95932
530-458-0719

COLUSA COUNTY GROUNDWATER COMMISSION MEETING

Darrin Williams, Dist. 1 | Deke Dormer, Dist. 2 | Matt LaGrande, Dist. 3 | Tom Charter, Dist. 4 | Jeff Moresco, Dist. 5

Meeting Minutes

Location: This meeting was held remotely via Zoom

Date: November 4, 2020

Time: 10:00 a.m.

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Williams opened the meeting at 10:00 a.m. The meeting began with a Roll Call of Officers and introductions of others in attendance.

Introductions

Staff and public in attendance:

Mary Fahey, Colusa County Water Resources	Jerry Brown, Executive Director, Sites Project
Kevin Spesert, External Affairs Mgr., Sites Project	Thad Bettner, GCID
Denise Carter, Colusa Co. Supervisor, District V	Ben King
Bridgette Gibbons, CDFW	Craig Bradford
Jennifer Wallace	Jim Wallace

Roll Call

Commissioners Present: Dormer, Moresco, LaGrande, Williams

Commissioners Absent: Charter

Approval of Minutes from the June 29, 2020 Special Meeting

Motion: Commissioner Dormer moved to approve the June 29, 2020 special meeting minutes with one correction to the date of the next regular meeting. Commissioner LaGrande seconded. The motion passed 4-0 and 1 absent.

Period of Public Comment

Ben King commented regarding the selection of legal counsel for the Colusa Groundwater Authority.

PUBLIC FORUM

Sites Reservoir Project Update, Jerry Brown, Sites Project Executive Director

Jerry Brown, the Executive Director of the Sites Reservoir project began his presentation by introducing himself and providing information about his background.



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He described the Sites Reservoir project as being decades in the making and an extremely important project to the State and to the Sacramento Valley. Climate change scenarios predict precipitation coming as more rain instead of snow and we are already seeing extreme variability in precipitation from year to year. From a water management perspective, this variability requires a need for flexibility. In the past, the water management focus has been on yield. Now we are looking at the next century to achieve flexibility. Sites Reservoir provides that needed flexibility for statewide water supply.

A unique aspect of the Sites project is that it has broad participation Statewide as well as strong local support, which is essential to long-term project success. There are currently 21 participants representing the Sacramento Valley, Bay Area, San Joaquin Valley and Southern California.

Mr. Brown explained that the Sites Authority has recently gone through a Value Planning exercise to review the 2017 planned operations and facilities, and consider comments from the 2017 Environmental document public review period. That project was a 1.8 MAF reservoir at an approximate cost of \$5.5 billion. The right sized project, which is currently the preferred alternative is a 1.5 MAF reservoir, the Delevan pipeline was eliminated and the project will rely on the GCID canal and Tehama Colusa canal for conveyance. In the south a Dunnigan pipeline was added that will span from the Tehama Colusa Canal to the Colusa Basin Drain. The energy generation station has been eliminated, but there is still some element of power generation through pipes that bring water out of the reservoir.

Mr. Brown described water allocations to various members and how water supplies vary during different water year types. Most water releases would occur during dry and critically dry years.

Ben King, landowner, commented about subsidence around Arbuckle and asked why the pipeline in Dunnigan couldn't be located in Colusa County where it would provide more benefits locally. Mr. Brown said that the planned location is the shortest distance between the Canal and the Colusa Basin Drain. Benefits to subsidence in Arbuckle haven't been discussed as part of the Plan. Colusa County Water District in Arbuckle is a participant in the Sites project and if they choose to use their participation for projects that address land subsidence, the Authority would be cooperative, but it is up to the participants to decide how they want to use that water.

Mr. Brown continued his presentation. He stated that diversion and operations criteria is one of the most controversial aspects of the project. They have made adjustments to the diversion criteria to provide the most environmentally protective conditions they could while still maintaining an affordable project. All of the modelling looks very good and he feels it is very important to make sure the Sacramento River is made whole and sustainable into the future.

Mr. Brown said that he anticipates recirculating the environmental document for public review around July of next year. The Groundwater Commission should be aware of this timeline.

Affordability of the water is important. By right sizing the project, they were able to reduce project



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costs by about \$2 billion. They are currently estimating cost of water from Sites Reservoir at \$600-\$700 per acre foot.

Mr. Brown described the multiple benefits of the project and reiterated that adaptability to climate change is important, along with the need for flexibility to deal with variable conditions.

- Environmental benefits include an enhanced cold water pool for salmon spawning and migration, and water supply for wildlife refuges. A lot depends on how the State chooses to use their pot of water. The State is considered one of the investors in the project.
- Flood control is another benefit. They will be able to regulate flows in Funks and Stone Corral creeks to help reduce flood risk.
- The project will also provide construction-related jobs, and long-term jobs related to recreation.

Currently a large part of the work includes meeting deadlines and requirements under Proposition 1, and more importantly getting the investors the information they need to decide if they want to go forward with the project. It is time to make those commitments.

Mr. Brown concluded his presentation with a brief discussion of the Sites Project's role related to groundwater interactions. He mentioned that the reservoir will be flooded with 1.5 MAF of water that is not there now which could benefit groundwater levels. More likely Funks and Stone Corral creeks will have more water in them on a regular basis which could add to groundwater recharge in the area. Terminal regulating reservoirs will provide some localized benefits that will be analyzed. Mr. Brown stated that most local affects will be beneficial although earlier studies found any recharge benefits to be generally less than significant.

Mr. Brown then opened the floor to questions.

Commissioner LaGrande asked how long a participant can store their water allotment in the reservoir, and how much do they lose from year to year. Mr. Brown replied that each participant essentially manages their own storage "condo." How they manage it is up to them. They can store it or move it. They will lose 3-4% per year through evaporation and other conveyance losses. Commissioner LaGrande asked if members were required to purchase the water each year. Mr. Brown said yes, but with a caveat. A large portion of the cost per acre foot of water is debt service. It has to be paid year after year. Participants can sell their water and the project team is trying to set up a transfer market place within the Sites family.

Commissioner Dormer asked what type of water right is created to protect users and buyers. Mr. Brown acknowledged that the water rights issue is very important. They are working on this now and have recently hired legal assistance. They will seek an appropriative water right and will be lower on the priority system but sufficient. They are also looking into the possibility to store State and CVP water in the reservoir. Sites will own a water right and the Authority will hold the water



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right. Participants will have rights to use that water.

Commissioner Williams asked if the reservoir could be expanded in the future. Mr. Brown said that as it's being planned now, yes, however it is not really being built for expansion. For example, the current plan includes a bridge. If the reservoir is expanded, the bridge would have to be rebuilt which would be very expensive. The dam could be restructured and heightened.

Commissioner Williams asked what the diversion capability would be in dry years if there is an extended dry period. Is the reservoir dependent on river flows? Do you see a situation where you are not able to fill the reservoir? Mr. Brown replied that Sites is an off-stream reservoir, so water is pumped into it. The water right is wet year water so the maximum filling period will be in wetter years. Surprisingly, during dry years, there are filling periods. Commissioner Williams asked if this scenario is factored into the financing plan. Will participants be paying for the water even if it cannot be delivered? Mr. Brown explained that the participants will be paying debt service which is about \$400 of the \$600 per acre foot water cost.

Commissioner Williams asked if they anticipate affecting flows into the bypass during diversions. Mr. Brown replied that if it's necessary to meet a water user need, they would have to shut off diversions before impacting other users of water.

Commissioner Williams asked if any benefits to groundwater from the reservoir would benefit groundwater users across the basin or if the Sites organization would claim ownership of the groundwater that is recharged. Mr. Brown deferred to Thad Bettner about who owns that water. Mr. Bettner said that the Sites Authority has tried to stay out of the surface water/groundwater discussion. It's complicated and percolation should be fairly minimal since the reservoir is disconnected from the basin. There has not been any discussion about ownership of recharged groundwater from the project.

Mr. King asked how excess flows could be used to benefit groundwater conditions especially west of Interstate 5. He also asked about utilizing flood control efforts to enhance groundwater supply. Mr. Brown said there would need to be further discussion and prioritization of projects, and funding is a big piece of it as well.

Commissioner Williams mentioned that the Tehama Colusa Canal has the ability to divert high flows and make water available to landowners at lower cost (eg. 3-F water). That water could be critical for groundwater recharge projects in the Arbuckle area. Would there be competition for 3-F water with Sites? Mr. Brown said that this question has been considered and meeting other water right holders' needs before Sites is a consideration. Considering timing of water demands they don't expect this would be a frequent occurrence and they would make sure that other needs are met first.

Mr. Brown said that he is available at any time to discuss the project and answer questions.



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DISCUSSION/ACTION ITEMS

Regional SGMA Update, *Water Resources Staff*

Mary Fahey provided an update on regional Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) activities. The big news in groundwater right now is Groundwater Sustainability Plan development which is happening throughout the Sacramento Valley. Local Plans are due January 31, 2022. Plans in the critically overdrafted basins (all south of the Delta) were due January 31, 2020 and are currently under review by DWR. Locally, the North and South Yuba Subbasins completed and submitted their plan early, in January, 2020. Submitted plans can be accessed by the public on DWR's SGMA Portal website.

Ms. Fahey described the local interbasin coordination efforts that are taking place. She also said that extensive public outreach is a requirement of SGMA. All of the local GSAs have websites and public meetings where stakeholders can become involved. Expect to see more public information meetings over the next year. In the Colusa Subbasin, two public information meetings are being planned in December on the evening of December 9 and the afternoon of December 10. Meetings will be held remotely until further notice.

Currently, the Basin Setting portions of the local GSPs are wrapping up and getting ready to go out for public review, or have recently been released for review. This section contains the water budget and other elements that describe what conditions look like throughout the basin. After conditions in the basin are better understood through the Basin Setting work, the GSAs will address the SGMA Sustainability Indicators and quantify at what point conditions become significant and unreasonable in the basin. The GSAs will develop minimum thresholds and measurable objectives for each Sustainability Indicator, develop monitoring sites for each Sustainability Indicator and design Projects and Management Actions. Ms. Fahey stressed that public input is very important during this phase.

Over the next year, the GSAs in the Colusa Subbasin plan to release the Colusa Subbasin GSP in sections for public review and comment, and a final compiled draft GSP is planned to be released for another round of public review and comment in August, 2021. Once submitted, DWR has two years to review the Plans for adequacy. Meanwhile, yearly reports and every-5-year Plan updates are required.

Discussion – Well Monitoring Pilot Program in the Colusa Subbasin

Ms. Fahey provided an overview of the Well Monitoring Pilot Program that is being developed as part of the Groundwater Sustainability Plan for the Colusa Subbasin. The program will solicit willing landowners to monitor well extractions and groundwater levels at participating wells. The goals are to get landowners involved in the SGMA process and to gather data that could help fill some data gaps. Mr. Williams added that the project came about from the Joint Colusa and Glenn Groundwater Authority Technical Advisory Committee meetings, and that a goal of the project is to educate landowners that don't have knowledge about some of the well monitoring technology that is available. The project will also help with public outreach and gathering data and information about groundwater conditions.



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Mr. King commented again about the process to hire the CGA legal counsel.

Set 2021 Meeting Schedule

Ms. Fahey presented suggested quarterly meeting dates for 2021, which are similar to the regular Commission meeting dates over the past couple of years. Those dates are: February 10, May 5, August 4, November 3.

Motion: Commissioner LaGrande made a motion to approve the suggested meeting dates. Mr. Moresco seconded. The motion passed 4-0 and 1 absent.

UPDATES AND REMINDERS

Statements of Economic Interest (Form 700) Requirements

Ms. Fahey stated that the Groundwater Commissioners were recently added to the County's list of entities that are required to file a Form 700. If there are any questions, they can contact the Clerks of the Board of Supervisors.

Commissioner Comments and Updates

There were no updates from the Commissioners.

Reminder – Commissioner terms of office

Three Commissioners' terms of office are up at the end of 2020.

Items for Next Agenda

Brandon Davison from DWR's Northern Region Office will provide an update on groundwater conditions. Ms. Fahey asked the Commissioners to send her any ideas for other presentations that would be of interest to the Commission and local landowners.

ADJOURNMENT

Next Regular meeting date: February 10, 2021 at 10:00 am.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:37 a.m.

Respectfully submitted;

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Mary Fahey". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Mary Fahey
Secretary