

NOTES: Core Stakeholder Group Meeting 5

Meeting Held: Sept 1, 2020

Notes prepared by: Consensus Building Institute

Meeting in Brief

Optimization Scenarios Considered: The Core Stakeholder Group is considering how basin optimization should be balanced with other projects and groundwater sustainability planning more broadly. Representatives from United Water presented the mechanics and reliability of the groundwater model and shared concepts for basin optimization scenarios. Going forward, the Core Group will focus on conducting a preliminary cost-benefit analysis of all the potential projects before advancing basin optimization modeling to help the group prioritize management actions that are cost effective and implementable.

Legal Committee Charge Approved: The Core Group approved the legal committee charge ([link](#)). Legal committee meeting details will be posted on the website with a note that these meetings are limited to Core Group members and attorneys and that participants must agree to mediation confidentiality.

Core Group to Continue and Near-term Focus: The Core Group decided to continue meeting with a near-term focus on projects and clarifying the overall basin management approach (together or separate).

Briefing the GMA Board on Sept. 23 and Other Constituent Organizations: The Core Group will brief the GMA board and other relevant constituent organizations about the group's progress. The goal for these briefings is to have a common message, to reach as many folks as possible, and to then incorporate constituents' input into the Core Group's discussions going forward.

Charter / Back-up Voting: The Core Group continues to refine the approach to back-up voting, which would determine if enough agreement exists to take a recommendation to the Fox Canyon Groundwater Management Agency board.

Action Items

Dan/United	By 9/11	Projects: Dan / United will connect the facilitation team with contacts within the Orange County Water District.
Dan/ United	By 9/15	Groundwater Model: United will meet with the City of Oxnard to provide access to the groundwater model.
Rosemarie/ Oxnard	TBD	Projects / Optimization: The City of Oxnard will present its recycled water business plan at a future Core Group meeting.
Rosemarie/ Oxnard	By 9/30	Back-up Voting: Revise back-up voting proposal based on Core Group feedback.

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Modeling and Optimization Scenarios

The Core Stakeholder Group is considering how basin optimization should be balanced with other projects and groundwater sustainability planning more broadly. Representatives from United Water Conservation District presented the mechanics and reliability of its groundwater model and shared potential basin optimization scenarios to help advance the Core Group’s thinking on optimization. Going forward, the Core Group will focus on conducting a preliminary cost-benefit analysis of all the potential projects and basin optimization activities to help the group prioritize management actions that are cost effective and implementable. The group will then engage United to conduct modeling on these priority actions.

Groundwater Model Reliability

United’s Dr. Jason Sun explained that the groundwater model is well calibrated and verified based on 600+ data points (well-logs). Verification is conducted by feeding the model a dataset that was not used during calibration to ensure that calibration holds. Model validation efforts demonstrate an average variance of less than 5 ft. in the forebay area and about 5 ft in coastal areas (the benchmark for acceptable variance for a groundwater model in the Ventura area is ≤ 20 ft). Additional strengths of the model include: 1) It has been reviewed and verified by experts in groundwater science; 2) It is based on open-sourced software which creates transparency; and 3) United is continually maintaining / updating the model.

United confirmed that it can provide Core Group members access to the model, recognizing that the model requires a high level of expertise to operate. United is currently working on validating the model with the most recent years’ data.

Basin Optimization Scenarios

Based on the Core Stakeholder Group’s discussion in early September, United staff member John Lindquist along with Dan Detmer discussed several potential basin optimization scenarios that would first concentrate on pumping and then integrate potential projects. Each scenario would improve regional groundwater conditions, but the costs and benefits would vary. The group generally feels that United’s “Scenario 1,” which focuses on pumping, for optimization merits further consideration though impacts to wells and other associated costs would need to be

addressed. Rather than proceeding with Scenario 1 modeling as a next step, the group would prefer to develop the full suite of available projects, analyze the cost-benefit of associated optimization scenarios, and then prioritize the most cost-effective and feasible projects (and assess replenishment fee options).

Staff observed that Scenario 1 pumping optimization could increase the sustainable yield by up to 10,000 acre-feet / year through the following measures:

- 1) Removing about 100 wells
- 2) Installing about 30 replacement wells
- 3) Replacing PTP Lower Aquifer System wells with Upper Aquifer System wells
- 4) Installing pipelines to deliver water from new wells to farms that lose wells
- 5) Cutting back pumping to new (higher) sustainable yield

Some well removals / cuts to pumping described in the optimization scenario could be softened if combined with a recycled water project.

Other key takeaways from the scenarios presentation include:

- “Where you pump matters”: shifting pumping away from the coast improves overall groundwater conditions by reducing seawater intrusion; shifting pumping away from the lower aquifer system could increase the groundwater levels in the upper system.
- Optimization efforts have the potential to capture additional water from inland areas (most of this water would have discharged to the ocean).
- United already has funding to conduct the coastal brackish optimization proposal analysis on costs and benefits.
- The various optimization scenarios can be combined and / or sequenced based on the group’s suggestions.

Going forward, meeting participants requested more information from United to clarify the following optimization-related questions:

- What is the total inflow to the basin if there was no seawater intrusion?
- What is the rate of natural vs. “engineered” recharge to the basin?
- What is the capacity of current pipelines to be further leveraged to reduce costs of optimization efforts?
- What allocation assurances might be provided to pumpers whose wells would be decommissioned as part of an optimization strategy?
- With regard to basin optimization scenario 1: do we need to decommission all 100 wells to get benefits? Are there some wells that if decommissioned would have a different impact on sustainable yield? Could some wells be rehabilitated? What are impacts to water quality?

Note: Questions that require additional detailed analysis would be addressed once the Core Group makes progress on prioritizing a set of optimization / project actions.

As a next step, the Core Group with support from the Projects Committee will focus on the following actions:

- Gather information on the full suite of project options (including but not limited to optimization efforts) and conduct cost-benefit analysis to estimate the cost per acre/ft of water per option to support prioritization efforts. This work will be dove-tailed with discussions about options for replenishment fees.
- Explore “low hanging fruit” projects and management actions (such as efficiency gains) that might increase yield cheaply.
- Factor in water quality and ecological impacts as issues to be addressed and conduct analysis of implications of relevant legal frameworks, such as LAFCO.
- Representatives from the City of Oxnard will present its recycled water business plan to advance the group’s considerations of how recycled water might factor into regional sustainability planning. As a preliminary consideration for the group, an Oxnard representative highlighted that regulations preclude Oxnard from pumping / injecting recycled water into the forebay area.

Legal Committee Charge Approved

The Core Group approved the legal committee charge. Going forward, Legal committee meeting details will be posted on the website with a disclaimer that these meetings are only open to Core Group members and the attorneys appointed to serve on the committee and that all participants must sign on to a mediation confidentiality agreement.

Core Group to Continue and Near-term Focus

The Core Group decided to continue meeting, with a near-term focus on projects and replenishment fees, as well as clarifying the overall basin management approach (together or separate). Several recommended picking up the ramp-down / allocation topics later in the process once there is more clarity about how much additional water supply can be created.

Some meeting participants suggested that the Core Group should expedite discussion of the topics with greatest disagreement, noting that the Core Group’s progress on these issues will influence decision-making about whether or not to contest the GSPs. A meeting participant also highlighted that progress on projects has the potential to make the contentious issues more manageable. The facilitator offered that there can be a benefit to going slower at the beginning of a facilitated process (building the foundation for effective group problem-solving) to position the group to move faster as the process progresses. Another meeting participant noted that

SGMA is intended to be a stakeholder-driven process, encouraging the group to take the necessary time to work through the issues.

In the near-term, based on meeting participants' feedback, the Core Group will focus on projects and clarifying the approach to basin management (together or separate). As part of the Core Group's work on projects, a meeting participant suggested that the group could benefit from learning more about the Orange County Water District's model (which is heavily project-dependent and provides a unique example for user cooperation).

Briefing the GMA Board and Other Constituent Organizations

In September, the Core Group will brief the GMA board and other relevant constituent organizations about the group's progress. The goal for these briefings is to have a common message, to reach as many folks as possible, and to then incorporate constituents' input into the Core Group's discussions going forward.

For the GMA board briefing, scheduled for 9/23, a delegation of Core Group members will deliver the briefing. CBI will prepare a PowerPoint and supporting materials (which all members can review) to support this effort. In addition to providing the GMA an update on the group's progress, the GMA board briefing is an opportunity to communicate the Core Group's interests with regard to the ramp down and to receive feedback from the GMA stemming from this interest-based conversation.

For other constituent briefings (such as other boards), each corresponding Core Group representative should plan to shoulder that responsibility. Examples of constituent groups that should be briefed include:

- City Managers Group
- OPV Landowners Group
- United Board

Charter: Back-up Voting

The Core Group continues to refine the approach to back-up voting. The intent of back-up voting would be to determine that enough support exists to forward a recommendation to the GMA board in the absence of consensus. The group is moving towards a 2/3 overall threshold approach: a proposal would need 10 total affirmative votes with an additional requirement that each interest have some minimum level of buy-in (thresholds per interest varying based on the number of members representing that interest). The proposal discussed would have required 2 of 3 municipal water suppliers, including the City of Oxnard; 4 of 6 agricultural members; 2 of 4 non-municipal water agencies; and 1 of 2 environmental interest group members. The City of Oxnard based its rationale on the City representing a larger constituent base than the combined

total of the other municipal and industrial representatives. Some Core Group representatives observed that they don't neatly fit within a single interest.

This back-up voting proposal requires additional work: a number of participants suggested that no single entity should have veto power.