

Notes: Core Stakeholder Group Meeting 4

Meeting Held: Aug 18, 2020

Notes prepared by: Consensus Building Institute

Meeting in Brief

Managing Basins Collectively

The Core Stakeholder Group discussed the pros and cons of managing the Oxnard Subbasin and Pleasant Valley Basin as one basin or separately and the inclusion of the West Las Posas Subbasin. The group did not reach a conclusion. From a technical perspective, managing the basins collectively allows for optimizing pumping, the combined sustainable yield, and projects and is consistent with goals for applying a one water approach. From an equity (end-point), political feasibility, and financial perspective, the basins and aquifer systems may need tailored approaches.

Allocation

Multiple group members suggest that the initial allocation, ramp down, and endpoint must be grappled with together. The group seeks to further consider how the ramp down, conjunctive use, and imported water intersect with the allocation plan. Some suggest that moving to a land- vs. wellhead-based system could mitigate uncertainties among operators receiving delivered water. Another observes that the current ordinance levels out variability in surface water availability over time. As a path forward, once details are developed around ramp down, end point, and conjunctive use, the group may choose to revisit the ordinance to consider whether the allocation approach is compatible with the proposed policies. As part of these conversations, the group will also need to better understand the nature of water-use data limitations.

Action Items

CBI	By 9/15	Project Committee: CBI will work with the members of the project committee to frame its charge and work plan.
Dan / United	By 9/01	Optimization: Dan will summarize the results of United’s optimization modeling efforts at the 9/1 Core Group meeting.
Kim / GMA	TBD	Land-based system: Kim was on vacation. When he returns, he can update the group on the GMA’s timeline or plans for moving to a land-based system.

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Managing the Basins Collectively

The Core Stakeholder Group discussed whether the focus is on managing Oxnard Subbasin and Pleasant Valley Basin as one basin or separately and should the West Las Posas Subbasin be included. The group did not reach a conclusion. From a technical perspective, managing the basins collectively can optimize pumping and the combined sustainable yield. From an equity (end-point), political feasibility, and financial perspective, the basins and aquifer systems may need tailored approaches. A tentative management goal would be to minimize flux across the basins and coordinate basin activities so conditions improve together.

Benefits / Rationale of Managing the Basins Together

Meeting participants offered various perspectives on the benefits of managing the basins collectively:

- SGMA makes clear that management of basins must be coordinated to ensure that actions in one basin do not prevent another basin from achieving sustainability. Fees could vary across basins within a joint management approach.
- Managing the basins together improves the potential to optimize pumping and collaboration on projects and other regional initiatives.
- Aiming projects towards a combined sustainable yield could help maximize supply.
- Joint management of the basins is simpler from an administrative and technical perspective and aligns with the one water approach

Challenges

Meeting participants also highlighted a number of challenges, complicating factors, and constraints that would need to be addressed if the basins are managed collectively:

- The basins are interconnected so the management approach needs to be coordinated to avoid situations where one basin is pulling water out of a neighboring basin.
- Safe yield and sustainable yield calculations are different between the basins and upper and lower aquifer systems; these differences would need to be managed. Recommendations would need to reflect the different endpoints necessary to achieve sustainability. For example, the upper and lower aquifer systems have different endpoints that affect pumping reductions necessary to achieve sustainability and how requirements for the reduction are distributed among pumpers.
- The management areas created by the GSPs have different constraints (seawater intrusion zone and pumping trough). The variation in constraints make it harder to ensure water security and equity across the region.
- Cities are focused on minimizing costs and providing for the needs of ratepayers (including many disadvantaged community ratepayers) while also satisfying requirements under the law. A successful joint-basin management approach would need to align with these.
- The GMA board would need to articulate its intention on managing the basins collectively and the associated boundaries to provide pumpers confidence in and willingness to pay for projects.

Next Steps to Advance Conversation on Approach to Basin Management

Meeting participants offered suggestions for how the Core Group might advance the conversation around managing the basins collectively:

- United will share optimization modeling results, including analysis of cross-basin impacts from different management actions. Optimization entails figuring out how to operate the system more effectively and smarter; understanding these dynamics will help the group think about basin management strategically.
- The Core Group needs to think creatively about how to distribute water across the system in a way that aligns with sustainability goals and shares costs equitably.
- The Core Group needs more information about endpoints for management areas if basins are treated separately and if basins are managed collectively. This data could be used to consider an appropriate distribution of costs.

Concept Proposals for Advancing Joint-Basin Management

- Manage basins collectively to optimize pumping between basins and the upper and lower aquifer systems while considering sensitivities and impacts in GSP management areas.
- Manage the basins collectively and certain aspects, like replenishment fees, uniquely.
- Start with a basin-wide management strategy, then take measures to mitigate the costs to individuals who would face an additional burden under the management scenario.
- Treat all pumpers the same for next 10 years to create time for collecting data on projects and planning for how to share the burden of cuts and fees.
- Develop an applied water average cost framework that equalizes the price of water whether pumped or delivered.

Key Question(s) to be Answered

- How do we realize efficiency gains and other benefits of joint-basin management while sharing costs equitably and rationally to get broad buy-in?

Allocation

The purpose of this session was to give Core Group members an opportunity to discuss elements of the allocation plan that still needs to be developed or merit attention or refinement. The group also considered key issues that it might need to tackle to implement the allocation ordinance, specifically, or an allocation plan, more generally. Several group members suggest that the initial allocation, ramp down, and endpoint are on a continuum and must be grappled with together. The group seeks to further consider how the allocation intersects with conjunctive use, imported water, optimization efforts, projects, and sustainability planning. As a path forward, once details are developed around ramp down, end point, and conjunctive use, the group may choose to revisit the ordinance to consider whether the allocation approach is compatible with the proposed policies.

Allocation Plan as part of Ramp Down

Discussion highlighted these links:

- Discussions around the ramp down cannot be isolated from allocation because of the impacts that allocations have on pumpers. The group needs to define the process for getting to the end point and that will need to map onto the allocation ordinance.

- The approach to minimum allocations needs to be defined because folks with a small allocation may not have many options except for fallowing land if ramp down is too significant.

Conjunctive Use and Imported Water

The group was reminded to differentiate between conjunctive use (alternating use between groundwater and local surface water when available) and use of imported water (e.g. purchasing water from the State Water Project). Several meeting participants observe that the allocation ordinance's provisions on crediting and carry-over disincentivizes conjunctive use practices.

- Conjunctive use as a management option can benefit basin yield and contribute to long-term goals. The Core Stakeholder Group will need to consider whether the allocation plan encourages coordination on optimization, projects, and burden sharing.
- Rate payers end up paying for imported water so this should factor into the equation.
- Providing credit for historical conjunctive use is important. The ordinance discourages future conjunctive use because of the way it handles credits.
- The 2020 Urban Water Management Plan requires cities to show that they have sufficient supplies to last a 5-year drought. Cities rely on groundwater to serve as their reservoir to satisfy these drought requirements. Recognizing that credits have been problematic in the past, being able to pump groundwater during dry periods while maximizing the use of surface water when available is key, but the carry-over provision effectively limits groundwater pumping in those dry years.
- Some who participated in conjunctive use programs between 2005-2014 feel they now must assume greater risk than folks who only pumped during that period. There is a sense that, had the "one water" approach been fully endorsed, this inequity could have been avoided.

Assurances for Operators receiving Delivered Water

Another theme was that some operators perceive a vulnerability in the long term since their initial allocation reflects their reliance on delivered water. Key points:

- Some in the agricultural community feel they have been penalized for moving to delivered water. These users feel they have lost their allocation through this ordinance and the move to a wellhead-based system.
- A large percentage of variance requests are stemming from operators who receive PTP water. The key question for these operators is how they will get assurance to have an allocation should they need it in the future. One suggestion could be for the GMA to facilitate discussions between landowners and purveyors.
- The result is that some in the agricultural community may have low confidence in regional efforts and may be hesitant to sign on to new initiatives.
- In the view of United, if an operator has used water from the pipeline, then United is holding that allocation for the operator.
- Delivered water / pipeline systems are critical for basin optimization. If people shy away from these systems, then the basins are going backwards.
- There is perception that consensus exists for moving to a land-based system. The group was not clear on whether resources are available to move to the land-based system. Delays in rolling out this system are due to a lack of detailed data on the parcels being irrigated and what crops are grown. The group agreed to check in with the GMA Groundwater Manager Kim Loeb to assess the status for moving to a land-based system.

Benefits of the Current Ordinance

A meeting participant highlighted a benefit of the allocation ordinance as it stands, and a perspective on why data gaps on pumping during the base period may not justify a change in the allocation approach:

- The current allocation ordinance serves the function of leveling out the variability in surface water availability and pumping rates over time, as the base period used spans a full climactic cycle of wet and dry years.
- A lack of data on pumping and water use during the base years in the current allocation ordinance does not justify a change because GMA regulations required all pumpers to measure and report the data in question during the base year period.

Next Steps

Seek information from the GMA about the work plan to migrate to a land-based system and the timeline to get there.

Proposals for Managing Allocation-Related Challenges in Near-Term

- The United PTP system and PV system could serve as mini-GMAs and directly provide operators with the allocation assurances they seek until the GMA migrates to a land-based system.

Committees

Projects

The Core Group further refined the purpose and approach of its nascent projects committee. A meeting participant affirmed that the committee should focus on projects that will yield benefits for the whole basin and highlighted the need to gather information about existing project proposals. Another meeting participant suggested that the committee should consider the potential regional impacts of projects and explore opportunities for collaboration with other basins where appropriate, as there may be opportunities for economies of scale.

Legal

The group did not have time to refine the legal committee's charge. The facilitated requested that those who had comments name those comments, which the Core Group will discuss at a subsequent meeting. One participant stressed the importance that the group be open and accessible to all members of the Core Group. Another participant highlighted the importance of ensuring mediation privilege and confidentiality. And, lastly, another emphasized that the Core Group drive the key questions for the legal committee's deliberation. Group members are generally happy with the updates to the legal committee charge and want to ensure that the committee's work responds to the needs identified by the Core Group and does not become a parallel process.

Core Stakeholder Group Members Present

Arne Anselm, Jared Bouchard, Alden Broome, Dan Detmer, James Dubois, Terri L. Ferro, Rosemarie Gaglione, Jurgen Gramckow, Martin Gramckow, Greg Lewis, Candice Meneghin, Lucie Munoz-McGovern, Ian Prichard, E.J. Remson, Jennifer Tribo

