

# Corning Subbasin Public Draft Groundwater Sustainability Plan 2021 Public Workshops

October 4 (in-person) and October 13 (webinar)

## Key Discussion Takeaways

### Background

Two public workshops containing the same information were held for the Public Draft Corning Subbasin Public Draft Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) on October 4 (in-person) and October 13 (webinar), 2021. Groundwater Sustainability Agency (GSA) staff presented the GSP content; the technical consultant Montgomery & Associates (M&A) was available on October 13 to address technical questions. The primary goals for the workshops were to 1) provide an overview of the GSP contents and where to find the information; 2) highlight the key takeaways from the Public Draft GSP; 3) identify resources for additional information and how to submit comments, and 4) discuss how and why it is critical to remain involved as the process progresses toward GSP implementation. The 45-day public comment period for the Draft GSP ended on October 25, 2021.

**Materials:** [Agenda Packet](#) | [Slide Deck](#) | [GSP Executive Summary](#) | [Oct 13 webinar recording](#)

### Meeting Summary and Discussion Highlights

The following provides a brief meeting summary and discussion highlights raised during the October 4 and October 13 public workshops.

#### Welcome, Agenda, and Orientation

Nichole Bethurem (Tehama County Flood Control and Water Conservation District / Tehama County GSA staff) welcomed attendees. Stephanie Horii (CBI Facilitator) reviewed the agenda, workshop objectives, and comment procedure.

#### Background and SGMA 101

S. Horii provided an overview of the SGMA, and N. Bethurem reviewed how the two GSAs and advisory groups for the Corning Subbasin have been working together to develop the GSP. Lisa Hunter (Glenn County / Corning Sub-basin GSA staff) then presented an overview of the GSP content.

#### Basin Setting: Understanding the Corning Subbasin Characteristics

L. Hunter presented Sections 1-4 of the GSP: Introduction and Agency Information, Plan Area, Basin Setting (Hydrogeologic Conceptual Model (HCM) and groundwater conditions), and Water Budget.

#### Discussion on Historical Water Budgets

- What are the data and rationale for the historical water budget takeaways? A storage surplus did not seem aligned with hydrographs indicating diminishing water levels.
  - The historical groundwater budget ends in 2015, which is when groundwater levels were just starting to decline. The overall historical water budget encompasses the time frame 1974 to 2015. When viewed over that timeframe, the cumulative (overall) change in storage was still positive, since the historical amount of groundwater in storage was quite high, prior to extensive well development. The annual change in storage shows a recent

decline. The current water budget then shows a decline in storage overall that is exacerbated in the projected future water budget. Note that for GSP planning and implementation, we want to focus on the projected water budget.

- Concern raised that deepening wells in recent decades may have had a bigger impact on shallow wells than the GSP estimates.

### **Monitoring Network and Sustainable Management Criteria (SMC)**

L. Hunter reviewed Sections 5 and 6 on monitoring networks and the SMC for defining and evaluating sustainability and tracking progress.

#### **Discussion on Water Quality**

- How does the GSP protect water quality and prevent future degradation (e.g., nitrogen)?
  - Water quality management under the GSP consists of a “do no harm” approach, essentially making sure that GSP actions do not impact existing water quality conditions, and involves review and coordination with other agencies responsible for water quality oversight (such as the Coalitions and Water Boards). Water quality SMC have been established and will be adhered to. Specific water quality monitoring will be developed for projects and management actions, as needed, to make sure the GSP implementation does not degrade water quality.

#### **Discussion on Groundwater level Undesirable Results (UR)**

- What does the groundwater level UR translate to in real life (e.g., which wells going dry over how many years)? Concerns raised that most domestic well owners do not understand how the groundwater level UR definition impacts their wells.
  - SMC section includes figures and tables that help describe what the worst-case scenario might look like. The SMC section also specifically looked at impacts to domestic wells.
- Concern raised that the groundwater level SMC gives too much leeway for dropping levels and does not sufficiently protect the small well owners, whose wells are at greater risk of going dry due to drought and overdraft.

#### **Discussion on SMC Development**

- How did the GSAs decide on UR definitions and SMCs for avoiding these URs?
  - The GSAs decided on SMCs that had to balance the needs of multiple beneficial users in the subbasin. In-depth discussions occurred at monthly Corning Subbasin Advisory Board (CSAB) meetings; a special CSAB evening meeting occurred specifically on groundwater level SMCs. The Tehama County Groundwater Commission also received monthly updates. All GSAs’ and advisory group meetings have been open to the public.
- Concern raised that including newer wells (less than 30 years old) may not detect impacts to many domestic well owners (whose wells are often more than 30 years old).

### **Projects & Management Actions (PMAs) and Plan Implementation**

L. Hunter presented an overview of the types of projects and management actions (Section 7) to address groundwater issues and the plan for implementing the GSP (Section 8), including cost estimates and long-term funding needs to be further addressed during GSP implementation.

#### **Discussion on Funding**

- When will the more in-depth GSP funding discussions occur?

- Currently working on funding mechanisms at a staff level. More focused discussions with the Tehama County GSA and Corning Sub-basin GSA are expected to occur starting in January 2022.
- How much of the costs are for GSP administration/operations compared to GSP implementation?
  - About \$600,000 per year (for the first five years) is estimated for administration; the rest is for implementation.
- How much support can we expect to gain from grants?
  - One of the major grant sources is through CA Dept of Water Resources (DWR) Sustainable Groundwater Management Program, which is currently providing funding for implementing projects, but not for GSA administration and operations. The GSAs need to establish separate funding mechanisms to cover administrative costs.
- Compared to other basins, a much larger portion of landowners in the Corning Subbasin do not irrigate (west side of the basin specifically mentioned). Charging per acre seems to unfairly charge and be an unfeasible cost burden on dry-land farmers. Can these areas or user types be managed differently? (potential subbasin boundary modifications discussed)
  - This type of input is very useful. Stay involved as funding discussions gain momentum in early 2022. Basin boundary modifications are a CA DWR process; not much can be done by the GSAs in the short term. As more data become available, the GSAs can revisit if boundary modifications are warranted and be prepared for the next DWR boundary modification process.

#### **Additional Discussion**

- Well owners also need to be aware of and understand they have a responsibility to maintain their wells and not solely rely on the GSAs / GSP.

#### **What's Next?**

S. Horii and the GSAs emphasized the importance of public involvement as the process transitions to GSP implementation and provided information on how to stay engaged.

#### **Public Awareness and Input**

- How will the GSP present public comments, and how will DWR consider public comments?
  - An appendix in the GSP includes a table of the comments received thus far and responses to those comments. A similar approach will be used for comments submitted through the 45-day public comment period.
  - DWR has a separate public comment review process – 75<sup>1</sup> days after GSP submission/posting and up to 2 years to review and assess the GSP.
- What opportunities and mechanisms are available to provide input and ensure the decision-makers (GSAs and the State) are aware of the public's concerns? (Concern that previously raised issues did not appear to be incorporated into the GSP. Desire for more dialogue and meaningful discussion in the future)
  - The GSAs provide a public comment period on the Draft GSP prior to adoption (45-days for this GSP), and DWR provides a comment period after GSP adoption and posting on their website. Additionally, the GSA board and advisory group meetings are open to the public. SGMA requires that GSAs find a balance that considers all beneficial users and uses of groundwater;

<sup>1</sup> Correction: According to (10733.4(c)): Upon receipt of a groundwater sustainability plan, the department shall post the plan on the department's Internet Web site and provide **60 days for persons to submit comments** to the department about the plan.

the group acknowledges that can lead to frustration and dissatisfaction. Going forward, the 5-year updates are opportunities to re-evaluate and discuss how to adapt. GSA staff encourage the public to submit comments in writing to ensure comments are captured fully and accurately.

- Because the GSP needs to balance many different groups with different interests; some very tough decisions have to be made, which underscores the importance for the public to be aware and understand how this affects them.

#### **Outreach & Engagement Materials & Mechanisms**

- Concern raised about how the “How to Comment” handout described the potential impact to domestic well owners; stating that the language appeared to diminish the impact. It is important for domestic well owners to know this GSP may affect them.
  - Broad awareness and understanding of SGMA and GSP impacts are important. The referenced language was intended to clarify that SGMA addresses de minimis / domestic well owners differently than those who generally use substantial amounts of groundwater (e.g., agriculture) and does not imply that residential wells are not covered by the GSP.
- Concerns raised about low attendance and inconsistent outreach in local newspapers. Some questioned whether more could be done to encourage attendance, citing the same persons attending meetings.
  - We have observed across various subbasins that attendance has been relatively lower compared to previous meetings. Potential factors could include COVID concerns, harvest, meeting fatigue and meetings overlap (many GSP meetings occurring within the same condensed timeframe), etc. Overall, we expect interest and attendance to be higher when the topics of funding and specific PMAs arise, underscoring the importance to stay involved.
- [At the Oct 13 webinar, participants (5) identified their preferred methods for staying involved. Their responses are provided at the end of this document.] Preferred communication methods include e-mail list-serve, paper mail, newspaper, and public workshops/meetings.

#### **Other GSP or SGMA-related Comments/Questions**

##### **Nexus with near-term needs**

- Participants sought to better understand how current or near-term activities (e.g., current operations, wells going dry, new development, etc.) interact with the SGMA process.
- The subbasin's window of opportunity to intervene to avert undesirable outcomes is closing quicker than predicted by the GSP, as evidenced by neighbors' wells going dry and well productivity falling.

#### **Not directly related to SGMA**

##### **Current large business/corporation operations**

- Question about specific rock quarry's water use and management restrictions near City of Corning.
  - Connect with Nichole Bethurem/Tehama GSA to better understand specifics.

##### **New well permits**

- Concern raised about how land use planning agencies (county planning / environmental health departments) are currently reviewing and approving well permits for installing large wells.
  - Not specifically covered under the SGMA process. Connect with county staff to learn more about which meetings / processes are delving into well permitting.

## Attendance Overview

### GSA Staff:

- Tehama County: Nichole Bethurem
- Glenn County: Lisa Hunter
- Glenn-County Irrigation District (Oct 4): Holly Dawley

**Technical Consultant** (Oct 13): Lisa Porta, Montgomery & Associates

**Facilitators:** Stephanie Horii, Olatunji Oniyaomebi (Oct 4), Consensus Building Institute (CBI)

**GSA / CSAB members:** 2 at Oct 4 meeting: Bob Williams and Steve Gruenwald

**Public Attendance:** approximately 7 at the Oct 4 meeting; 10 at the Oct 13 webinar.

## Oct 13 Polling – Responses Raw Data (5 respondents)

Preferred method(s) for connecting with you?

- Email list-serve; eNewsletter (quarterly, Tehama County); Paper mail; Direct call; Newspaper; Radio; Public workshops and meetings
- Website - CorningSubbasinGSP.org; Email list-serve; eNewsletter (quarterly, Tehama County); Paper mail; Direct call; Public workshops and meetings
- Paper mail; Direct call; Newspaper; Radio; Public workshops and meetings
- Email list-serve; Paper mail
- Email list-serve; Social Media; Paper mail; Newspaper; Public workshops and meetings

Specific newspapers / networks:

- Valley Mirror
- Farm Bureau