



## Semitropic Water Storage District May 13, 2020

By Don A. Wright

The Semitropic Water Storage District board of directors held its Wednesday, May 13, 2020 by teleconference. Chairman **Dan Waterhouse** called the meeting at 12:30pm. **SWSD** General Manager **Jason Gianquinto** asked everyone to identify themselves and there wasn't any public comment. All the directors were present. Attorney **Steve Torigiani** just got off the phone with Wheeler Ridge and he explained a little about a new item being added to the agenda 5 k, a neg dec on a solar project.

Straight away the board began the laborious exercise of wisdom in judging the action items. It started by approving the agenda and the minutes last month's regular meeting and GSA meeting. The treasurer's report was also approved. The financial reports, the financial statements and payment of the bills were all approved. Under the new rules of virus inspired remote meetings and in an effort to be transparent the board is polled for each vote.

Administrator **Marsha Payne** got to ask each director his vote.



WM Lyles seems to have a standing item on the agenda each month. They presented Semitropic with a cost proposal for Raw Water Processing Facility for 2020 recovery operations. As I understood it the board approved up to \$100,000 on the necessary replacement of parts and refurbishing of the facility. I think the issue here was twofold: arsenic was a constituent to be dealt with and the recharge part of the facility hasn't been used in a while.

On a related note the board was asked to set policy on the water quality from pumped in supplies and wheeling. The district has some policy on quality standards for water but it needs to be finetuned for certain applications. If a well is pumping up salty water it the district shouldn't be required to wheel the water or pump it into the Aqueduct. Adding a water sample and evaluation requirement was the specific request. The board approved.

The next item was setting the service charges per acre for different types of land. The additional consideration of SGMA matters have complicated things and initiated the needs to update how things such as charges are handled by the district. The rates were approved and a public hearing set for next month. Districts have quasi-judicial and legislative responsibilities and when conducting such they must hold public hearings.

Semitropic wants to give subsurface water recharge a shot. There is grant money through the US Bureau of Reclamation's Water Smart program. GEI Engineers want to ask for \$750,000 so they can get a \$1.5 million matching grant. Naturally GEI wants to be paid for preparing and filing the application. The board agreed. Somewhere in midst of poling the board Payne's voice dropped out and Gianquinto began echoing while other had crackling static. In less than a minute it all went away and voices were audible again.

Semitropic is a State Water Project contractor and with only 15 percent allocations. Gianquinto said the district is making plans by purchasing supplies beyond SWP. Some of the water is coming from districts north of the Delta and some of it is water swaps hither and yon. They snagged a little more than 15,000 a/f extra water. Staff wants to offer this water to landowners for irrigation or even carryover in San Luis Reservoir realizing that carryover could be lost. This water could also be banked for credit. The board kicked around the idea of offering it as an allocation based on acreage. If there is any leftover then make it first come, first served. Gianquinto would like to wrap this up by June. The found that reasonable provided all the water stays in the district and the buyer pays up within 10-days.

The extra item was next. A resolution of a negative declaration on the Pond Road Solar Project. Torigiani explained this and the board approved.

The next item was the Semitropic GSA news. Gianquinto said Semitropic has had a shared well program before SGMA came along. The district would partner with landowners on wells located on landowner property and the two would share how much water they recovered. The district would determine how much the well could produce. Let's say the well produced 1,000 a/f annually and the landowner and the district split the cost of developing the well. If it's 50/50 cost share each party would get 500 a/f each per year. However under SGMA this a separate supply outside of the GSP budget. The grower has a right to use the well but not to pump more than allowed. Gianquinto wanted to work up a white paper to send to the landowners pretty much stating the above. The board talked it over with staff and thought that reasonable. Gianquinto said it is a viable program that benefits both parties. In other news land has dropped out of production since ET measurements were given to growers. There was also some talk about a 10-year rolling average for pumping limits.

Consultant reports were next. Former GM **Will Boschman** said this reminds him of when Semitropic first started implementing water banking and how complicated that was and how much time he had to spend explaining things. He praised the current staff for the way it is dealing with SGMA under this virus condition. Boschman reported the Agua Via agreement has been extended to 30-years and Aqua Planet is still optimistic of raising the necessary capital to complete its agreement as soon as international travel restrictions ease. Boschman also reported on some Delta matters. He said the Southern California Water Authority met last month and has been working on changing its organizational structure.

**Larry Rodriguez** of GEI gave his report saying his firm has been working on canal interties, spreading ground design and other things. GEI is working on coordinating a presentation on subsidence along the California Aqueduct to be given to DWR. His firm is also working on a groundwater banking model to incorporate into the GSP. He's been talking with neighboring districts about joining in and sharing costs. Not a lot of enthusiasm at this time.

**Dean Florez** gave his political report saying Sacramento is back at work. His microphone or something was messed up. I couldn't understand him. It sounded like there are 30 giant bills and his email doesn't work due to COVID-19. I think he might have said there are no state senate bills to get bothered over. Then we lost him. Then he came back saying two-thirds of all bills in Sacramento have

died from Coronavirus related needs. Only bills dealing with the virus are up for votes. He said this has been pretty good as almost all the bills the district opposed have died.

Gianquinto gave his report saying the office is closed to the public and staff is working in compliance with extra safety. He said the Delta Tunnel Project has been busy. An AIP was developed – Agreement in Principal – and is being reviewed. DWR wants to know who wants in and who doesn't. The Incidental Take Permit has spawned lawsuits. The Kern County Water Agency has joined in. Water contractors have sued the state, and the state has sued the feds over the biops. The State Water Project is at 15 percent allocation but Gianquinto doesn't expect any increase. SWSD has a deadline to request recovery with its banking partners. The meeting went into closed session.

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### **SEMITROPIC WATER STORAGE DISTRICT**

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**Board:** Rick Wegis - President, Philip W. Portwood - Vice President, Dan Waterhouse – Treasurer, Todd Tracy – Secretary, Jeff Fabbri, Tim Thomson, Tom Toretta

**Staff:** Jason Gianquinto-General Manager, Bobby Salinas-District Controller, Isela Medina-District Engineer, Executive Secretary-Marsha Payne, Consultant-Will Boschman, Superintendent-John Lynch & Attorney

**About:** Semitropic Water Storage District is one of eight water storage districts in California and is the largest in Kern County. The District delivers water to nearly 300 customers for the irrigation of approximately 140,000 acres for agricultural uses. Semitropic also supplies energy to a variety of users and provides groundwater banking and storage services. Established in 1958, Semitropic Water Storage District covers an area of more than 220,000 acres. It began as an irrigation district for the purpose of securing State Water Project supplies to reduce groundwater overdraft. *From [www.semitropic.com](http://www.semitropic.com)*