

# Water Wrights

## Madera County GSA Advisory Committee Special Meeting Held July 16, 2020

By Joel Hastings

At the 2 p.m. start time **Stephanie Anagnoson**, Madera County Director of the Water and Natural Resources Department and the staff “head push” for this Committee, announced the rules of the road for this Zoom meeting. She said that staff and committee members would be using the video while other attendees would not and would be muted. She invited committee members to mute themselves when not speaking, noting with a wry tone of voice that no one ever believes the background noise is coming from her or his room. Ironically, the only hitch in the meeting was an interrupted internet connection from Stephanie’s office that caused her to break up and need assistance from other staff in different locations from time to time.

Anyway, Chair **Devin Aviles** called the meeting to order at 2:07 p.m. and thanked staff for the set-up. He asked that cameras be shut off and he led all in the pledge of allegiance.

Stephanie A took roll call after unmuting with six members and a couple of alternates present. Staffer **Jeannie Habben** had to help here when Stephanie’s sound was breaking up.

Chair Aviles read the public comment rule. While no member of the public had comments, alternate committee member **Angela Islas** asked if minutes could be distributed to committee members. Stephanie A explained they are posted on the website at <https://www.maderacountywater.com/county-gsa-advisory-committees/>

Regular committee members are called ambassadors as they represent various interest groups that have committee seats. **Jim Maxwell**, one of two permanent-ag reps, said he met with several “white area” growers about how to reduce groundwater use. He called it a productive discussion.

**Madeline Harris**, an alternate for one of the two seats for the DAC (disadvantaged community) had met with a group representing socially disadvantaged farmers and hoped their interests would be considered. It was also reported that the well for the Fairmead community had reached stage 4, challenged by the falling water table and an increase in homeowners relying on it due to the stay at home order. Also, in that community, a property owner’s tank had become inoperative, but county funds were no longer available to help with the replacement cost. Later in the meeting in response to a question, Stephanie A explained that the county funds are a “flow through” from the state and that they were apparently depleted at this time.

Committee member **Larkin Harman**, representing non-permanent ag, gave an update on the Clayton Water District which lies in both Madera and Merced County GSAs. She also reported on a project being undertaken with the neighboring Triangle T Water District.



In her director's report, Stephanie A noted that a mediation had been held on June 12 for the seven GSA's that had failed to execute a coordinating agreement by the January 31 deadline. The lack of an agreement had caused the state to reject the Madera Subbasin GSP. The group met with a judge and the coordinating agreement is now in place. More details could not be reported because the judge had required a non-disclosure agreement among all the parties.

The next item was a report on domestic wells by Stephanie A. Grants are in place to conduct well inventories and installations in both the Madera and Chowchilla subbasins. An ad hoc committee formed last year had encouraged that property owners be provided with clear, easy to understand instructions on providing information for the data base. It had also recommended more work be done to obtain complete addresses for the files. There will be an effort to address both short term and long term issues around these wells.

Committee alternate **Madeline Harris** asked about the timeline for the Madera Subbasin inventory. The reply from staff was that contracts are going out shortly, so maybe a month or two.

Since the topic was domestic wells, there was further discussion of the well at Fairmead which apparently had been deepened 10 years ago... but the dropping water table and expanded population was creating the problem of insufficient water. Committee member **Victoria Ortiz** added this information calling in on the phone line.

Maxwell said that as part of his extensive farming operations, his firm has a pump and well company with lots of equipment managing hundreds of wells. He said he'd be happy to have his team look at the distressed well and offer advice about options that might be available.

The main agenda item, saving the best for last, was the report from Stephanie A and consultant **Greg Young**. In an outline entitled "Demand Management Options" Stephanie explained that, as all know, it's necessary to reduce "consumptive use" and there are several options. Among them are allocations, allocations with a water market, land resting and retirement easements and fee structures.

The outline explains that "good faith" needs to be shown to GSA partners; state intervention needs to be avoided; and the trends and the magnitude of the reductions must be determined. She might have added, SGMA requires it.

To assess the situation, satellite -based water usage (evapotranspiration!) analysis was obtained for the years 2010 to 2019. In detail presented by consultant Young, and sure enough, no matter how the data is analyzed, it shows gradually increasing water usage for agricultural operations. The report can be found at <https://www.maderacountywater.com/county-gsa-advisory-committees/>

At the conclusion of the report, Chair Aviles said, "We can see use is higher, so we have to start discussion." He predicts contentious times but says we must get going on it.

The committee was asked for comments. Harris asked if we have thought about offering incentives to growers to participate in state healthy soils initiative which would help soil, water and air quality. Stephanie A replied saying we're going to work with a consultant on fees and this could be one of the elements.

Committee member Harman says at her farm they do it even though they don't go through the state program. Committee member **Darcy Vlot** who holds the livestock seat said we do that and many other things to take care of the environment. We're not here to just make money, but to take care of the land, water and air along with employees and our families for the future of the business. She said for example, they have been working for several years to install a manure digester on their dairy.

Stephanie A said that an allocation approach will be presented at the August 6 meeting for public comment that will "get beat up." Consultant Young added that allocation is aimed at determining a sustainable yield of native ground water, not so much of imported water.

It's the overdraft that's the issue... the continued pumping of "stored" water i.e. ground water.

Young said the purpose of the satellite data is to understand trend lines, not to provide absolute data. Maxwell says he and his managers have used satellite data for more than 10 years as an important tool in farm management decision making.

Committee alternate **Jay Quick** representing residential users said how glad he is to be talking seriously about consumptive use. "Kudos to all," he said. "We're finally ready to do it!"

From the public, **Wayne Cedarquist** said he had had results from a "free flyover" sample of satellite analysis but there is going to have to be metering for specific properties when you get down to individual plots of land.

Chair Aviles said it will come down to growers documenting what they are pulling out of the ground.

Stephanie A assured the group there will be an appeals process. With no further discussion, Chair Aviles adjourned the meeting at 3:28 p.m.

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Madera County GSA is comprised of three subbasins, designated by the CA Department of Water Resources as critically overdrafted, and "high priority": (1) the [Chowchilla Subbasin](#); 5-022.05 (2) the [Madera Subbasin](#); 5-022.6 and (3) a portion of the [Delta-Mendota Subbasin](#). 5-022.07 Each of these subbasins submitted a Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) by January 31, 2020. These subbasins are required to achieve "sustainability" by the year 2040. The method by which sustainability will be achieved will be illustrated in the GSP, which was drafted in partnership by the irrigation district, water districts, cities and Madera County.

The Madera County Groundwater Sustainability Agency (GSA) is administered by the Madera County Department of Water and Natural Resources: Stephanie Anagnoson, Director, 200 W. Fourth Street, Madera, CA 93637, (559) 675-7703 x. 2265 or (559) 675-6573  
The GSA Advisory Committee Members for 2020 are as followed (organized by name, subbasin, and representational group): Albert Guravage, Non-Permanent Ag- Alternate, Al Solis, Residential- Alternate, Ben Pitman, Livestock- Alternate, Bryant Elkins, Madera -Non-Permanent Ag, Clay Daulton- Residential, Clay Haynes- At Large, Devin Aviles, Madera- Permanent Ag, Darcy Volt- Livestock, Greg Hooker, Non-Permanent Ag- Alternate, James Unti, Permanent Ag- Alternate, Jared Samarin- Delta-Mendota, Jay Quick, Residential- Alternate, Jerry Kazynski- Residential, Jim Maxwell, Chowchilla- Permanent Ag, Karun Samran, Permanent Ag- Alternate, Larkin Harman, Chowchilla- Non-Permanent Ag, Leadership Council, DAC- Alternate, Mike DeLeGuerra, At Large- Alternate, Sam Lopes, Delta-Mendota- Alternate, Self-Help, DAC- Alternate, Teresa Mendoza- DAC, Vicki Ortiz- DAC