

Water Wrights

Tri County Water Authority September 3, 2020

By Don A. Wright

The Tri County Water Authority's board of directors met from its Corcoran headquarters on Thursday, September 3, 2020 afternoon. It was on Zoom meetings and I couldn't get my mic to work so the TCWA was spared of my comments public or otherwise, good for them. I haven't been to Corcoran in a while but there was a good Mexican restaurant. Lots of folks don't know tacos are nature's perfect food.

Chairman **Cory VanderHam** called the meeting at 1:00pm and they welcomed **Wade Magden** to the board. There were no public comments or conflicts of interest. The consent calendar was passed; that included minutes, treasurer's report and payment of the bills.

Public Hearing

The next item was a public hearing to consider the adoption of the Tri-County Water Authority Meter Policy & Procedures. Consulting engineer **Amer Hussain** spoke about the proposed policy. There was one public comment from **Pam Silkwood** about being sure the data confidentiality will be in compliance with SGMA. The board voted and there was an unanimous vote to adopt the policy and procedures in the form of Resolution 20-06. Silkwood advised posting the document on the web. I am not familiar with Ms. Silkwood but she sounded like an attorney; that combination of warmth and authority ringing out in her voice.

Engineering Report

Someone I do know is Four Creeks Engineering's **David DeGroot**. He spoke on the subject of a sub basin wide monitoring network. He said sites have been identified and water quality samples have been taken. If I understood him correctly the network will come into its own this spring and forward. A subsidence network has also be prepared. DeGroot said it ties in with other organizations'



satellite measuring so the data sets will work together. He said an over arching data management system will be discussed shortly. There have been grant income and the money stretched far enough to drill four monitoring wells in the areas of TCWA and the neighboring Eastern Tule GSA. These locations have shallow and deep wells and will help provide for the areas with the biggest data gaps.

DeGroot said there was a million dollar grant from Prop 68 to help fund groundwater modeling and monitoring wells. An extensometer was hoped for – an instrument that measures subsidence – but just one of these gadgets would have exhausted the monitoring funding. There is an environmental review process he has to dance with the state to drill under that funding source. The DWR will go out and drill wells with their own contracted crews. I didn't catch the program name this falls under but DWR will start work in October. DeGroot said the Big Marxist Virus has slowed down the wheels of government and there are some checks in the proverbial mail from the grant awards.

DeGroot next said **Thomas Harder**, hydrogeologist, developed a flow model. DeGroot made sure to differentiate between Harder and UC hydrogeologist **Thomas Harter** with a “t”. Harter made some very unpopular assumptions about groundwater that was harmful to dairies. Those findings are still being questioned. I'm grateful to DeGroot for that because I have trouble remembering how to spell Tom's last name correctly. I'll just have to remember “d” for the popular hydrologist. Harder is a good guy, I've sat through some meetings with him. Anyway, DeGroot spoke about getting the monitoring and data collection/management in shape to take care of the possible scenarios and calculating the modeling needs.

Director **Steve Jackson** asked about comment response to the GSP and DeGroot said another popular hydrogeologist, Dr. **Ken Schmidt** provided a good deal of reasoned response for the comments. TCWA General Manager **Diana Jackson** (no relation) thanked DeGroot for taking time to address her board.

Data Management

A proposed sub basin wide data accounting system was presented by **Eric Riley** of Basinsafe. Riley said the last time they spoke he was there in person. He said this software is original, built here in the Valley and customized by Valley software writers. He said the system is flexible, you can add features as needed. Basinsafe is supposed to be compatible with most of the sub basin GSPs and has been up and running for two months. Updates are ongoing as the situation on the ground or technically changes Basinsafe will address that.

Riley said the core features are tracking, consumption, billing, reporting and management. Both meter and evapotranspiration data, as well as Land IQ satellite data will work. The system is web based, there will be no need to install special software to use the program. Riley went into a little more detail on the functionality of the five types of features.

Riley continued saying the “Onboarding” of the system takes a few weeks. That's mostly for training and configuration to the entity's needs. He said he's met with Jackson and other GSA managers to be sure the most application and cost efficiency was built into this. There is a configuration/application set up and data import, testing and staff training included. Then the big test, getting member access and acceptance. Basinsafe is providing help through all of the pre-launch and post launch needs.

How much does it cost? I don't want to spoil it for you but once you figure in the platform development, time and materials and annual fees you're looking at north of \$100,000. Is this a reasonable cost? I don't know, but I do know it's cheaper than letting the State Board do it for you. It sounded to me like Riley knew what he was talking about and I hesitate to weigh in any further because the real value will be determined by landowners impacted by SGMA in the TCWA. But it sure

sounded good to me. One way suggested to pay would be sharing some of the costs with other GSAs using Basinsafe and the figure of \$.24 per acre was mentioned.

I hated to leave but the Eastern Tule GSA was starting at 2pm and that's the part of the state where the Friant Kern Canal is sinking. So, here's what was also on the agenda. If you're interested in items from this part of the meeting I did see the record light was on the Zoom screen. The board was going to be asked to approve a Kings River Conservation District elevation monitoring cost share agreement. Obviously I don't know how the vote went and I haven't attended TCWA meetings as much as many but in my experience when approval is asked for on the agenda most of the time the issues have been worked out in committee and the action item passes. We'll have to see what happens this time.

The last action item was to consider setting a public hearing date of November 5th to hear public comments regarding the assessment of late fees on unpaid assessments. The last items on the agenda were reports by directors and reports of general interest.

Under general interest Hussain was going to report on the advisory committee's take on a groundwater allocation evaluation plant and some grants. There was a Tulare Lake Sub Basin update. The agenda lists **David Armanasco** as giving the board an update on California Strategies' going on's. Cal Strategies is consulting firm with a lot of folks with close ties to a lot of folks in Sacramento. There is a legal counsel report – ah, here it is – by Pam Silkwood (I thought she had an attorney voice) and she is slated to talk about the tolling agreement with Westlands WD GSA. And, other updates as appropriate.

The next meeting will be November 5th at 1pm.

So, that's all for this TCWA report.

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Tri-County Water Authority is a collaboration of Public Agencies, Water Suppliers, Communities, Cities, County, Environmental Groups, Government Representatives, and a variety of other interested parties. The goal is to identify and implement water management solutions on a regional scale that increase regional self-reliance, reduce conflict, and manage water to concurrently achieve social, environmental, and economic objectives.

Directors & Staff: Cory VanderHam - Chairman, Mark Grewal – Vice Chair, Steve Jackson, Wade Magden. Deanna Jackson – Executive Director, Amer Hussain – consulting engineer.