

SANTA ROSA PLAIN GROUNDWATER MANAGEMENT SITUATION ASSESSMENT

Key Themes from Interviews Conducted by
Center for Collaborative Policy

California State University, Sacramento
Center for Collaborative Policy
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OVERVIEW

The Santa Rosa Plain[•], home to approximately half of the population of Sonoma County, faces growth in population and demand for water. The Russian River and groundwater resources are the primary sources of that water. The challenge of increasing demand and other uncertainties necessitates thoughtful water management. To address this matter and build on the recent progress of the Sonoma Valley Groundwater Management Plan, the Sonoma County Water Agency (Water Agency) directed its staff to investigate the feasibility of pursuing groundwater management for the Santa Rosa Plain. Staff enlisted the Center for Collaborative Policy, California State University, Sacramento, (Center) to conduct an impartial assessment of issues and concerns related to groundwater management and to learn if and how stakeholders might want to address these issues. The Center interviewed 55 individuals representing 37 organizations with an interest in groundwater.

The overall findings indicate competing interpretations on the value and potential of groundwater management planning as well as a significant lack of technical understanding of both the aquifer underneath the Santa Rosa Plain as well as the extent of interaction between surface and groundwater resources. While nearly all interviewees agree that gaining a better understanding of the condition and status of local groundwater resources is critical, many agricultural and ranching interests are extremely hesitant to participate for a fear that groundwater planning would result in increased regulations and operating costs. Moreover, the sheer size and diversity of both geography and interested parties within the Santa Rosa Plain produce a daunting and complex challenge to undertake productive groundwater planning. Not only are there a large number of jurisdictions and competing interests within the planning area, experiences from past regional planning efforts, recent lawsuits filed by environmental organizations and municipalities, and current efforts on the Russian River and in Dry Creek have resulted in extremely high levels of distrust amongst many of the parties and, in particular, of the Water Agency.

Based on these findings, the Center concludes that collaborative groundwater planning within the Santa Rosa Plain would require significant pre-planning steps to lay the foundation for a phased groundwater management planning process. These steps include convening a small, representative steering committee to guide pre-planning work and initiating a robust education effort and outreach campaign on the findings of the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) technical study.

[•] The Santa Rosa Plain is a groundwater basin bounded on the northwest by the middle reach of the Russian River floodplain and by mountains of the Mendocino Range on the remaining western boundary. The southern end of the Santa Rosa Plain is marked by a series of low hills, which form a drainage divide that separates the Santa Rosa Plain from the Petaluma Valley south of Cotati. The Santa Rosa Plain is bounded to the east by the Sonoma Mountains south of Santa Rosa and the Mayacmas Mountains north of Santa Rosa. The Santa Rosa Plain is drained principally by the Santa Rosa and Mark West Creeks that flow westward and collect into the Laguna de Santa Rosa.

APPROACH

A professional, impartial facilitation team from the Center worked with the Water Agency to identify a number of individuals representing key stakeholder interests to participate initially in the assessment process. Starting with this list, Center facilitators conducted interviews representing a range of water-related interests and viewpoints on groundwater management. As the interview process proceeded, the Center identified additional individuals to participate based on recurring recommendations from other participants and to ensure a comprehensive and broad range of interests contributed to the Center's understanding. In total, the Center conducted interviews with 55 individuals representing 37 organizations from February to October 2009. Appendix A lists participating organizations and individuals.

To help guide the interviews, the Center generally asked questions identified in an interview questionnaire (see Appendix B), provided to many participants prior to the actual interview. The questionnaire covered the following topics:

- Identification of the major technical issues requiring further research;
- Stakeholders' goals and general concerns regarding the Santa Rosa Plain;
- Historic and current, interpersonal and organizational relationships among stakeholders;
- Appropriate public participation and outreach techniques for potential use;
- Familiarity with the use of groundwater banking as a water resources management strategy;
- Knowledge of other efforts underway that should be considered; and
- Willingness to participate in collaborative planning for the Santa Rosa Plain.

All interviews were confidential. The mediators do not attribute specific comments to individuals in this report. They will not share interview data with any agencies or interest groups. Rather, the Center has summarized and qualitatively evaluated the information gathered through the assessment to identify stakeholder consensus and discord and to develop recommendations related to groundwater management planning.

INTERVIEW FINDINGS

The interviews provided a wealth of information and insights into the water-related issues facing the communities within the Santa Rosa Plain. The Center has summarized issues of concern into categories: major concerns, information gathering and data analysis, interest group dynamics, insights for success and perspectives on collaborative processes.

Major Concerns

Stakeholders lack understanding about the groundwater basin and differ in opinion about its capacity.

Stakeholders from all interest groups articulate a strong need to understand the groundwater basin and extent and location of recharge. Competing studies exist, and stakeholders have differing viewpoints as to how the basin actually functions. Stakeholders question connectivity within the basin, the rate of recharge and where recharge occurs. Stakeholders would like to better understand the relationship between riparian areas and groundwater aquifers. They are unclear about the extent of natural resources' dependence (vernal pools, native plants, and terrestrial species) on groundwater.

Some stakeholders believe that the region's geological complexity make it difficult, if not impossible, to do a hydrologic assessment. Several interviewees reported drilling wells just several feet apart, with one hitting and the other missing water at similar depths. Stakeholders suggest that the Water Agency's Environmental Impact Report on water delivery implies that the Water Agency knows what is happening on streams flowing into Russian River. However, others lack clarity and have not seen modeling that demonstrates this.

Many stakeholders are worried about the capacity and long-term sustainability of the groundwater supply. Reports are that wells are going dry in some areas, requiring deeper wells by pumpees. Rural residents and agriculture are reportedly being affected by decreasing groundwater levels. Certain areas of the Santa Rosa Plain are reportedly experiencing a scarcity of groundwater or cones of depression. Stakeholders suggest that more pumping in drought years increases angst and tensions.

For these reasons, stakeholders are looking forward to the USGS study to be released in late 2010. They hope that it might answer some of these many questions.

Participants question the cumulative effects from current pumping and sustainable yield from the Santa Rosa Plain basin.

Stakeholders generally are unclear about the height and depth of water tables and the basin's vulnerability to contamination or depletion. Generally, all stakeholders agree that the demands on the aquifer are numerous and significant; one interviewee estimated that there are well over 40,000 wells within Sonoma County. Stakeholders report that Santa Rosa is considering putting new wells online while the Water Agency may pump more now from existing wells that were supposedly only for "emergency" use. Interviewees express concern that the Water Agency has used these wells continuously for the past few years given restrained surface water supplies in dry conditions. The effect of a potential casino possibly installing wells and pumping groundwater concerns many.

Despite sensitivities about monitoring, many interviewees suggest that groundwater quality issues and groundwater quantities pumped by urban areas, rural residences,

and agriculture should be documented. However, almost everyone agrees that most water users are adamantly opposed to well metering. And, people are generally afraid to share data and well information. However, as one interviewee stated, “How will we know when we are going to run out of water? We need to understand how much water is really out there.”

Groundwater quality concerns exist in various parts of the Santa Rosa Plain. While numerous areas have water quality issues, such as methane, boron, manganese or arsenic, they are generally isolated. Groundwater quality monitoring does occur throughout the Santa Rosa Plain, largely through small municipal or private water companies, public water suppliers and commercial operations who submit water quality data to the state.

Some stakeholders suggest that the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board is not configured to address groundwater as over-drafting is not perceived as a form of pollution. The Board is charged with going after polluters to ensure adequate water quality. No one agency appears to have regulatory oversight for groundwater.

Planning is critical, but agricultural interests are skeptical.

Environmental, water supply and governmental interests agree that groundwater management planning is essential to the sustainability of the resource. “We are all in it together,” one stakeholder commented. These interests think that groundwater is integral to water management and natural resources although studies could clarify these relationships. Regardless, the cities, agriculture, private water districts and rural residential well owners are all relying on groundwater. From these points of view, planning must integrate differing perspectives, tie in natural resource issues, create a portfolio of solutions and plan for the future.

Stakeholders report that they would like to conduct groundwater planning to achieve the following objectives:

- Ensure that groundwater resources are sustained and protected;
- Replenish the groundwater basin by locating recharge ponds;
- Help to mitigate groundwater overdraft if and when this occurs;
- Sustain storage reserves for use during dry periods;
- Develop monitoring programs that provide data to assist in evaluating and managing the groundwater basin;
- Identify and evaluate threats to groundwater quality and prevent or mitigate contamination associated with those threats;
- Manage in the face of climate change and increased efforts to expand carbon

sequestration; and

- Increase public awareness of the importance of groundwater and methods for both conserving water use and protecting water quality.

However, many but not all representatives of agricultural interests express skepticism and concern about the need to manage groundwater. They worry about the implications of groundwater planning. One stakeholder suggested, “The situation needs to get much worse before real progress can happen. Need for a crisis before the issue of groundwater will become salient.” Many representatives of agriculture are worried about increased regulation and bureaucracy potentially associated with groundwater planning. Several agriculture representatives suggested that if groundwater management planning were to occur, organizers would need to articulate potential benefits and outcomes to help agricultural stakeholders understand why and how groundwater management might provide benefits. Fear of an adjudicated basin might make a non-regulatory groundwater management plan attractive.

Stakeholders would like to integrate water management and supply issues and land use into overall planning.

Nearly all interviewees desire a better understanding of current water use by various user types, including urban, agriculture, dairies and rural well owners. Stakeholders would like to understand the relative comparison between the volumes being pumped by various users, including the amount of water being transported out of the Santa Rosa Plain and Sonoma County. Stakeholders repeatedly advocate that the region could realize significant water use reduction with more proactive conservation.

Many interviewees stressed that surface water issues are inextricably linked to groundwater and, thus, groundwater management planning cannot happen without discussing surface water issues. Stakeholders question the nature of the interconnections between the groundwater and surface water systems.

Interviewees also suggested that land use should be examined and the impact of land use planning on groundwater better understood. Vernal pools, wetlands, and impervious surfaces are subject of stakeholder discussion. Several suggested storm water recharge and attempting to enhance recharge areas as potential management strategies.

Generally, interviewees were cautious, yet open to exploring groundwater banking, capturing excess surface water flows in the wintertime and storing potable water in underground aquifers for later use during summertime. Stakeholders were curious about the potential that this might provide, and some viewed it as a favorable way to accommodate anticipated climate changes with fewer, more extreme storms. Many stakeholders would be deeply concerned by the possibility of using recycled water for groundwater banking and using winter surface runoff water that might have potential contaminants. Interviewees raised concerns about the amount of

energy that would be required for pumping necessary for groundwater banking. Another interviewee suggested that recharge should be maximized first since it just seemed less costly and complicated. One concern was that efforts would be made to extract more water than was banked, which could further stress the aquifer.

The complexity of the region will make collaborative planning very challenging.

Stakeholders suggest that the number of jurisdictions (multiple cities and the County) involved increases the difficulty of planning. A few suggest that the Santa Rosa Plain is too big and issues are too complicated. Interest group dynamics (see below) will also make groundwater planning in this region challenging.

Information Gathering and Data Analysis

The mediators asked participants about technical information needed to facilitate groundwater planning. No consensus exists on the state of the groundwater basin, the connectivity of the aquifers, groundwater use and its impact on the aquifer. Generally interviewees are awaiting the USGS study, funded by regional water suppliers, to help clarify some of the questions and misunderstanding. Some water contractors express frustration that they haven't been more involved in the development of the USGS study. One interviewee observed, "The biggest challenge is collecting the relevant data." With this said, participants are interested in a range of questions, highlighted below.

- What are existing groundwater levels?
- What are sustainable groundwater pumping levels?
- How much water is actually being pumped and by whom?
- How does variation in soils and aquifers affect the groundwater system?
- What is the potential for aquifer storage and where is recharge possible? How many recharge ponds would be needed to actually make a difference and where should recharge ponds be located? How much impervious surface exists? What effect is impervious surface having on recharge?
- What role are pesticides and emerging chemicals playing in groundwater quality?
- How is wastewater being handled? What is the potential for increased use of recycled water?
- What impact are abandoned wells having on groundwater quality?
- What are the sources and potential remedies for methane, manganese, arsenic,

and boron in groundwater?

- What is the surface-to-aquifer relationship and what are the physical challenges and opportunities for additional storage?
- What effect is wastewater runoff having on Laguna de Santa Rosa?
- How will pending Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) effort be undertaken by North Coast Regional Quality Control Board and what are the potential outcomes from this effort? Many are concerned that process would lead to mandatory well monitoring.

Interest Group Dynamics

One of the challenges to groundwater management planning would be interest group dynamics. Stakeholders highlight these issues on several levels.

First, many question the Water Agency's interest in groundwater planning. While most stakeholders agree that the Water Agency is the obvious choice to organize groundwater management planning, they question the Water Agency's ability or willingness to engage and negotiate in a transparent manner. They urge the Water Agency to be forthcoming regarding its interests in groundwater management planning and why it is important to them and to enlist the assistance of neutral consultants to guide the process.

Second, a major challenge is the unincorporated area. Sonoma County has an estimated 40,000 groundwater wells and the highest number of residential wells in a county in the state (along with Fresno County). These homeowners represent a major interest in groundwater—they rely on groundwater to live on their property, and their property has no value without it. Yet, this interest group is not well organized. Identifying representatives and conducting outreach with this user group would be a challenge.

Some parties believe that environmental advocates wield too much influence and, as a result, agriculture and dairy are seen as “culprits”. Others express concern about negotiating directly with some interest groups who have relied on litigation to affect water management planning. History has resulted in significant distrust between various groups and incorporated areas in central and southern portions of Santa Rosa Plain.

Stakeholders express concern that blaming one party or another is neither fair nor accurate. Agricultural interests feel that they are often accused of using too much water when in fact they are striving to conserve. Cities are also accused of drawing down the aquifer while city representatives highlight conservation success and responsible management. A few stakeholders suggested that politics influence everything. These dynamics will significantly affect any planning effort.

Insights for Success

Raise interest and highlight success stories.

Interviewees suggest that stakeholders would benefit from learning about analogous success stories and understand how groundwater management planning might benefit them. Stakeholders recommend that success stories from other areas, including Sonoma Valley, be made available before initiating any collaborative effort for Santa Rosa Plain. Interviewees suggest that stakeholders have a need for education throughout Sonoma County to raise awareness about water issues so participants can understand what interests of theirs would be met through groundwater management planning. A number of individuals suggested that water bills and other easy-to-read documents be used to help spread the word.

Share information.

Interviewees suggest that the process would need to be open and allow all issues and concerns to be discussed. First publishing the USGS study is advisable. Data and urban area's pumping volumes would also need to be understood and discussed. Participants are not clear as to the urgency of planning. Stakeholders would like to incorporate scientifically based rationale for discussing the "problem" if in fact there is a problem with current groundwater use. A few interviewees stated that there is a strong need for easy-to-comprehend visual tools to understand water levels and usage.

Non-regulatory approach and local control are critical if rural parties are going to participate.

One of the major concerns associated with groundwater management planning is the perception that planning will lead to additional regulation. Participants are extremely hesitant to support any effort that might increase limitations on business operations or costs of doing business. Stakeholders recommend that the focus for management strategies consider where the least economic impact will occur and continue to allow for business expansion. These stakeholders suggest that cost effective, efficient measures that protect private property rights are critical. A number of interviewees suggested breaking the outreach and planning effort into smaller geographic areas to allow for more focused participation.

Perspectives on Collaborative Processes

Participants offered a range of perspectives on participating in a collaborative process that might be of concern or affect their ability to participate. To the extent possible, they suggest that any collaborative that might move forward address these issues:

- Have strong participation from interested groups and, ideally, commitment to not go to litigation and/or adjudication.
- All parties, including Graton Rancheria and non-English speaking communities should be represented.
- Some parties may have more time than others to participate in effort; however, others need to be involved.
- Need to have participants that are not angry and full of strong emotions. People need to be good listeners and hear the opposing points of views.
- Participants need to understand and accept technical findings and consider needs of historical uses within area.
- The collaborative discussion could serve as a process to develop good science on issue.
- Unsure how to get the diverse groups to come to consensus; this seems close to impossible.
- Process must not be dominated by agency people and, in particular, the Sonoma County Water Agency, but technical staff should be provided to assist effort.
- Need more outreach and general public meetings. Disinformation has not helped. Weekly update on water would be a great addition to the newspapers.
- Neutral facilitation needs to be clear and direct how the process will be run. The process must be very structured to overcome past problems and the political nature of this area and topic.
- A champion for a groundwater management planning effort is essential to its success.

Conditions for Collaboration

The Center’s team analyzed the assessment findings in light of conditions essential for a successful collaborative planning process and outcome. While many of these conditions are met in this case, a few present serious challenges. For the reasons presented below, the Center concludes that the project does not presently meet all of these conditions. However, there are opportunities for improving relationships and building trust amongst the relevant parties that will enable the initiation of a phased education and planning effort for the Santa Rosa Plain. This approach is described in the “Recommendations” section of this report.

There are multiple opportunities to create mutually shared value and potential areas of agreement.

While many opportunities do exist for creating beneficial outcomes from a collaborative groundwater planning effort, the current level of mistrust between key parties is acute. As a result, much work has to be done to build better working relationships prior to and through initiating a comprehensive planning process.

The primary parties are identifiable; however, not all are willing to participate.

While the key parties have been identified and participated in this assessment, a few are very reluctant to participate at this time. In particular, key agricultural, dairy, and ranching interests are highly skeptical about groundwater planning and the Water Agency's motives for wanting to undertake any water-related planning at this time.

Each party does not have a legitimate spokesperson.

Representatives from the key urban areas, environmental organizations, and agriculture exist. However, rural private well owners who live within the unincorporated areas of Sonoma County do not have a consolidated "voice" that represents their interests. How this large and dispersed group is brought to the table is a key question that must be answered.

There is a relative balance of power among the parties.

This condition is challenging as many perceive the environmentalists as wielding too much influence. Moreover, some parties question the Water Agency's motivation and worry that the Water Agency is not being forthcoming as to their long-term plans for use of additional surface and ground water.

External pressure to reach agreement exists.

Some agricultural and ranching interests do not see the need to undertake groundwater management planning at this time. A number of individuals stated that the water situation will have to get much worse before they want to do anything proactive. Conversely, other interviewees believe that the area is "extremely lucky to have not destroyed the aquifer yet so time is on our side." These voices believe that all parties "need to do what we can to protect and preserve groundwater resources." While shared belief that there is a need to proactively plan at this time does not exist, parties are open to learning more about the subject.

Primary participants share an investment in long-term, cooperative working relationships.

Some stakeholders highlight a high level of resentment and animosity between the agencies and some environmental interests in the region that will make collaboration very difficult. On a positive note, the pending TMDL for the Laguna de Santa Rosa presents an opportunity for both agriculturalists and environmentalists to work together and help build better relationships. Additionally, there appears to be strong working relationships between a number of the parties that could be leveraged to permit discussions between parties that have had a troubled past.

There are adequate financial resources to carry out the collaborative process.

The Water Agency will seek adequate funds to allow the process to go forward if all parties are willing and committed to working together. Potential funding may be available from various grants that the California Department of Water Resources makes available to local groundwater efforts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the analysis of the assessment findings, the Center concludes that collaborative groundwater planning within the Santa Rosa Plain would require significant pre-planning steps to identify stakeholder representatives and improve technical understanding of the aquifer. Further, a small planning group or steering committee would work to identify representative spokespeople and re-assess agricultural representatives' interest in planning. These efforts could improve conditions to be favorable to initiate groundwater management planning. The Center recommends that the following phased education and planning activities be initiated with the goal of moving towards a more comprehensive groundwater management planning effort.

Step 1: Convene a Santa Rosa Plain Steering Committee

Timeframe: Early 2010

A Steering Committee should be convened to oversee and undertake the public education and outreach campaign and to work towards building improved relationships amongst participants to set the stage for groundwater planning. The Steering Committee would have the following key tasks:

- Assist in developing scenarios for the USGS study
- Guide education activities on the USGS study and groundwater management planning frameworks
- Conduct outreach to identify stakeholder representatives and address concerns related to groundwater planning
- Recommend a groundwater planning framework if appropriate

The Steering Committee would be convened as soon as appropriate to participate in developing scenarios for the technical study, possibly organizing a workshop for a range of input on these scenarios.

The Committee would guide subsequent efforts, specifically the outreach component of the USGS study release. This education and outreach serves as the first step toward a more formal and integrated approach to the management of groundwater within the Santa Rosa Plain. This would also be an opportunity to meet with many rural residential well owners.

Members would conduct focused outreach with agriculture to better understand and address agricultural representatives' concerns about groundwater planning. The goal would be to address these concerns so that planning could eventually move forward in a manner acceptable to all stakeholder interest groups. The Steering Committee could also provide guidance on who might need to participate in a broader stakeholder planning group should one move forward.

The Steering Committee would also explore groundwater management planning to assess what frameworks might be appropriate for the Santa Rosa Plain. They would consider different policy and legal issues that might affect planning. Lastly, they would contemplate who should participate in a Basin Advisory Panel should groundwater management planning progress.

The Water Agency could provide staff and technical support while neutral facilitation of the committee would be helpful. Drawing from the groundwater planning experience in Sonoma Valley, a committee work plan, charter, and operating rules should be developed and reviewed at the group's initial meeting. The committee should be consensus-driven and representative of the key interests within the Santa Rosa Plain. However, considering the initial focus of this group's effort, the Center recommends that the membership be kept small to help build strong working relationships and to focus work efforts. Additional organizations would be added to form a stakeholder planning group at a future time when, and if, a groundwater management plan is initiated.

The Center recommends the following considerations for composing the Steering Committee:

- Balance and symmetry between public agencies and non-governmental organizations
- Agriculture, cities, environment, groundwater users and water supply interests represented
- Geographical representation across the Santa Rosa Plain
- Small and focused participation (8-10 members)

Step 2: Initiate a robust public education and outreach campaign on USGS technical study and groundwater planning

Timeframe: 2010

The USGS technical study on Santa Rosa Plain groundwater will contribute significantly towards building a common understanding of the groundwater basin. USGS will publish the report in late 2010. Earlier in 2010, the Center recommends that USGS begin presenting the preliminary findings to broad range of existing organizations, local governments and interested parties within the Santa Rosa Plain. Once the final report is available, USGS and the Water Agency should distribute it widely. As part of the distribution, the Water Agency and USGS should work together to create easy-to-understand information that summarizes the study's findings and groundwater basics into a "user-friendly" groundwater primer. The study and groundwater primer or summary should be made available on appropriate websites and other outlets. The summary should be translated into Spanish. This information, coupled with existing water conservation literature, would help educate citizens as to the importance of water conservation and protecting and improving overall watershed and aquifer conditions.

Lastly, this outreach effort could highlight success stories related to non-regulatory voluntary groundwater management. This would help stakeholders to understand the potential benefits of groundwater planning and provide an opportunity to address fears and concerns associated with planning.

To guide this effort, the Center recommends that an education and outreach plan be developed. This plan would identify a broad range of stakeholder groups in the region, rely on existing social networks, and be tailored to the needs of the various areas within the planning area. Technical staff could make presentations and local experts, such as representatives from the California Ground Water Association and others, could assist to broaden understanding of the aquifer. The plan would also detail specific media relations and advertising, internet-based outreach, direct mail / e-mail, speakers' bureau, and collateral materials to be used in the outreach effort. Another goal of this outreach effort is to identify potential representatives of residential well owners who might serve in a collaborative. Lastly, the outreach efforts would have an emphasis on working with agricultural interests to understand the technical information and the potential for groundwater management.

Step 3: Re-assess interest in groundwater planning and identify key representatives

Timeframe: Fall 2010

This step represents a milestone. The Steering Committee, including the Sonoma County Water Agency and in consultation with others, would have to determine that both agricultural and rural residential interests are willing to participate and have willing and appropriate representation before collaborative groundwater management planning could occur.

As discussed in the findings, agricultural representatives are hesitant to participate or support groundwater management planning. Since so many interested parties: the cities, county, water suppliers, developers and environmentalists are interested in addressing groundwater concerns through joint planning, a concerted effort should be made to negotiate the conditions necessary to assure robust agricultural participation in any planning effort. As part of the overall outreach effort, staff and the steering committee would work with agricultural leaders to identify and address concerns with groundwater management planning.

The Steering Committee would also confirm that rural residential well owners have representative spokespeople to participate in a planning effort.

Step 4: Contingent on Step 3, develop a phased-approach to groundwater planning

Timeframe: Winter 2010-2011

Initiating a phased-approach to groundwater planning is contingent on successfully completing the previous step. If the Steering Committee is able to address the concerns of agriculture to ensure its participation and identify rural residential well owners, then the Center recommends that groundwater planning officially commence.

Phase 1: Organize Basin Advisory Panel to negotiate groundwater management planning

Building on outreach conducted during the previous steps, the Steering Committee would discuss and develop membership of the collaborative planning body, known as the Basin Advisory Panel. The Steering Committee would continue to function to develop proposals and review technical documents for the full Panel's review and approval. (The Basin Advisory Panel might also recommend a technical subcommittee to review materials.) The Panel would be the primary decision-making body, reviewing and recommending elements of a groundwater management plan.

Basin Advisory Panel participants would include these organizations and interest groups, **and potentially others**. Geographical representation from throughout the Santa Rosa Plain would also be critical.

Potential Basin Advisory Panel Membership (or Representation)

Governmental

- State of California Department of Public Health
- Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation & Open Space District
- County of Sonoma Permit and Resource Management Department
- City of Cotati
- City of Rohnert Park
- City of Santa Rosa
- City of Sebastopol
- Town of Windsor

Tribal

- Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria

Environmental

- Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation
- O.W.L. Foundation
- Occidental Arts and Ecology Center
- Sonoma County Water Coalition
- Sebastopol Water Information Group (SWIG)

Water Supply & Groundwater Technical Issues

- Cal American Water Co.
- California Ground Water Association
- Sonoma County Water Agency
- Small Water Districts (Penngrove Water District, others from throughout the area)

Rural Residential Well Owners

Agricultural

- Sonoma County Farm Bureau
- Sonoma County Winegrape Commissions
- United Winegrowers
- Dairy Farmer
- Rancher(s)
- Farmer / Grower(s)

Business / Developers

- Coddling Enterprises
- Commercial Businesses
- North Bay Realtors Association

Other

- Sotoyome and/or Gold Ridge Resource Conservation District

Phase 2: Stakeholder Issues & Interests and Technical Issues

As this process moves forward, the Basin Advisory Panel would educate itself on successful groundwater efforts, in-depth knowledge of the USGS study, and the interests (why groundwater is important) to all the stakeholders.

The Basin Advisory Panel would hear presentations from representatives from jurisdictions where groundwater management planning has been effectively undertaken. By doing so, Panel members would become educated as to how groundwater management planning could be undertaken in a proactive manner that effectively manages the groundwater basin.

The Panel would increase the depth of its understanding regarding the technical information available on the Santa Rosa Plain, identifying gaps in technical information and modeling improvements to be incorporated into the plan and long-range planning and data collection efforts.

The stakeholders would strive to learn about the interests of all stakeholders participating on the Panel and would take field trips to see first hand areas of particular interest. This would lay the foundation for negotiating elements of the plan.

Phase 3: Develop the Groundwater Management Plan

The next stage of the planning effort would be to develop plan elements: identify basin management objectives; develop management strategies to achieve objectives; and agree on governance structure and implementation plan. The goal of this phase would be a consensus-based adopted groundwater management plan.

Phase 4: Advance & Implement Groundwater Management Plan

Once the organizations that developed the plan have adopted it, the last stage would be to implement the plan. This involves seeking funding and moving forward the management strategies outlined in the plan. This is an ongoing effort that is overseen by the entity identified in the plan itself.

CONCLUSION

Groundwater is critical to the water supply needs of Sonoma County. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance that the communities within the Santa Rosa Plain continue to work together to manage their groundwater resources sustainably. Increased demands and the possibility of reduced water in the future make effective and efficient management of the groundwater basin essential. Through collaborative efforts, a plan could be developed that will identify how the management of the groundwater basin could be improved, thereby ensuring that groundwater resources will continue to be sustained and protected. However, efforts must be made before initiating a planning process to ensure that a plan could be developed with all the major stakeholders represented.

APPENDIX

A. Interviewees

State, County and Local Governments

Office of California State Senator Patricia Wiggins: Fred Euphrat
California Department of Public Health: Janice Oakley
North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board: Luis Rivera, David Evans
County of Sonoma Agricultural Preservation & Open Space District: Andrea Mackenzie
County of Sonoma Permit and Resource Management Department: Pete Parkinson, Connie Stravros
City of Cotati: John Guardino, Damien O’Bid, Janet Orchard
City of Rohnert Park: Darrin Jenkins, Jake Mackenzie
City of Santa Rosa: Susan Gorin, Glen Wright, and Gerry Nakano
City of Sebastopol: Linda Kelley, Sue Kelly
Sotoyome Resource Conservation District: Kara Heckert
Town of Windsor: Richard Burt, Deborah Fudge, Matt Mullan, Craig Scott

Tribes

Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria: John Maier (Tribal Counsel)

Water Providers and Associations

California Ground Water Association: Gary Mickelson
Penngrove Water Company: Jim Downey
Sonoma County Water Agency: Jay Jasperse

Business & Agricultural Interests

Codding Enterprises: Geof Syphers
Community Alliance of Family Farmers: Terry Harrison
Ocean View Dairy: Marvin Nunez
Dempel Farming Company, Bob Dempel
Quaker Hill Development Corporation: Craig Harrington
Saralee’s Vineyards: Saralee Kunde
Sonoma County Farm Bureau: Lex McCorvey, Dominico Carinalli, Ed Grossi, Bob Muelrath, Mike Strunk, Walt Ryan
Sonoma County Winegrape Commission: Nick Frey
United Winegrowers: Bob Anderson
Weeks Drilling: Charlie Judson

Environmental & Conservation Interests

Rue Furch

Fred Soares

Blucher Creek Watershed Council and Community Alliance of Family Farmers

Board Member: Steve Howard

California Native Plant Society: John Herrick

Coast Action Group: Allan Levine

Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation: Christina Sloop

O.W.L. Foundation: H.R. Downs

Occidental Arts and Ecology Center: Brock Dolman

Sebastopol Water Information Group (SWIG): Jane Nielson

Sonoma County Conservation Action: Dennis Rosatti, Bill Kortum, Guy Connor

Sonoma County Water Coalition: Stephen Fuller-Rowell

Sonoma Land Trust: Wendy Elliott (brief consultation/interview)

B. Santa Rosa Plain Assessment Interview Questions

Introduction

1. Please tell me about yourself and your organization(s) and how you are involved in water issues in the Santa Rosa Plain area?

Issues to be Addressed

2. What concerns and interests do you have regarding water supply in the Santa Rosa Plain? And groundwater in particular? What concerns, if any, do you have about the future?
3. What issues might others raise? Are any of these issues in conflict with yours? How might these differences be resolved?
4. What types of coordination currently occur between users? What other opportunities for coordination would you foresee?
5. What potential benefits and potential drawbacks do you associate with developing some type of groundwater management plan?
6. What issues would a successful groundwater management plan address? Avoid?
7. What obstacles to developing a management plan might arise? Do you have suggestions to overcome them?
8. What are your thoughts about the Sonoma County Water Agency's role/capabilities in developing a groundwater management plan for the Santa Rosa Plain?
9. Are you familiar with the use of groundwater banking as a water resources management strategy (i.e., capturing excess surface water flows in the wintertime and storing the water in underground aquifers for later use during summertime)? If so, what are your opinions on its applicability for the Santa Rosa Plain?

Stakeholder Involvement

10. If this effort goes forward, which individuals or groups do you think should be involved? How?
11. Who doesn't usually participate in these types of public efforts that you believe should be involved?
12. Would you or your organization/agency like to participate in developing a groundwater management plan if it were to go forward? How would you envision being involved?
13. What kinds of public outreach would you recommend?

Context and Information Needs

14. What information would you like to have or what technical questions would you like answered as part of this effort?
15. Do you feel that you have a good understanding of where Santa Rosa Plain's water supply comes from and how water is used in the area?
16. What other related efforts are underway that I should know about?

Conclusion

17. Do you have any interests or concerns you have not yet mentioned?
18. Is there anything else you think I should know or any advice you might offer?
19. Who else, if anyone, do you think I should speak with?

C. Center for Collaborative Policy

The Center for Collaborative Policy is a unit of California State University, Sacramento. The mission of the Center is to build the capacity of public agencies, stakeholder groups, and the public to use collaborative strategies to improve policy outcomes. The Center has 40 mediators and facilitators working throughout the State of California on some of its most vexing policy dilemmas. www.csus.edu/ccp

Gina Bartlett is a senior mediator and director of the Center's Bay Area Office. She facilitates a number of groups, including the collaborative implementing the consensus-based Sonoma Valley Groundwater Management Program. Ms. Bartlett received her Master's degree in Conflict Analysis and Resolution from George Mason University and has worked in the field since 1991.

Austin McInerny has worked as a mediator on a number of challenging natural resource management projects over the past dozen years. Mr. McInerny has conducted assessments for the South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project (the largest wetland restoration effort to be undertaken on the West Coast), the Upper Klamath Basin Working Group Restoration Planning Process, and Desert Tortoise Recovery Planning Situation Assessment. Mr. McInerny received a Masters in Regional Planning from Cornell University in 1997 and has published and lectured on collaborative planning methods.