



Estrella-El Pomar-Creston Water District (EPCWD)
Estrella-El Pomar-Creston Groundwater Sustainability Agency (EPCGSA)
Regular Meeting Minutes
Wednesday March 13, 2024
Windfall Farms Conference Room, 4710 Flying Paster Lane, Paso Robles

ITEM 1: CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

The meeting was called to order at 3:01PM by Hilary G.

Directors Roll Call:

Dana Merrill – absent
Lee Nesbitt - present
Jerry Reaugh – present
Hilary Graves – present
Herb Rowland – absent (joined by teleconference, non-voting)

Others present:

Blaine Reely, SLO County
Guests (in person and by teleconference)

ITEM 2: REVIEW AND APPROVE MINUTES OF DECEMBER 14, 2023 AND FEBRUARY 14, 2024 MEETINGS

MOTION TO APPROVE MINUTES OF DECEMBER 14, 2023 AND FEBRUARY 14, 2024 MEETINGS made by Jerry Reaugh, seconded by Herb Rowland, passed 3-0.

ITEM 3: PUBLIC COMMENT

No public comment was presented.

ITEM 4: UPDATE ON REGENERATIVE FARMING CONFERENCE AND POTENTIAL DISTRICT PROJECT OPPORTUNITIES

Hilary Graves attended a recent conference on regenerative farming and reported on topics that work to improve soil quality in order to be able to absorb more water. Could the District somehow incentivize adopting such methods in order to enhance the watershed? Hilary Graves is working with our representative in State Congress to include some of the concepts in the Farm Bill. The benefits of encouraging beaver populations was mentioned as another example from the conference and Lee Nesbitt brought up the local “Beaver Brigade” working in the Salinas river area in Atascadero.

ITEM 5: DISCUSS SECURING A CONSULTANT FOR OUTREACH PROJECTS

Hilary Graves led the discussion of outreach to increase awareness of the District’s efforts and plans, and whether to consider securing a contract with a public relations firm to expand those efforts. Lee Nesbitt encouraged increasing the District’s “vocal” footprint, and looking for collaboration opportunities. Jerry Reaugh noted that Blaine Reely is in process of preparing an outreach proposal for the PBCC, which Blaine Reely confirmed is in the PBCC proposed budget. Jerry Reaugh asked if using grant money for such outreach effort. In light of the CDFA appointing a working group to define regenerative ag and that definition being used for grant proposal, it might offer outreach possibilities.

ITEM 6: DISCUSS HOSTING REGULAR EDUCATIONAL OUTREACH MEETINGS

Hilary Graves suggested the District consider regular, periodic, ongoing outreach meetings, perhaps quarterly, that would focus on educational topics. They could occur in the field and member of the District and the public could be included. Demonstrations by the NRCS, vendors of enhancement technology such as the Well Bubbler and others could be included. Apart from the educational benefit, it could serve to further show the benefits of the District to the ag community in terms of being approachable and positive as well.

Revisiting Item #5, Hilary Graves asked for direction on whether to pursue contracting with a PR firm to which Jerry Reaugh responded that a contract's effect on the budget would have to be examined. Hilary Graves was asked to obtain some estimates from a variety of PR firms for consideration by the Board.

ITEM 7: DISCUSS POTENTIAL PBCC BUDGET

Jerry Reaugh presented information on the draft PBCC budget for upcoming years and looked specifically at the 2024-2025. The balance of the grant money from the State must be spent by April 2025. It is generally agreed at the PBCC that the current governance structure (MOA) will not serve well now that the Basin is in the implementation phase of the GSP. As an example, if a well database is developed, who will collect the data, organize it, maintain it, etc.? The EPCWD's portion of the 24-25 PBCC draft budget is listed as \$175,800 which would require substantial increases in the EPCWD's assessment levels in order to meet the obligation; currently the assessment rate is \$5.00 per irrigated acre and it would need to increase to \$15.00 per irrigated acre. There was a general discussion of parity in payments over the whole Basin, as currently, those in the County GSA have their funding paid for by the County Flood Control District, while those in the EPCWD and SSJWD are effectively paying twice; once through their District assessments and once through their taxes paid to the County.

PBCC staff is currently reviewing and rating three responses to the RFP to develop a rate structure for the Basin, with public interviews coming up. This would be funding to "keep the lights" on and would not include any Basin enhancement projects. Project funding currently is using State grant funds, but those will be unavailable after April 2025. The EPCWD budget is relatively low compared to some other GSAs in the State. Lee Nesbitt reiterated that the disparity between assessments in the County "White Area" which are effectively zero, and the assessments for the EPCWD needs to be brought to greater attention. Randy Diffenbaugh encouraged the EPCWD to move forward to collect the assessments necessary to fund the District's activities in the Basin which is what the members originally voted the District to represent them for. Perhaps the District should consider collecting more in the 2024-2025 budget and then level out the "pain". The County needs to put an across-the-board fee structure in place for those in the "White Area" and now may be the time to ask where the County stands on this. Lee Nesbitt asked whether the SSJWD is in a similar position as EPCWD on the PBCC budget and Jerry Reaugh responded that they have more funds available from past assessments than does EPCWD which has been keeping the budget trim in order to not stockpile funds with no purpose. Hilary Graves reminded attendees that if the PBCC doesn't get management and implementation of the Basin Plan in hand, the State will step in and do it. The final consensus is that the EPCWD Board is unable to look at approving the PBCC draft budget until it is presented and explained to the District members.

ITEM 8: UPDATE ITEMS

Note: The Update Items were discussed generally out of order and will be shown here in the order taken, with the correct numbering:

a. Groundwater Levels Monitoring

2) EPCWD Groundwater Monitoring Network

Jerry Reaugh reported that the first readings of this year have been completed. The wells are monitored four times per year, 20-23 wells on average.

1) Real-Time Groundwater Monitoring

Jerry Reaugh reported that two Bubbler sensors and two pressure sensors are in place, one in each of four wells.

e. Paso Basin Cooperative Committee Update

1) PBCC staff report

b) Expanded Monitoring Network RFP

Jerry Reaugh has suggested modifying the RFP to build the database.

b. SLO County Board of Supervisors meetings

No update provided.

c. WRAC meeting

Lee Nesbitt reported that the committee had basic housekeeping topics along with the County Reservoirs report.

d. State Water Subcontractors Committee project

Jerry Reaugh reported that Blaine Reely is planning to prepare an RFP to use State Water for the recharge project proposed by the EPCWD.

e. Paso Basin Cooperative Committee update (cont'd)

1) PBCC staff report (cont'd)

a) Outreach RFP

Jerry Reaugh will try to obtain a copy of the outreach RFP.

b) Expanded Monitoring Network RFP

Jerry Reaugh repeated that the RFP is out and received bids are in review.

c) PBCC Budget (see above for report)

d) Evapotranspiration (ET) extractions project

The proposal made at the last PBCC meeting was tabled for further discussion. Hilary Graves asked why there was no line item in the PBCC budget for ET and Jerry Reaugh responded that the grant would cover the first year, with PBCC direct funding in year two and beyond.

e) Rate Study RFP (see above for report)

2) Blended Water Project: Engineering Report contract signed, study underway

The study is in process and is due back mid-summer. Part of the project is the drilling of eight alluvial wells, part of the response to the State's review of the GSP.

ITEM 9: TREASURERS REPORT

The report stands as presented.

ITEM 10: NEW BUSINESS

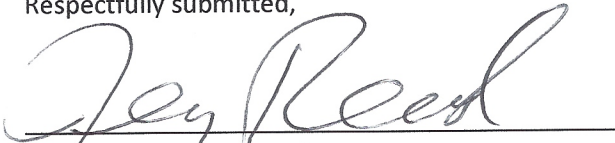
Jerry Reaugh asked for an item to discuss the proposed PBCC budget with outreach to members beforehand on this specific topic, along with what changes are proposed to the PBCC governance structure. Staff requested to include the annual resolution regarding submission of delinquent assessments to the County for inclusion in the tax rolls.

ITEM 11: SCHEDULE NEXT MEETING – APRIL 10, 2024

ITEM 12: ADJOURNMENT

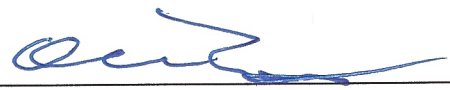
MOTION TO ADJOURN made by Lee Nesbitt, seconded by Jerry Reaugh, motion passed 3-0.
Meeting adjourned at 4:31 PM.

Respectfully submitted,



Jerry Reaugh, Secretary/Treasurer

Accepted:



Dana Merrill, President

4-10-24

Date