

Special Meeting



Tehama County
Wednesday, October 15, 2025 8:30 AM
Groundwater Commission
Meeting Minutes

Tehama County Board of Supervisors
Chambers
727 Oak Street, Red Bluff, CA 96080
<https://tehamacounty.legistar.com/Calendar.aspx>

8:30 AM

Commissioners: Martin Spannaus, City of Corning; Jeff Godwin, City of Red Bluff; Hal Crain, City of Tehama; Kris Lamkin, El Camino Irrigation District; Todd Hamer, Los Molinos Community Services District; Martha Slack, Rio Alto Water District; Liz Merry District 1; Adam Englehardt, District 2; Seth Lawrence, District 3; Michael Ward, District 4; David Lester, District 5;

Justin Jenson, Flood Control/Water Resources Manager; Lena Sequeira, Administration

Call to Order / Pledge of Allegiance / Introductions

The meeting started at 8:46am due to technical difficulties.

Present	Commissioner Martha Slack, Commissioner Kris Lamkin, Commissioner Michael Ward, Commissioner Seth Lawrence, Commissioner Hal Crain, Commissioner Martin Spannaus, Commissioner Adam Englehardt, Commissioner David Lester, Commissioner Liz Merry, and Commissioner Jeff Godwin
ABSENT	Commissioner Todd Hamer

Public Comment

A resident discussed a presentation she had seen and shared her thoughts regarding input from Indigenous peoples. She also commented on a previous PRA request she had submitted.

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1. **Potential GSA Fee Structure Presentation** **25-1804**

Jenson commented on the item under discussion, explaining that the purpose was to make a recommendation on the theory of how fees could be charged. He emphasized that the group was not voting to set a fee, recommend a dollar amount, or approve fees at this time. The intent is to reduce the level of work required by consultants during their review. Jenson noted that a formal fee study would be brought back at a later date for final determination after consultant review, and that no fees were being set today.

Jenson reviewed the slideshow and described the proposed fee concepts, noting that when a decision is eventually made, the data available at that time will be used. He also reviewed information regarding total well connections.

A brief recess was taken due to technical difficulties.

The meeting reconvened.

Jenson continued reviewing the presentation, including data on the number of existing wells by type. He discussed the amount of land within the basins, total irrigated acreage, and provided a breakdown by crop type. Jenson explained that the data presented does not align with the Agricultural Commissioner's report and provided clarification on the reasons for the discrepancies.

He continued the presentation by reviewing groundwater use within the basins, including how much groundwater is used and the purposes for which it is used. Additional data related to groundwater conditions in the basins was also presented.

Jenson reviewed the budget portion of the presentation, breaking down each budget category. He noted that budget amounts would vary depending on the selected fee methodology and reiterated staff's recommendations. Jenson stated that he is seeking the top two to three methodologies to forward for further review, highlighting a recommendation to use volumetric measurements as the basis for instituting a fee.

He explained that these measures would help conserve water and reduce groundwater use, which would benefit the basin through a lower overall cost structure and provide incentives for reduced use. Jenson clarified that while the goal is to reduce groundwater volume and associate an incentive with reduced use, the District is not recommending well metering. Instead, staff is recommending an assumptive fee structure with the option for users to report actual groundwater use to reduce costs.

Jenson concluded by stating that he is seeking recommendations on how to move forward and input on what the group would like to see included in the next steps.

Discussion followed regarding how fees would be applied to domestic users.

Lawrence asked about the rationale for charging fees within the basins versus applying them countywide.

Englehardt agreed and proposed recommending that properties outside of the basins

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be excluded.

Lester agreed with focusing on in-basin properties at this time, suggesting that if groundwater issues arise outside the basins in the future, those areas could be addressed then.

Lawrence asked if anyone had additional thoughts on charging fees outside of the basins.

Merry shared her thoughts on having the discussion and stated that she would like to see the numbers.

Jenson responded that the estimated range for domestic users would be approximately \$2–\$4 per year.

Englehardt suggested excluding domestic users within the basins.

Lawrence asked whether charging fees within the basins was agreeable and if anyone supported a countywide approach. He suggested that if work is conducted by the GSA outside the basins in the future, the issue could be revisited. He stated that there is no plan to do work outside the basins at this time and recommended focusing on a fee structure limited to in-basin properties.

Lester asked whether this action required a motion or could proceed by consensus.

Jenson confirmed that he was seeking consensus at this time to document ideas, with a formal vote to occur at a later date.

Slack added that a caveat should include a five-year review.

Jenson stated that there would always be a five-year review process.

Discussion followed regarding where the fees would apply and whether they would need to be modified.

Lamkin asked whether this applied to all basins.

Jenson clarified that the discussion applied to the five managed subbasins, noting that any basin without an adopted plan would not be included at this time. The subbasins discussed were Bowman, Red Bluff, Corning, Los Molinos, and Antelope.

Lawrence stated that Bowman would be revisited at a later date and that, for now, the evaluation would focus on charging fees within the managed basins only.

Public Comment

A resident shared their opinion regarding the District's use of funds and existing debt.

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Lawrence commented that California did not begin managing groundwater until 2014, which has contributed to the current conditions. He stated that groundwater must be managed locally or the State would assume management, which the District is working to avoid.

A resident discussed fluctuations in groundwater levels over the past twenty years and shared their opinion on installing meters on commercial agricultural wells. The resident also suggested higher rates per acre-foot in areas experiencing groundwater depletion.

Jenson responded to the resident's comments, noting that the points raised were valuable input and agreeing that declining groundwater levels result in reduced access to water. He clarified that another Demand Management program includes fees associated with areas experiencing more severe conditions.

A resident asked for the group's perspective on requiring meters on commercial wells.

County Counsel David Klausner responded, stating that a citizen initiative restricts the County from monitoring private wells. He also shared his perspective on well monitoring.

A resident expressed their opinion regarding administrative fees, stating that the only fair way to assess fees would be based on volume of use, including domestic users.

Jenson responded to the resident's comments.

A resident representing the Cattlemen's Association and Farm Bureau stated that cattle producers and walnut growers want to work together to address the issue. They emphasized the importance of ensuring buy-in from both cattlemen and orchardists when the fee structure is determined.

Jenson responded that the District has been able to delay the implementation of fees due to state funding provided through SGMA. He noted that input from the agricultural community will be a significant part of public outreach regarding fees and stated that the overall goal is to reduce costs.

A resident commented that agricultural producers cannot afford to pay the proposed fees and shared concerns related to water use and the cost of electricity.

A resident asked about five-year reporting requirements in the future.

Jenson responded that the grant funding ends in 2026 and does not cover reporting costs in 2026 or in future reporting periods.

The resident continued commenting on Glenn County's portion of the subbasin and referenced a fee report.

A resident from Vina shared their views on the state's requirements and expressed difficulty understanding the connection between the fees being paid and the benefits

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received. They shared their opinions on well metering, the methodology being considered, and continued discussing taxes and regulations related to the installation of new wells.

Jenson responded that this was the purpose of today's discussion, noting that everyone benefits from groundwater protection. He clarified that neither the GSA nor the District has authority over land use.

A resident shared their opinion on sustainability, noting questions about who is responsible for it. They also expressed their thoughts on metering large water users, emphasizing the importance of fairness while making decisions that benefit the future.

Ward commented that a recurring theme has been the use of meters, noting that it could be left to growers to decide whether to meter.

Lester commented on assumptive use, stating that growers understand the water needs for their crops. He added that he plans to install meters on his agricultural wells and noted that local management of water is preferable, as the county would face greater challenges if the State were to take over management.

Jenson suggested researching "probationary action under SGMA" to see what has occurred in other basins. He noted that, under state conditions, most agricultural operations would likely be unable to afford to farm, and domestic well users would face significantly higher costs than those currently proposed.

Lester commented on areas experiencing the greatest declines in water levels, emphasizing that fees should be structured to disincentivize overuse. He also discussed the number of monitoring wells in these areas that could be used for data comparison and shared his perspective on managing for sustainability.

A resident asked why not all users are required to pay a fee.

Lawrence and Jenson clarified the resident's concerns, and the resident continued to share their opinion.

A resident asked about the law prohibiting well metering.

Lester commented that the County cannot require meters.

Klausner clarified that a citizen initiative passed in the 1980s prevents the County from mandating well meters.

Lawrence asked for discussion among the board.

Godwin commented that the volumetric approach is equitable and shared his view that all users should be part of the program if they benefit. He suggested that incentives should be included to encourage reduced water use and that users who opt to use surface water should be recognized.

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Crain shared his perspective that all users should contribute, regardless of whether they irrigate. He suggested that cattlemen should pay a small fee, as they also benefit from SGMA. He expressed support for participation from all users who receive benefits, provided his opinion that there is currently insufficient information to set fees. Crain also shared his thoughts on volumetric use and recommended that domestic users contribute at some level.

Englehardt shared his opinion that domestic users within the basins should be charged fees and that non-irrigated landowners within the basins should pay a minimal administrative fee. He expressed support for the concept of consumptive use as an incentive.

Jenson stated that the assumptive-use method is as accurate as they can achieve at this time. He noted that voluntary metering is a good incentive to encourage water savings and commented that the fee structure for non-irrigators still needs to be refined.

Lester shared his opinion, favoring volumetric use with all users in the basin participating. He expressed hesitation regarding a per-acre fee for non-irrigated and dryland farming.

Lawrence stated that everyone should participate and contribute to the fee structure to support management. He expressed support for volumetric measurement but indicated he would like to see additional data before fully discussing it.

Ward shared that he supports volumetric use, with non-irrigated users exempt from fees. He also offered his perspective on differences between low-priority and high priority basins.

Merry agreed with using volumetric measurement and expressed no objection to including all users in the fee structure.

Slack commented that she supports volumetric use, stating that it is the most fair and equitable approach. She noted that almost every GSA that has imposed fees has faced lawsuits and that legal challenges are costly. She expressed that volumetric measurement is the most defensible method.

Lamkin shared that she also favors volumetric use and believes all users should be included. She emphasized the importance of considering water quality, noting that extraction from domestic users could have an impact. She added that administrative costs are low enough to involve everyone, reflecting on her experience with the high costs of data management.

Jenson commented that the proposed numbers are low and his goal is to keep fees as affordable as possible to benefit all users.

Godwin stated that the concept was difficult for him to fully support and shared his concerns about charging residents who already have wells. He noted, however, that he

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agreed with the volumetric method and appreciated efforts to keep the fee as low as possible. He also commented on the role of municipalities in supplying water and expressed support for Jenson's goal.

Lawrence commented that the discussion has narrowed to two approaches to move forward with volumetric use and a base fee.

Crain suggested considering a distinction between irrigated and non-irrigated parcels, proposing a base fee by parcel with an additional volumetric component.

Lawrence asked whether this fee structure should apply only within the basins or countywide.

Jenson commented that the decision is up to the board and offered to provide additional information if the group wanted to review it.

Discussion followed regarding keeping charges within the five managed basins.

Crain shared his opinion on administrative fees.

Further discussion occurred regarding the Bowman Subbasin.

Lawrence stated that the group has a recommendation to vote on: a volumetric methodology combined with either an initial fee or a per-acre fee, as well as a methodology that applies a flatter fee within the five managed basins.

Jenson reiterated that the vote is to recommend a fee structure report for legal review. The recommendation includes volumetric fees across the board and volumetric fees above administrative costs within the five managed basins. He noted that there are two options for consideration within the five managed basins.

All members were in favor.

Commission Matters

None

Adjourn

10:25am