Tehama County
Wednesday, October 8, 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
Board Chambers

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

Present Commissioner Martha Slack, Commissioner Kris Lamkin, Commissioner Michael Ward, Commissioner Seth Lawrence, Commissioner Adam Englehardt, Commissioner David Lester, and Commissioner Liz Merry

Absent Commissioner Todd Hamer, Commissioner Hal Crain, Commissioner Martin Spannaus, and Commissioner Jeff Godwin

Public Comment

A resident expressed their feelings on the management of groundwater water.

A resident with DWR for the Tehama County GSA shared some updates from DWR.

A resident expressed their concerns regarding taxes.

A resident on behalf of the Farm Bureau expressed their opinion on taxes, the proposed fees and recharge.

1. **Presentation on Well Levels by Frank Endres** **25-1763**

Frank Endres presented a map of the wells he monitors and summarized each well's location, depth, and measured water levels. He noted fluctuations observed across the ten wells and shared that residents appreciate the attention to groundwater conditions. He also discussed the need to drill deeper when replacing dry wells and reviewed recent rainfall totals, stating his belief that groundwater levels should be improving. He concluded by taking questions.

There was brief discussion about adding more detail to the maps and providing the data to commissioners in advance.

Lawrence asked whether Endres would continue collecting measurements into the spring, noting the value of year-to-year data.

Endres responded that wells near the Sacramento River are not experiencing the same issues as those on the west side near the edge of the aquifer.

Merry observed that none of the wells shown were shallow wells.

Endres confirmed they were all deeper wells.

Merry suggested this may explain the lack of observed recharge.

Lawrence noted that deeper wells typically have a delayed response, making it difficult to determine real-time changes in groundwater conditions. He emphasized the importance of comparing spring-to-spring measurements to better understand how rainfall impacts water levels.

Endres shared his observations from last fall's rainfall and emphasized his opinion on the need for injection wells to support recharge. He also provided his perspective on the Black Butte project and the use of its water.

Ward noted that DWR has a system for making groundwater data available online to the public. He said he planned to upload some information to the platform and asked if Endres's data could be added as well.

Endres agreed and noted that he had recently signed an agreement with DWR to monitor two wells on his ranch, adding that this monitoring would be more formal than his personal measurements..

2. **Informational Presentation by the RCD on Irrigation Efficiencies** **25-1765**

Amy with the Resource Conservation District (RCD) presented on effective irrigation and soil management strategies to support water conservation under SGMA. She provided an overview of the RCD's role and structure, noting that it is a community based organization led by local residents. Amy outlined the agency's services and highlighted how they support local farmers and ranchers by improving irrigation efficiency, enhancing soil health, and assisting with securing funding for related projects.

She discussed the potential impacts SGMA may have on agricultural users, outlining what could occur and what actions can be taken, emphasizing that the long-term goal is to protect groundwater as a shared resource. Amy reviewed issues related to impacted soils and over-irrigation, along with the consequences of each. She also addressed how outdated equipment can lead to uneven water delivery and highlighted the benefits of upgrading irrigation systems. Amy shared comparative data showing increased water savings from system improvements and presented results from a UC Davis study demonstrating those efficiencies.

Discussion followed regarding average water savings and percentage reductions.

Amy outlined various practices that can improve irrigation efficiency, noting that although many of these approaches require higher initial costs, they typically lead to long-term savings. She also provided an overview of existing funding opportunities and additional funding expected in the near future.

Jenson asked whether there were any funding gaps where additional resources could provide support.

Amy responded that larger agricultural users often do not qualify for available funding, which she viewed as a flaw in the system. She noted that additional funding opportunities for larger operations would be beneficial, as they also need support to manage and reduce water use effectively.

She continued by outlining the types of assistance the RCD can provide, along with resources available through other local agencies. Amy also shared the RCD's contact information so members of the public could reach out for support.

Ward shared his perspective on the need to address in-lieu recharge sources and asked whether funding was available to repair damaged infrastructure.

Amy explained that there are a few programs available to support GSAs and outlined the funding options that individual users may qualify for.

Discussion followed on the available funding opportunities and the ways in which the RCD assists applicants in securing those funds.

Amy discussed block grants and noted that they are waiting to see whether the RCD will serve as a grant holder.

Englehardt commented that many users in the county have converted to groundwater and now need assistance paying for the infrastructure to return to surface water. He asked whether that transition would qualify as a water-saving activity eligible for grant funding.

Amy responded that eligibility depends on specific program guidelines, noting that some projects have been approved or denied based on criteria that are not always publicly detailed. She emphasized that funding decisions are made on a case-by-case basis.

Jenson noted the importance of maintaining a strong partnership with the RCD, emphasizing the value they bring in assisting stakeholders throughout the region.

Amy reiterated that the RCD is there to help and encouraged the group to make use of their services.

Spannaus shared his experience working with the RCD, noting that they have been very helpful. He added that he has seen significant cost savings and a substantial decrease in water use since utilizing their programs.

A resident shared their perspective on water savings and orchard expansion.

Jenson commented on the benefits of soil improvement for reducing water runoff.

Lawrence shared his experience with the RCD, noting positive results.

Merry asked whether the RCD had presented to the Farm Bureau.

Amy responded that they had been invited to give a presentation at one of the Farm Bureau's upcoming events.

3. Annual Report Letter Red Bluff Subbasin WY 2024 **25-1766**

Jenson informed the group that he never received the letter from DWR directly and instead obtained it from the website. He noted that the majority of the letter focused on monitoring and missed monitoring cycles. He emphasized the importance of determining what went wrong and stated that he is working with DWR to understand the issue. Jenson clarified that the District monitored all of its wells and submitted the data on time, and that the missed data appears to be a state-level issue, though collaboration may be needed to resolve it.

He also highlighted a comment in the letter recommending that the low-season monitoring period be extended from October to August, and he explained DWR's reasoning for suggesting the earlier start date.

Ward shared his concerns regarding the proposal to change the low-season monitoring period.

Jenson clarified that the goal is to explain monitoring on a continuous basis. He noted that the current monitors record multiple times per day, providing data that can be compared across all seasons.

Englehardt asked if the letter was associated with the annual report prepared by LSCE and inquired about who had approved that report.

Jenson responded that the annual reports are essentially data compilations submitted to DWR based on the information they require. He noted that this process is evolving and may soon become more detailed than a simple data submission, outlining his expectations for potential future changes.

Discussion followed on how annual reports might look if submitted in a different format and what potential outcomes or implications could result from those changes.

4. Fees Presentation on Potential Rates 25-1762

Jenson noted that decisions will be needed on fee structure and applicability and that this was the final presentation in the fee series. He clarified that the discussion was intended to gather input on methodologies, not to set fees.

He outlined a two-part fee structure consisting of administrative costs and action-based groundwater management fees, reviewed administrative expenses, discussed assessment options, noted exemptions for federal lands, and explained how each option could apply under different scenarios.

Discussion followed regarding fee breakdowns and groundwater usage, focusing on which parties would be subject to specific fees.

Jenson noted that legal input could affect the decisions made regarding fees.

Ward asked whether the fee structure would apply to all basins or only those within the county.

Jenson responded that it would apply to the five managed basins.

Ward commented that the Bowman Subbasin does not have regulatory burdens.

Jenson responded that the District currently manages the Bowman Subbasin, which does create an existing regulatory burden. He noted that removing Bowman from management would require action at the Board level. Jenson explained that the subbasins along the river are interconnected from north to south, emphasizing that the Bowman Subbasin contributes a significant amount of water to the Red Bluff Subbasin. He cautioned that failing to continue monitoring Bowman could lead to future issues.

Crain asked for additional details regarding the administrative budget.

Jenson provided clarification.

Discussion followed on basin connections and how fees could be allocated across basins.

Englehardt requested input on the differences between charging fees by basin versus countywide.

Jenson reiterated that the purpose of the discussion was to gather input on potential options in order to develop a consolidated list for consultant review.

Crain suggested using Butte County as a model for developing the fee structure, starting with what is legally required and identifying actions needed to meet those requirements.

Jenson responded that there are many possible approaches and emphasized the importance of staying within the scope of the options they intend to pursue.

Discussion followed regarding how the different scenarios could be implemented.

Crain referenced Butte County and asked whether any areas could be exempted from the fee structure.

Jenson reminded the group that no fee decisions are being made today; the goal is only to narrow down a list of methodologies for review. He explained how the work would be carried out, noting that it is not grant-funded. Since no fees are currently in place, there is no source of income at this time.

Discussion followed on the various ways users could be charged and how fee structures might differ inside versus outside the basins.

Englehardt shared his opinion that it makes the most sense to charge fees within the basins and asked whether it would be possible to assess fees on an acre-foot basis.

Jenson confirmed that it is possible and explained how an acre-foot–based fee could work in areas without meters. He noted that categories would need to be established with assumed volumetric use for each, resulting in a default fee unless actual usage is reported, which is recommended. He added that many users do have meters and programs in place to reduce water consumption.

Englehardt responded that the ultimate goal is to reduce water use, so it makes sense to structure fees in a way that rewards using less water for the same crop.

Discussion followed on charging based on assumed water use versus actual use, highlighting the benefits of using less water. The group also discussed the advantages of metering and reporting consumption.

Lawrence raised a concern that charging a per-well fee could be unfair, noting that one well might irrigate 1,000 acres while another only serves four acres.

Discussion followed regarding the fairness of the fees and the methodology of charging on a per-well basis.

County Counsel Daniel Klausner noted that he was not making a recommendation but observed that the question had arisen earlier. He asked whether it would be possible to calculate fees using both a per-well rate and a volumetric rate.

Jenson responded that a flat fee could be applied based on assumed usage.

Englehardt reiterated his opinion that agricultural users should be charged by the acre foot rather than a flat per-acre fee, noting that a flat fee could potentially limit future land use.

Discussion followed regarding future irrigation practices and potential impacts on land use.

Jenson explained that connections and residential users could be combined into one category, and the same could be done for rangeland. He added that while categories are feasible, staff recommendations would guide the final structure.

Slack asked for clarification regarding the benefits under Proposition 218.

Jenson responded that SGMA allows multiple methods for regulating fees. He explained the Proposition 218 process, as well as an alternative process similar to Proposition 218, including how the voting requirements differ.

He then presented the PMA cost breakdown, noting that these represent non administrative fee costs. Jenson reviewed the three PMA cost categories and explained what each includes. He added that there is substantial data available on typical water use rates, which helps estimate potential fees.

Jenson stated that if fees are assessed on a volumetric basis, the estimated cost would be approximately $8 per acre-foot. He compared this to state intervention, noting that local management would cost roughly one-third of what the state would charge to administer a similar program.

Lester asked whether Jenson had confirmed the fee amounts that would be charged by the state.

Jenson responded that he had confirmed the state's fee amounts and stated that he believes the program can be administered locally at a significantly lower cost than the state.

He reviewed staff's recommendations, noting that key challenges include establishing assumed-use fees and annually developing volumetric use characteristics. He explained that each methodology carries its own administrative burden and emphasized that SGMA will continue to influence how and where water is used, making fee structures subject to change over time.

Discussion followed regarding the potential use of a flat administrative fee.

Slack shared her opinion that charging fees on an acre-foot basis provides a stronger nexus and would be less susceptible to legal challenge.

Jenson agreed stating that volumetric measure can be a very symbolic benefit.

Slack asked whether metering would be required to demonstrate reduced groundwater use resulting from installed efficiency measures.

Jenson responded that if the District provides services to help reduce volumetric groundwater use, one likely requirement would be to demonstrate reductions through metering. He expressed hope that, over time, users would recognize the cost-saving benefits of metering. Jenson noted that users would need to provide proof of reduced water use to qualify for lower fees.

He also pointed out that Tehama County has a voter initiative prohibiting the County from mandating groundwater metering. As a result, volumetric use would need to be assumed unless users voluntarily choose to meter their wells, unless significant political action were taken to change the initiative.

Lester commented on behalf of the agricultural community, noting that in this situation it may be advantageous to meter groundwater use.

Jenson noted that many irrigators already know their water usage, so for most it would not be a significant burden. He added that as the program moves forward, meters will be provided as part of the incentive. District staff has recommended linking fees to volumetric use, which would involve assigning volumetric assumptions to each crop type. He continued by reviewing the different cost categories associated with the program.

Discussion followed regarding the fees that would be charged to domestic users.

Jenson emphasized the importance of well registration, noting that unregistered wells would be assumed to exist and subject to fees.

Lester shared his opinion regarding how fees should be applied to rangeland wells.

Discussion followed on the financial impact of fees to groundwater users.

Englehardt asked for clarification on staff's recommendation that an administrative fee be applied to each acre within the basin.

Jenson responded that the fee would not be applied per acre, but rather based on volumetric use and assigned accordingly. He noted that the consultants will provide the calculations based on their research.

Discussion followed regarding assumed water use and how fees would be allocated, including considerations of parcel boundaries and actual usage.

Godwin asked Jenson to clarify how the proposed methodology would impact the cities.

Jenson clarified that the methodology would not affect the cities. He explained that under volumetric assumptions, only the property associated with the water use would be billed and provided examples of how different scenarios could be applied.

Discussion followed on how the cities would receive the bills and how fees would be apportioned to users. The group also discussed the process for including the charges on property tax statements.

Public comment

A resident asked about water use by the state and recreation parks.

Jenson responded that the question would need to be addressed by the legal team, but noted that state and recreation parks account for only a small percentage of total water use.

A resident commented on the Corning GSA and shared their opinion regarding the CSGSA's participation, requesting a response from Justin.

Jenson responded by explaining the structure and management of the CSGSA.

The resident continued by discussing the inclusion of federal lands in the fee structures and shared their opinion on the proposed budget.

Jenson reiterated that no fees are being set today and that any recommendations will come from the consulting professionals.

A resident shared their opinion on holding a study session to further discuss the topic.

Lamkin provided an overview of the work completed on the fee structures.

A resident calling in from the Farm Bureau commented that it is difficult for stakeholders to participate in meetings during harvest season and shared their opinion on the proposed fee rate.

A resident emphasized the importance of informing the public before any fees are established.

Englehardt asked whether a decision on fees was required at today's meeting.

Jenson clarified that he is seeking recommendations to present to the next level and input on how the group would like to proceed

Discussion followed on how recommendations should be compiled and on providing copies of relevant documents to the group.

Englehardt asked when public comments would be considered in the fee-setting process.

Jenson stated that a public hearing will be held, and that there will be ample opportunity for public input. He noted that questionnaires have been distributed and public outreach meetings are being planned. He reminded the group that he needs direction on preferred methodologies before presenting the proposals to the public.

Lawrence clarified that Jenson was seeking input on which fee methodologies the group supports and which they do not.

Jenson confirmed that was correct.

Ward asked for clarification on how costs per well and per acre would be calculated and allocated.

Jenson provided clarification.

The group requested a summary spreadsheet showing all proposed fee budgets. Discussion followed regarding the timing of its distribution, and the group agreed to review the spreadsheet and provide comments to Jenson by Thursday of the following week.

Englehardt questioned the proposed timeline.

Jenson explained that the District's grant funding will end next spring, and without it there will be no funds to continue operations. He noted that the District has previously relied on millions of dollars in grant support, which is now ending, and emphasized that a funding mechanism must be established to avoid groundwater management reverting to the state.

Discussion followed regarding the expiration of grant funding and the associated deadlines.

Englehardt emphasized the need for public outreach.

Discussion followed on potential fee amounts and what information would be needed to support effective public discussion on the topic.

Jenson clarified that the timeframe to implement these measures is between February and July of next year.

Merry asked whether this item would be presented at next week's Flood meeting.

Jenson confirmed that it would.

Merry shared her opinion that the upcoming Flood meeting should be publicly announced to allow for public feedback.

Jenson stated that he needed recommendations to present to the Board, emphasizing that he would like the volumetric method to be thoroughly reviewed. He noted the importance of providing clear direction to the fee consultants.

Lester clarified that Jenson is not seeking a vote at the Flood meeting, but rather recommendations from the group.

Jenson confirmed, noting that while there is a formal requirement to vote on fees, the current discussion is strictly for gathering recommendations.

A resident shared their opinion on the importance of taking sufficient time to review the information before making a decision, and commented on the proposed timeline.

Jenson informed the group that they could schedule a special meeting if needed.

A resident asked the group to consider subsidizing fees for low-income users and inquired about the costs for residents without a well.

Lamkin commented that volumetric use was not an option when fees were first discussed, providing background on the fee-setting process prior to that time. She highlighted that changes in resources and political perspectives have made an assumptive use rate feasible now. Lamkin also noted that more data is available today, allowing for more equitable decision-making.

Lawrence asked the group whether they preferred to hold a special meeting next Wednesday or provide a recommendation today.

The group reached a consensus to schedule a special meeting.

Crain requested that the data be provided along with a detailed summary.

Jenson explained that the detailed data and summary would not be available until the consultants review the information, and that input from the group is needed to compile it.

The Groundwater Commission agreed to hold a special meeting on the following Wednesday.

5. Standing Agenda Items **25-1761**

Groundwater Recharge

Jenson stated that an outside consultant is evaluating water availability and the timing of when it could be accessed. He explained that grant funding is available to support the diversion of floodwater during flood stages and reviewed how this process would work.

Discussion followed regarding the approval process.

Grant Status

Jenson provided an update, noting that the topic included some unfavorable news. He stated that grant funding is expected to be terminated by spring 2026 and that a request for an extension was denied. Jenson added that staff is working to fully expend the remaining grant funds before the deadline.

Demand Management

The initial review with legal counsel has been completed, and positive feedback was received. While no final conclusions have been made, there is strong support for the proposed methodologies. Jenson noted that he is hoping to receive a written response by next week.

Well Mitigation:
A meeting has been scheduled and will likely be the final meeting in the series. The group has a few remaining details to work through before the materials are submitted for legal review.

Annual Report
This item was discussed earlier in the meeting.

Outreach
A schedule is being developed for high-level outreach meetings. Once finalized, it will provide a clearer picture of the long-term outreach plan.

Ward asked how the expiration of grant funding would impact Demand Management.

Jenson responded that at the next CSAB meeting he hopes to discuss next steps and obtain direction from the Board on how to proceed.

Crain inquired about recharge efforts, asking whether the pilot projects were close to being ready and who would be accountable for keeping them on track.

Jenson responded that the consultants are responsible for keeping the projects on schedule and offered to provide an update at the next meeting.

A resident commented on the management of the Bowman Subbasin.

Crain asked whether that question should be directed to legal counsel.

Jenson said if the group wanted him to look into it he could do so.

The group agreed they wanted research on the matter.

6. Commission Matters
None

Adjourn
11:45am

APPROVED ______________________
Chairperson

Tehama County Groundwater Commission

by ______________________ Deputy