



Tehama County
Wednesday, September 10, 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

8:31 AM

Present

Commissioner Todd Hamer, Commissioner Martha Slack, Commissioner Michael Ward, Commissioner Seth Lawrence, Commissioner Liz Merry, and Commissioner Jeff Godwin

ABSENT

Commissioner Kris Lamkin, Commissioner Hal Crain, Commissioner Martin Spannaus, Commissioner Adam Englehardt, and Commissioner David Lester

Public Comment

Frank Andres goes over map and shows the area where he is measuring well water levels. The device he uses is 98-99 percent accurate and goes down to 2000ft. He is measuring 18 wells and gets the measurements once per month. Thinks that injection wells are the only way to refill the aquifer.

Martha asks what the average depth of the wells he is measuring.

Franks says 250-300ft. However two wells just went dry and to get a new well with enough water he had to go down to 700ft. Another that went dry had to be drilled to 450 ft, the original well was 235ft. He has agreed to have the state come in to monitor some of his wells.

1. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

25-1574

a) Waive the reading and approve the minutes of the regular meeting held 7/9/2025

RESULT: APPROVE

MOVER: Martha Slack

SECONDER: Liz Merry

AYES: Commissioner Hamer, Commissioner Slack, Commissioner Ward, Commissioner Lawrence, Commissioner Lester, Commissioner Merry, and Commissioner Godwin

ABSENT: Commissioner Lamkin, Commissioner Crain, Commissioner Spannaus, and Commissioner Englehardt

2. Annual Report Letter Corning Subbasin WY2024

25-1573

Dave Lester joined the meeting during the approval of the minutes (Item #1).

Jenson reviewed a letter from the SGMA Management Office following submission of the annual reports. The letter requests additional information, noting that several monitoring points qualify for undesirable results and asking the county to report the maximum low. Jenson explained that a data gap occurred when wells were transferred from the state to the county, resulting in lost information. He noted that the state is responsible for tracking which wells were monitored during that period

Ward provided comments on the Red Bluff Annual Report.

Jenson said he had not officially received it yet.

A resident asked who was responsible for monitoring the wells and what the protocol is for that process

Jenson responded that the majority of wells in Tehama County are monitored by the county, though he did not have exact numbers available

Hamer discussed how the monitoring responsibilities for the wells are divided

3. Presentation on Volumes for Fee Setting

25-1580

Jenson explained that this presentation is the next in a series aimed at reaching an agreement on how to proceed with fees. He reviewed the various ways fees could be allocated and provided data on the number of wells and connections within the basins, noting that the vast majority of water use in the basin comes from groundwater. He also discussed the total acreage within the county, including irrigated land, and compared crop type data with state figures.

Discussion on service districts serving domestic wells.

Jenson reviewed the percentages of land use and groundwater consumption, noting that the majority of groundwater is used for crop irrigation and densely populated areas. He explained that dividing costs based on the volume of water used could help

determine a fair fee structure and guide the group's discussion on how to proceed Ward asked if the last part of the presentation would be added to the agenda for the next meeting.

Jenson confirmed it will be included on the next agenda. He explained that the upcoming presentation will focus on dividing funds across volumetric types and is intended to gather feedback on reasonable options moving forward.

4. Review of Draft Proposed to Demand Management Program Along with Current Status in Working Group 25-1584

Jenson began by explaining that this is a detailed topic covering the proposed Demand Management Program. He noted that the STRAW proposal is divided into three parts: potential incentives to reduce use, defining key terms, and establishing triggers and actions to reduce demand when those triggers are met

The first part of the program focuses on incentives, using funds identified in the fee presentation to encourage reduced demand. Jenson explained that the goal is to provide direct incentives for growers to lower groundwater use. He discussed how improving irrigation efficiency would be the most impactful and cost-effective approach, providing several examples of possible methods. He also highlighted soil improvement as another strategy to enhance irrigation efficiency and further reduce water use

Jenson explained that there are two types of incentives that can be used. The first is a direct, or given, incentive—paying for something on behalf of the participant. The second is an avoidance incentive, where using less water results in lower costs. He noted that the proposed approach incorporates elements of both types and described how they would work together within the program

Ward stated that he wanted to discuss the use of surface water versus groundwater. He noted that he had spoken with several commissioners on the topic and that they felt it is an important component of the overall plan.

Jenson stated that much of that work is already being addressed through SGMA implementation funding

Ward asked if that work was being done through recharge efforts.

Jenson responded that there is in-lieu work included in the grant, with some projects already underway and partially funded through that source. He noted that a significant amount of research has been gathered and additional data is expected. Jenson emphasized that some form of incentive will be necessary to encourage participation and support change

Discussion took place on incentivizing change and implementing in-lieu projects

Discussion took place regarding water allotments for the water districts and how unused allotments could supplement groundwater usage. The group also discussed the reliability of the water districts.

Jenson began reviewing the definitions section of the Demand Management Plan in detail.

Discussion took place on the definition of a polygon and the considerations involved in developing it.

Additional discussion followed on how monitoring wells are measured and the overall process involved.

Ward shared his opinion on the definition of a trigger and emphasized its importance

Jenson began discussing the restrictive side of the program, as opposed to the incentive-based approach. He explained that the program is set up initially, but restrictions are delayed to allow exploration of other options first. This provides groundwater users time to adjust, gives the group additional time to collect data, and allows for evaluation of the effectiveness of incentive-based actions.

Jenson reviewed the management actions in detail.

Discussion took place regarding the provided percentages, the sources of the recommendations, and questions on how the fees would be assessed.

Jenson assured the group that a full legal review would be conducted by an outside consultant.

Discussion took place regarding water volume used and the associated cost to remedy or cure the usage

Jenson explained that administrative activities would reduce usage and groundwater levels would increase. He noted that once groundwater returns to the target level, no fees would be charged after two consecutive years. He emphasized that this outlines what would occur if the plan is adopted.

Brief discussion took place on how decreases in groundwater levels would be managed.

Discussion took place on lifting restrictions once groundwater levels stabilize and the timeframe for doing so.

Jenson reminded the group that the goal is to remove penalties once groundwater levels return to target. He advised that lifting restrictions as soon as practical is the preferred approach and stated that, in his opinion, this method achieves the desired outcome.

Lester stated that, in his opinion, it does not make sense to penalize someone for being within the sustainable range, which aligns with SGMA's intended goals.

Discussion took place on structuring restrictions to change behavior, with the subsequent removal of the fee serving as the reward.

Discussion took place on incentives for having wells metered, as well as other options

to reduce water usage that do not involve well metering.

Jenson discussed management action number two, Sustainable Yield Pumping, noting that it works in conjunction with management action number one. He explained the concept and emphasized that this action reduces groundwater extraction through ordinance.

Discussion took place regarding the fines associated with this section of the program.

Ward asked about the Corning Subbasin, specifically whether, if groundwater levels remain below the MT in 2031, the basin would immediately enter the Sustainable Yield Pumping phase at that time.

Jenson responded that yes, the basin would enter Sustainable Yield Pumping if the issue is not resolved within the next few years.

Discussion took place regarding sustainable pumping in the Corning Subbasin.

Jenson reviewed topics for further discussion, including MOs, MTs, and the timing of triggers.

Discussion took place regarding the remaining work that needs to be completed and the time required to accomplish it.

Jenson discussed triggers, explaining the difference between using an MT versus an MO to initiate action. He reviewed the polygon methodology and noted that a modeling system will be run to provide additional data on subsurface conditions, which will aid in decision-making. He also addressed the differences between inland and river-adjacent wells and their direct correlation with river levels.

Jenson explained how inland wells, particularly in the Red Bluff Subbasin, are affected by the river. He detailed how these wells can interact with river flows and noted that inland wells may actually be drawing from river levels.

Jenson explained the water portfolio management approach and expressed hope for general consensus on resolving the water trading program. He noted that the program cannot be fully developed before going to the board and would therefore require a separate plan. Jenson discussed how the basins affect each other and expressed hope that adjusting these dynamics over time will help achieve sustainable water levels. He stated that he is uncertain about conditions beyond the basin boundaries, including Glenn, Stony Creek, and Colusa. He outlined commitments that have been made, noting that conservation will be incorporated, though recharge remains uncertain. He also discussed fees, new development, and groundwater-dependent ecosystems. Ward commented that he hopes the commission will have the opportunity to provide input on recommendations related to new development.

Jenson stated that if the group wishes to address that, it can be added to the agenda as a separate item.

Hamer asked what was being requested of the commission today.

Jenson responded that he needed input on high-level issues, particularly regarding the use of MOs versus MTs for management. He noted that DWR's guidance is to manage toward achieving the goal.

Slack stated that she supports using MOs, noting that she believes this approach is a more progressive way to achieve the goals.

Merry stated that she agreed with Slack.

Further discussion took place on MOs versus MTs, with commissioners sharing their preferred methods. They reviewed additional details of the two approaches and discussed how to communicate the process and outcomes to residents.

Jenson stated that he is working with the RCD to develop collaborative relationships.

Discussion took place on how to differentiate a farm operation from smaller-scale operations, such as hobby farms.

Public Comment

A resident asked whether there are initial estimates for the maximum pumping rates.

Jenson responded that the estimates range from the high 4s to the low 5s.

A resident raised concerns regarding the trigger for voluntary measures and the fines imposed for pumping over the allocated amount. They asked whether this could be considered a nuisance and what actions could be taken. The resident also shared their thoughts on the fee structure, expressed opinions on litigation, and referenced an article about fees in San Diego.

Hamer responded, noting that the resident's reference to the 218 process was not applicable to the current discussion.

The resident continued to share their perspective on the article. Jenson addressed the resident's concerns and discussed the balance between incentives and fees.

5. Standing Agenda Items

25-1567

Groundwater Recharge: Jenson commented that they are still waiting to hear back from attorneys regarding where water can be sourced.

Grant status: Jenson stated that preparing NOEs and landowner agreements are the next steps for this category.

Demand Management: Covered earlier in the meeting in detail.

Well Mitigation: Jenson noted that a meeting will be held next week with live listening. The plan is well-advanced, and there is strong consensus on its direction.

Annual Report: The report is complete, and a presentation will be given once it is released.

Outreach: Efforts are underway to distribute information to the public. Efficiency-based incentive outreach is being sent out, and a survey targeting private well owners has received a strong response. Jenson encouraged everyone to help spread the word to maximize input.

Discussion on the annual report and missing information.

6. Commission Matters

Martha discussed a notice she received from DWR regarding an agency currently in hearings and moving under state administration. She noted that the state plans to charge the agency \$200 per acre-foot of water for management.

Jenson commented that it would be unfortunate if the state took over management, as they would also implement mandatory monitoring.

Adjourn

11:34 AM