

Understanding the Wyandotte Creek Subbasin

Draft results for the Basin Setting portion of the Groundwater Sustainability Plan

<https://www.wyandottecreekgsa.com/>

Meeting Brief

- The Wyandotte Creek Groundwater Sustainability Agency (GSA) led a public webinar to present draft results for the Basin Setting portion of GSA development (i.e., water supply and demand, land and water use trends, groundwater characteristics and conditions). All materials are available [here](#).
- Tania Carlone, Senior Mediator at The Consensus Building Institute (CBI) gave a brief overview of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) and the Wyandotte Creek GSA governance structure.
- Christina Buck, Butte County Water & Resource Conservation, and Byron Clark, Davids Engineering, presented high level draft results for the Hydrogeologic Conceptual Model (HCM), water budgets, and groundwater conditions. The presentations provided context to prepare for more in-depth discussions about basin setting results in the coming months.
- Following the presentation, GSA opened the discussion for public comments and questions. Main areas of concern included land-use designation in the models, land-use change projections, lack of sufficient consideration of climate change extremes (particularly extreme events (e.g. long-term drought, mega floods, large wildfires), and lack of trust in data sets provided by the CA Department of Water Resources (DWR).
- Meeting Materials: [Wyandotte Creek Public Meeting Agenda \(06/23/2020\)](#) | [Wyandotte Creek GSA Fact Sheet](#) | [Wyandotte Creek Subbasin Water Budget Overview](#) | [Hydrogeological Conceptual Model \(HCM\) Presentation](#) | [Draft Basin Setting Results Presentation](#)
- To receive meeting notifications and updates, the public can register on the SGMA email list by: (1) Visiting Butte County Department of Water & Resource Conservation's website at www.buttecounty.net/waterresourceconservation and clicking the orange "Join our Email List" button; or, (2) texting the word BCWATER to 22828.

Discussion

Key takeaways from the public discussion include:

- **Land-use designation:** Public participants expressed concern with existing land-use designations in the models. Specific recommendations included (1) specifying wildlife refuge areas, wetlands, riparian areas, and other important groundwater dependent ecosystems currently depicted as irrigated agriculture; and, (2) noting that agriculture exists in non-irrigated settings (e.g. "rangeland," "native range," "non-irrigated agriculture." etc.). "Native" or "idle" classification might be interpreted by developers or other stakeholders as land with little community, economic or ecosystem value. However, these areas are very valuable for groundwater recharge, biodiversity, and ecosystem health. Suggestions included adding more land-use designations in the HCM and connecting the models to the County's regional Habitat Conservation Plan.
- **Land-use change projections:** Participants highlighted the need to properly reflect recent land-use changes, particularly the expansion of orchards into rangeland areas in the southern area of the subbasin. Future conditions presented underestimate irrigated land. Orchards used to be confined to the West side of HWY 70; now, orchards are East of Lone Tree and moving toward Palermo Honcut Road. A participant suggested conducting a parallel assessment using a more extreme land-

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use change scenario to estimate future water budgets and identify water conservation alternatives. Butte County Staff will explore ways to better identify and quantify this shift in acreage and evaluate groundwater monitoring wells in this area. Some sources of information include DWR detailed land-use coverage datasets, USDA Cropland Data Layer coverages for recent years (somewhat less reliable), and local data from the County's Agricultural Commissioner. Due to the high degree of uncertainty, it is difficult to predict landowner decisions and future expansion. Thus, the process will be iterative and allow adjustments over time.

- **Water Transfers, Sustainability, and Stability:** A participant raised the issue of augmenting water supplies with out-of-basin sources to achieve groundwater sustainability. Accounting for these changes seems problematic and not consistent with the goal of achieving stability and sustainability. Butte County Staff specified that these issues will be addressed at a later stage in GSP development. Currently, the GSA is setting the foundation to start developing sustainability criteria. In order to comply with the annual planning requirements, the plan will be updated each year. Ideally, the GSA will update assumptions, growth projections, and datasets every 5 years, in coordination with other basins.
- **Climate change impacts:** participants were concerned with the lack of proper consideration of extreme climate scenarios. Extremes present a serious worry for communities, particularly based on recent experiences with long-term drought, flooding, dam reliability, and large forest fires (i.e. The Camp Fire). Participants believe climate extremes should be taken seriously into account, using the most up-to-date scientific information.
- **Inter-basin coordination:** Participants asked about Wyandotte Creek GSA's efforts to coordinate with neighboring subbasins to maintain consistent accounting of inter-basin groundwater flows and stream-aquifer interactions. Butte County Staff highlighted inter-basin coordination actions are required by SGMA [Refer to [Article 8 §357.2 \(b\)](#)]. Representatives from Vina, Butte, Wyandotte Creek, Corning, Colusa, Bowman, Red Bluff, Antelope, and Los Molinos subbasins have started meeting and will continue to coordinate moving forward.
- **Drought and increased pumping:** Participants were confused by distinguishing reductions in groundwater storage related to recent historic drought from those caused by increased pumping, when there is a strong link between times of drought and increased pumping.
- **Technical Data:** Participants expressed suspicion of DWR as a technical source of data, particularly regarding inconsistencies with land-use designations and future climate projections. Further, a participant suggested utilizing simpler language to communicate technical information with a broader public audience.

Next step:

- The draft results for the Basin Setting and Monitoring Chapters of the GSP will be ready for a 30-day public comment period by mid-summer.
- The next Wyandotte Creek GSA board meeting is scheduled for August 27th.
- Geosyntec will be the technical consultant firm leading the next portion of GSP completion.
- The Wyandotte Creek GSA is interested in forming an advisory committee. Public participants interested in joining a governance advisory committee, please contact Christina Buck (CBuck@buttecounty.net) or Paul Gosselin (PGosselin@buttecounty.net).