



Regional Water Management Group

LOCATION: Online (ZOOM)

MINUTES

Monday, August 23, 2021 1:30 pm

1. The meeting was called to order at 1:34 pm, by Tom Wheeler, chairman.

Those present included:

Tom Wheeler – Madera County

Al Solis – SEMCU

Jeannie Habben – Madera County

Stephanie Anagnoson – Madera County

Kristi Robinson – Water Wise/Triangle T

Jacob Roberson – RWMG Coordinator

Keith Helmuth – City of Madera

Angela Islas – SHE

Jack Rice – MAWA

Brandon Tomlinson – Chowchilla WD

Carl Janzen – Madera ID

Gretchen Heisdorf – Root Creek WD/P&P

Sam Cunningham – Madera County

Chris Montoya – DWR

Jenny Nunez-Rodriguez – Madera County

Laura Satterlee – SHE

Matt Maringer – Greystone Equities/SEMCU

Igal Treibatch – SEMCU

Don Roberts – Gravelly Ford WD

Amy Siliznoff – Madera/Chowchilla RCD

Eddie Mendez – Madera County

Dina Nolan – Madera ID

Robert Macaulay – Madera County

Jason Rogers – City of Chowchilla

Christopher Yohannan – USDA NRCS

Sarbjit Johal – SEMCU

Jean Okuye – East Merced RCD

2. Review & Approval - Agenda & Minutes

- A motion to approve the August agenda after moving item #10 up to item #5 and moving item #s 5 – 9 down one spot was made by Carl J; Gretchen H second; all voted; Motion passed unanimously.
- A motion to approve the July minutes was made by Carl J; Jason R second; all voted; Motion passed unanimously.

3. Public Comment

- Items of interest were mentioned by Jacob R (for more information, reach out to Jacob):
 - The Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board is accepting written comments on proposed Groundwater Protection Values for designated High Vulnerability Townships within the Central Valley Region. Written comments must be submitted via email or mail to Eric Warren with the Control Board by 5 pm on September 1st.
 - The Bureau of Reclamation is accepting applications for three WaterSMART grant opportunities – Drought Resiliency Projects, Water and Energy Efficiency Grants and the new Environmental Water Resources Projects. These funding opportunities will help communities throughout the West by increasing water supply sustainability and drought resiliency. All applications are due online through Grants.gov
 - The Draft FY 2021-22 Fund Expenditure Plan for the Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Fund (Plan) has been posted to the State Water Board's webpage for public review and comment. Public written comments will be accepted by the State Water Board and must be submitted no later than 12 pm (noon) on Friday this week, August 27th.

- State Water Resources Control Board and Department of Water Resources staff will host two Drought Funding Workshops for Counties on August 25 and 31 to discuss the roles of counties and state agencies in emergency drought response, review how counties can access funding and develop programs for countywide programs related to emergency drinking water shortages, and answer questions from county representatives and their partner nongovernmental organizations. Both workshops will provide the same information.
- DWR is currently accepting applications for its Small Community Drought Relief Program. The purpose of the program is to provide immediate and near-term financial and technical support to help small communities survive this and future droughts. Applications are being accepted through December 29, 2023.
- The Wildlife Conservation Board's 2021 Proposal Solicitation Notice for its Forest Conservation Program is now available. Proposed projects may include planning, implementation, or acquisition projects within the Sierra Nevada and Cascade mountains in California. Priorities include meadow restoration, post-fire habitat recovery, and aspen stand restoration as well as acquisitions that protect meadows, migration corridors, or habitat connectivity. Interested applicants must submit a pre-application by 5pm on September 10th. Successful pre-applications will then be invited to submit a full proposal.

NEW BUSINESS

4. Discussion & Action - Financial Report/Warrant Approvals

- Carl J reported that no money came in and \$2,000 was spent for Jacob's position. We have a balance of \$31,191 which will easily get us through the end of the year.
- A motion to approve the financial report was made by Carl J; Igal T second; all voted; Motion passed unanimously.

5. Discussion – Madera/Chowchilla RCD Soil Health / Water Nexus Presentation

- Amy S mentioned that they are working with the California Association of Resource Conservation Districts (CARD) on the Heller Foundation grant which includes work surrounding SGMA in Madera County. This work is setting up meetings with all the local GSAs as an educational piece surrounding Healthy Soils and how they tie into the water nexus. It focuses on the implementation of cover crops in current farming practices. CDFA and NRCS are including soil health as part of their grant structure. There is a concern that with the GSPs currently treating cover crops as a net user for water, they will discourage farmers from implementing soil health practices of which cover crops are an essential pillar. The Madera/Chowchilla RCD is interested in assisting the local GSAs to include cover crops as a positive management practice when it comes to water use. The presentation they would like to do for the group during an upcoming meeting will touch on multiple topics, including: 1) Rainfall retention benefits through reduced runoff using cover crops which then reduces the water requirement to build up the soil profile including use in on-farm recharge and designated recharge areas, 2) Cover crops increase organic matter in the soil, thereby increasing water retention, decreasing commercial nitrogen application need, reducing nitrogen volatilization, and reducing leaching to groundwater. This will be a big help in improving groundwater quality with CVSALTS, 3) Cover crops reduce the need for pesticide application, thereby reducing pesticide runoff issues, reducing labor safety issues, reducing groundwater contamination, and allowing early access to fields by equipment, and 4) Cover crops also help with bee and monarch butterfly health. The RCD would like to present on these topics to the group and provide scientific information to encourage the use of cover crops when formulating the way they are treated in the GSPs. Grants awarded by the NRCS and the State will have cover crop management practices as part of the awarding process. The presentation will be kept to around 30-minutes and they follow up with

each of the GSAs afterwards with more information. Presenters, so far, include sustainable conservationists (covering the CVSALTS research) and UC Cooperative Extension specialists. They would also like to bring Rob Roy with NRCS (area agronomist for Fresno) to provide more information on cover crops. This will be an educational piece about cover crops and how they're just not a net user of water, but they save so many other things.

- Tom W asked which meeting they would like to have this presentation put on the agenda for, and Amy answered either September or October. The RCD would setup separate meetings with the GSAs attending. Their grant is up at the end of December so any time before that for the presentation would be fine.
- Carl J mentioned that it would be a good presentation. If anyone reads any of the information and articles about soil health, California and what we're doing is so far behind the wetter parts of the country where it's easier to do cover crops. The work they do with soil health in the Midwest and back East are so far ahead of us that we aren't even in the race.
 - Amy mentioned that California is in a different situation because of the climate change. The presentation will include how cover crops can primarily depend just on rainfall so they wouldn't need irrigation from groundwater necessarily. Tom added that he doesn't see nearly as many cover crops on farms as he had seen in the past, and Carl mentioned that they still see some in raisins and in almonds but mainly it's the grape vineyards using cover crops regularly. Amy mentioned that a lot of almond orchards are beginning to implement cover crops because of the pollination benefit. The cover crops can become a bee pollinator habitat, so there are a lot of great benefits to cover crops. It's unfortunate if farmers are being penalized in any way and then causes them to rip out the cover crops. There's a lot of downfall to that.
- A motion to approve the Soil Health / Water Nexus presentation during a meeting before December was made by Carl J; Gretchen H second; all voted; Motion passed unanimously.
 - Later in the meeting, it was decided that October's meeting would be best for this presentation since an agenda item next month (September) will run a little longer than normal.

6. Discussion – Proposition 1 Disadvantaged Community Involvement Funding

- San Joaquin Valley Counties
 - Self Help Enterprises – Projects 12 and 13
 - Angela I mentioned that last month during the Madera RWMG meeting we had a discussion regarding the group asking for an extension on these projects due to slow response rates, lack in interest in getting water tested, and a lot of focus being put towards the drought. The group can consider funding another project on the IRWM Project List or ask for an extension to continue this effort of water sampling.
 - Jacob R commented that last month he had a call with Eddie O and Angela where they showed concern with not being able to test as many domestic wells as they would like to for these projects which end on July 31, 2022. Jacob, Angela, and Eddie spoke with Maggie D at Contra Costa WD, and she mentioned that the group can decide to allocate the funds to another project, or we can ask for a project extension with DWR on these projects. The water quality staff with SHE is currently assisting the Emergency Services department with the drought response.

- Tom W commented that testing domestic wells is a high priority, and he would like to keep these projects going, even if that means asking for a project extension.
- Kristi R commented that the Chowchilla Management Zone (CMZ) has been utilizing this funding for the water testing that they are doing in Madera County within the Chowchilla Subbasin. They have done 1 test so far with this funding and SHE's assistance, and the CMZ would like to continue to use the funding and continue to do water testing. CMZ would like to step in and assist with the water testing to keep it going during the drought if the group agrees.
 - Tom asked if the CMZ has the staff for the testing, and Kristi mentioned that they have the staff for interest shown in domestic well testing. COVID slowed down the request amount, but they are expecting for water testing requests to pick back up.
 - Jacob commented that this can be done easily. Jacob will double check the agreement language and see if any paperwork needs to be done to add CMZ as a payee on the grant.
- Jeannie H asked when the funding for this grant ends, and Jacob answered July 31, 2022. Jeannie asked how much funding is left for the domestic well sampling and testing, and Jacob answer roughly \$148,000. Jeannie also asked about who CMZ was using in the past for the water sample/test already done if it wasn't SHE, and Jacob mentioned that it was SHE that CMZ used for the sample test done in April. Kristi also added that CMZ was using SHE for their sampling and testing until about a month ago when SHE notified CMZ that they can no longer assist with sampling and testing due to the drought. CMZ is now using a 3rd party lab for their sampling and testing.
- Tom asked to keep an eye on these projects so we can ask for an extension from DWR if needed. We want to get as close to testing 150 domestic wells as we can with this funding.
 - Jacob commented that if we would like to ask for an extension, we would need to do this after our January meeting since the group does not meet in December. Tom asked Jacob to include this on the November agenda, that way we can see how many domestic wells have been sampled and tested to date and go from there on whether an extension is needed or not.
- Igal T asked Kristi if domestic wells in Southeast Madera County could be tested utilizing these funds, and Kristi said yes. Domestic wells in all of Madera County can be tested utilizing these funds. Igal commented that Matt M with SEMCU will reach out to Kristi. SEMCU can post an ad and contact information in their local paper advertising this free sampling and testing for domestic wells.
 - Laura S with SHE added that they are still sampling and testing wells in Madera County, but not that many due to the drought. Igal can have residents reach out to SHE for sampling and testing as well as CMZ.
- A motion to add the Chowchilla Management Zone to projects 12 and 13 was made by Carl J; Jason R second; all voted; Motion passed unanimously.

7. Discussion – Proposition 1 IRWM Implementation Funding

- Mountain Counties and San Joaquin Valley Counties
 - Eddie M commented that for Indian Lakes, they have been continuing their work with the vendor who will also be working to get the contract with them. They have received updates on the vendor's lead times because of shortages for the computer chips and other components that are used to make the meters have impacted their ability for the creation of each of the meters which they are using for the project. The lead time on the meters has been extended, unfortunately. They are going to try to order the meters much sooner than they were originally planning just to get the order in, and the vendor is going to try to get the meters to them so they have them on hand. The vendor is willing to house the meters for them since they are looking at about 90-days to receive all the meters due to the shortages. Contract details are being wrapped up and they are getting the Board Letter prepared to get the contract approved in a month or two.
 - Keith H commented that the RFP is still out for the City of Madera's project. The RFP period hasn't closed just yet.
 - Eddie added that Parkwood is going to be along the same timeline as Indian Lakes. Parkwood and Indian Lakes are using two different types of meters, so whichever they receive from the manufacturer first will be installed first. One is a plastic design and the other is a brass design, but either than that they are essentially the same components.
 - Eddie also added that they have a draft contract for the Parksdale project and the Board Letter submitted to the County Council already for the rehabilitation of Well #2 in Parksdale. They should have the Board Letter ready this week or shortly after to get that on the Board meeting's agenda to get that wrapped up and the project started. Just need to get the contract finalized and sent over to the contractor for signatures.
 - Jason R commented that since last month, nothing new to add for the City of Chowchilla's project. They're working on the Urban Water Management Plan update which DWR said needs to be completed and submitted to the State before October so they can receive the funding agreement. They have QK working on that, and they are looking to have it completed within that timeframe so they can get the funding agreement and be able to move forward with the project.

8. Discussion – Domestic Wells – Prop 68 Funding

- Stephanie A mentioned that she has invited Pete Leffler for next month's meeting to report out on the domestic well inventory project for the County. Pete has done some additional analysis and they modeled what domestic wells look like in terms of a multiple dry year scenario at the beginning, which isn't ideal. They're working on a technical memo and Pete is also going to share some maps of potential locations for monitoring wells. They have funding in this grant to install some monitoring wells at concentrations of domestic wells.
 - Tom W mentioned that since this agenda item will run a little longer next month, to schedule the Madera/Chowchilla RCD cover crops presentation for October. Jacob R mentioned he will make a note of that and let Amy S with the RCD know.
 - Igal T asked Stephanie if the group will be able to see a map during next month's presentation on how the domestic wells are drying up and where. This could help figure out if there is a pattern or trend among the domestic wells drying up across the County. Stephanie answered that the information Igal is asking about lies

with SHE. SHE would be able to provide more recent or live data. Pete's maps are going to provide a look into the future with dry domestic wells.

9. Discussion – Creek Fire / Forest Management / Watershed

- Jacob R commented that Doug Waltner with the Sierra Vista Scenic Byway Association reached out to him and mentioned that he, Tom W, and Bobby M had spoken a couple of weekends ago about collaborating on a tour with the Madera RWMG. Doug also mentioned that the Sierra Vista Scenic Byway focuses more on education with their tours (e.g., geology, botany, cattle grazing, archeology, etc.) as related to the Byway. Their plan for their tour this Fall is to focus on the effects and history of the Creek Fire. They're also going to talk about the causes of the fire, but they are mainly focusing on factual information on the fire itself. They are looking at doing the tour during the 2nd week in October, but they haven't set a date yet. They would like to collaborate with our tour if it works with the group's plans.
 - Bobby mentioned that the Byway Association is looking to focus more on educational facts for their tour.
 - Tom W asked Jacob to invite Doug to our next meeting to get some questions answered and finalize how we can combine our two tours.
- Jacob also mentioned that he got responses from people after sending out a "feeler" email to see group members' interest in attending a tour of the Creek Fire in Madera County. There were 10 organizations that expressed interest in attending the tour, with roughly 18 – 20 people total between those 10 organizations. Multiple people mentioned that it just depends on the day and time of the tour so they couldn't commit to attending the tour.
 - Tom W commented that they have done a tour like this in the past with the Forest Service and rented 3 big tour buses to haul everyone around since so many people signed up. It was a very interesting day.
 - Jacob will send out another email.

10. Discussion – Drought Working Group

- Jeannie H commented that the Madera County group had their meeting today, and the next meeting is scheduled for September 20th. At today's meeting, they had SHE talk about their programs, where they are with the number of tanks installed, how many domestic wells went dry, etc. in Madera County. They also had a demonstration on www.drought.gov by Jenny N. It's an interactive website that can be used to find out current and future drought conditions. County information, zip code information, etc. can be typed in and used to get information, maps, and other stuff. They also had Western United Dairies/Drought at the meeting. They also have 3 videos or webinars that can be used to find drought information. One that was shared was about funding that's available for different aspects of drought, energy, etc. For the next meeting, they are going to have Madera County Department of Environmental Health do a presentation on well permits (how to fill out a permit, what they are, etc.). Right now with wells going dry and there being a delay with getting wells drilled, they will be talking about the process and what needs to be done with that. Information gets sent out all the time, and hopefully people are getting educated and coordinated with drought information and getting the same information out there about the drought and where to go for available resources.
- Angela I provided some drought updates for the drought in Madera County for the month of July. SHE has 241 active water tanks installed in Madera County for the replacement/hailed water, they had 19 installed during July, and currently a large amount of drought call-ins are coming from the Fairmead Boulevard area in Madera County and the area North of Madera Lakes off Avenue 21 and Road 28 ½. SHE also reported 21 dry wells last month in July for Madera County.

11. Review & Approval – IRWM Project List

A. Chowchilla Management Zone Project Proposal

- Jacob R commented that the CMZ submitted a proposal to include on the group's IRWM Project List. It is essentially a duplicate of Projects 12 and 13 which is being done by SHE, and this project proposal can serve as a replacement to projects 12 and 13 if the group decides to reallocate funds to a different project or be funded again in the future when funds are available.
- A motion to add the Chowchilla Management Zone project to the IRWM Project List was made by Igal T; Gretchen H second; all voted; Motion passed unanimously.

B. SEMCU Project Updates – Projects 98 & 104

- Jacob R commented that projects 91 – 106 on the current IRWM Project List are SEMCU's projects, and they are looking to update 2 of them and remove the rest. SEMCU would like to keep projects 98 and 104, and update both projects as well.
 - Igal T mentioned that the changes they are proposing are minor for projects 98 and 104. They are just adding some more explanatory information, including cost estimates and contact information.
 - Igal T also commented that a dry well that was used for a study and was operated over 19 days out of a month and a half averaged 550 GPM of water taken in. The dry well yielded 45 acre-feet of water in 19 days of production. The dry well was producing 700 GPM of water taken in during the past, but the strata that they were filling got filled.
- A motion to make the changes to projects 98 and 104 above, and remove projects 97, 99, 100, 101, 102, 103, 105, and 106 from the IRWM Project List was made by Kristi R; Carl J second; all voted; Motion passed unanimously.

OLD BUSINESS

12. Sustainable Groundwater Management Act – SGMA – Report

- Stephanie A reported that the Madera County GSA continues implementation of their GSP. The County GSA has some grants that are wrapping up towards the end of this year, including one for land repurposing that develops an incentive structure. That will culminate in a white paper. They also have the WaterSMART Water Strategy grant for water markets, and that's wrapping up by the end of this year too. They are moving forward with the Prop 68 Implementation funds in the Madera and Chowchilla Subbasins (two separate projects). Both projects are for \$4.2 million with partner agencies for recharge.

13. Chowchilla Nitrate Control Program - Report

- Kristi R reported that they are continuing to do outreach in Madera County and a small part of Merced County in El Nido. They are starting to receive more interest and requests for water sampling and tests of domestic wells. They have been hosting in-person events which has been helpful in sparking interest so they will continue to do that in communities that they believe to be impacted by high nitrates in their drinking water.
 - Tom W asked if any funds are available to help fix the nitrate issue with domestic wells that test high. Kristi mentioned that it is part of their long-term plan at this point, their Preliminary Management Zone and Early Action Plan states that once a well is tested and shows high nitrates, they will provide the residents with replacement water and they also must decide, as a group, what their long-term solutions are. Long-term solutions could include ways to restore the wells, devices that can collect water out of the atmosphere, connecting homes to a small water system, etc. Short-term solutions are water replacement, bottled

water delivery, water kiosk, etc. Most residents have indicated they would prefer something installed in their home as a short-term solution, but they continue to seek feedback from those impacted by the high nitrates and what works best for them as both short and long-term solutions.

- Tom also asked if the nitrate numbers they have been seeing are high, and Kristi mentioned that they have been seeing some rather higher numbers for a few residents. They do believe that the drought could be impacting nitrate levels and causing them to be higher than normal, but they will continue testing and making sure that people have safe drinking water.

14. New/ Suggested Members for the Madera RWMG

- No new members suggested.

15. Future Agenda Items

- Jacob R will note the presentation by Pete Leffler with Luhdorff and Scalmanini for next month under the Prop 68 Funding – Domestic Wells agenda item.
- Jacob R will also include the Madera/Chowchilla RCD cover crops presentation on the agenda for the October meeting and suggest a few items to remove from the agenda for October's meeting to allow time for the 30-minute presentation.

16. Next Meeting

- Next meeting is scheduled for Monday, September 27th, 2021, at 1:30 pm on ZOOM for now, unless we can meet in person. If we can meet in person, meeting will be held at the Oakhurst location.

17. The meeting was adjourned at 2:28 pm.