

Merced Subbasin GSA

Governing Board Meeting

September 16, 2021





GSP Implementation Approach:

Options for Achieving GSP Demand Reduction
Objective

Demand Reduction Objective

- Merced Subbasin GSP set forth projects and management actions to obtain sustainability by 2040 – including significant demand reduction in MSGSA

“The MSGSA anticipates reductions will incrementally increase annually for the entire MSGSA area, until the total annual reduction achieves the needed balance. Achieving these reductions will likely require the MSGSA to utilize available methods, which may include: establishing a per-acre pumping allocation for water users in the MSGSA, possibly with a trading market; establishing fee structures tied to extracted volumes; and establishing easement or contract programs to pay for reduced groundwater use. During the first years of implementation, the MSGSA Governing Board will evaluate options and adopt necessary approaches.”
(Merced GSP, p. 6-6)

Demand Reduction Objective

[Annual reduction of consumptive use of groundwater]

- Near-term reduction objective is 15,000 acre-feet/year of reduced consumptive use of groundwater by end of Water Year 2025
- Longer-term goal estimated to be ~ 130,000 acre-feet/year by 2040
- Multiple approaches available that will need to adapt throughout implementation
- Current focus for the near-term objective is proposed to be voluntary land repurposing

Options for Reduction

- Implement per-acre allocation limits now
 - Set a cap on consumptive use from groundwater
 - Need to establish basis and design approach
- Rely fully on land repurposing
 - 30,000 to 50,000 acres no longer irrigating with groundwater
 - Design to have complementary land uses
- Charge fees
 - Fee per acre for irrigated lands
 - Fee per acre-foot extracted (tiered?)
 - Need to comply with Prop 218
- Hybrid: land repurposing, fees and allocations
 - Land repurposing (near term)
 - Allocation approach after extensive work with affected parties – e.g. begin in 2025/2026
 - Charge fees

What Are Other GSAs Doing?

- Only a few GSAs are implementing reduction actions already
- Most of those are using allocations with fees and most are irrigation districts that have a surface supply already being allocated and/or a relationship with all landowners:
 - Semitropic
 - Tri-County
 - Lower Tule/Pixley
 - Rosedale Rio-Bravo
- Some south valley GSAs are initiating land repurposing programs
 - Kaweah Regional Conservation Investment Strategy
 - Tule Basin Land and Conservation Trust
- Madera County is similar to MSGSA
 - Just adopted an allocation after 2+ years of stakeholder outreach
 - Includes fees and a land repurposing element

Recommended Approach

Phase 1 – Starting 2021 through end of Water Year 2025

1. Pursue and achieve the MSGSA Water Year 2025 objective to reduce consumptive use of groundwater by 15,000 acre-feet per year
2. Focus on land repurposing/fallowing and importing surface water into the GSA (flood waters or purchased water)
3. Develop and release year-to-year water budgets for growers to raise awareness
4. Design and adopt by Summer 2022 an additional Phase I Proposition 218 fee to fund the implementation of the Water Year 2025 objective
5. Hold public meetings to workshop allocation elements and approaches starting in 2021

Phase 2 – Starting in 2026

1. Adopt by the end of Water Year 2025 and implement starting in 2026 an allocation approach in combination with the continued land repurposing/fallowing and imported surface water into the GSA
2. Design and adopt an additional Phase 2 Proposition 218 fee



Discussion

Well Consistency Policy for Groundwater Well Permits

Well Permitting Policy Considerations

- **NEW WELLS:** there are three potential approaches:
 - Continue existing County policy – no new wells allowed
 - Temporarily continue existing County policy until other GSP implementation factors (allocation and CEQA issues) are resolved
 - Allow new wells, but with limits on per-acre allocation. This would require that an allocation be established now, and complicated CEQA issues be addressed.
- **REPLACEMENT WELLS:** there are two potential approaches
 - Continue existing County policy
 - Modify County policy to:
 - Address concerns of pumping within areas where subsidence equals or exceeds GSP objectives so as to condition the replacement to limit pumping above/below the Corcoran Clay
 - Limit extraction with a new basis

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