



Napa County

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Legislation Text

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TO: Technical Advisory Group for the Napa County Groundwater Sustainability Agency
FROM: Brian Bordona - Interim Director of Planning, Building and Environmental Services
REPORT BY: Jamison Crosby, Natural Resources Conservation Manager
SUBJECT: Groundwater Pumping Reduction Workplan - Update

RECOMMENDATION

The Technical Advisory Group (TAG) will receive an update on progress developing potential water conservation actions for the Groundwater Pumping Reduction Workplan (GPR Workplan). This will include an overview of the GPR Workplan, the draft results of the water conservation practices summary matrix, a discussion of development of an implementation plan and next steps. Several framing questions are included to receive feedback and direction from the TAG.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Staff and the technical team are continuing work on the GPR Workplan. An initial presentation was given at the February TAG and updates were provided at the March and April TAG meetings. TAG feedback at each prior meeting has been incorporated into the draft analysis being completed for the Workplan. It is anticipated that work will continue over the next several months. This is the fourth of several updates to the TAG. Information based on feedback and preliminary analysis completed by the technical team is being presented at this meeting, and this will be updated as the technical team completes its work and continues to receive feedback from the TAG.

Procedure

Staff introduces.

Questions and answers with the TAG.

Public comments.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

ENVIRONMENTAL DETERMINATION: The proposed action is not a project as defined by 14 California Code of Regulations 15378 (State CEQA Guidelines) and therefore CEQA is not applicable.

BACKGROUND AND DISCUSSION

Napa County GSA Staff and the technical team are continuing to work on the GPR Workplan. It is anticipated that work will proceed over the next several months. This is the fourth update to the TAG. Information and updates since the last TAG meeting are being presented (see Supporting Document A), and this will be updated as the technical team completes its work and receives feedback from the TAG.

The Groundwater Pumping Reduction Workplan (GPR Workplan, see draft outline, Supporting Document B) is being prepared to provide a roadmap for implementing measures to reduce groundwater pumping in the Napa Valley Subbasin. This Workplan is a companion document to the Napa County Vineyard and Winery Water Conservation Workplan. The GPR Workplan will describe the voluntary measures to conserve water, including reducing groundwater pumping. The GPR Workplan will include processes for improving the understanding of groundwater use in the Subbasin and evaluating the effectiveness of measures implemented to reduce groundwater pumping in relation to observed benefits to groundwater conditions and sustainability. The GPR Workplan will also include adaptive management and a process to invoke mandatory measures if voluntary measures are insufficient to achieve groundwater sustainability.

The GPR Workplan is based on a guiding framework that was developed with TAG input and includes the following: it should focus on voluntary actions that achieve groundwater benefits for the Subbasin, assess the costs and benefits of alternative actions and focus on those that are most cost-effective, leverage existing programs and opportunities to generate value to participants, and include an adaptive management process to adjust the program as data and sustainability indicators evolve.

Voluntary water conservation actions should provide a benefit to the Subbasin and to individuals that adopt them. The TAG has reviewed certification programs (Feb 2023), benchmarking programs (Apr 2023), and broader best practices for incentivizing adoption of water savings technologies and practices, including behavioral nudges and educational workshops and programming (Feb, Mar, Apr 2023). The project team has and is continuing to conduct outreach to support analysis of existing and potential water conservation practices. This includes outreach to certification programs as well as other industry organizations and experts.

Certification programs are one way to realize value from voluntary actions. Existing certifications for winegrapes have been reviewed to identify the potential for certifying specific water management practices, and what value these types of labels may generate. A preliminary update was presented at the March 2023 TAG meeting. Certification programs that have been reviewed include the California Sustainable Winegrowing Alliance, Napa Green, SIP Certified, Fish Friendly Farming, and Napa RCD LandSmart. The motivation for utilizing different certification programs ranges from regulatory compliance to intrinsic value for practices that producers are already utilizing. Many program participants increase adoption of newer technologies for certifications and as part of best management practices. It appears there are opportunities to expand certification of specific practices (and/or emphasize adoption of current, certified practices) that would support groundwater sustainability in the Subbasin.

“Benchmarking” is an approach to encourage changes in practices by showing how an individual compares to an (anonymous) group of their peers. Benchmarking programs have proven to be successful in utilities, both for energy and residential water use. Benchmarking provides a framework to track and evaluate performance, identify room for improvement, and save both resource use and related costs. At the April 2023 TAG meeting, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s Energy Star program was presented as a case study for a benchmarking program. The case study provided an opportunity to explore how a benchmarking program for water use in vineyards and wineries (and potentially other sectors) may similarly be developed in Napa to help

reduce groundwater pumping and maintain sustainability under the GSP. A key issue identified by the TAG is the variability in water use across different growers, crops, and microclimates. A benchmarking program in which a grower could track across their own portfolio over space and time may overcome some of these challenges.

FRAMING QUESTIONS FOR TAG DELIBERATIONS

The following framing questions have been prepared for the TAG in consideration of groundwater pumping reductions to achieve overarching GSP objectives for the Napa Valley Subbasin:

The GPR Workplan will include a detailed summary of each water conservation practice (see Supporting Documents). This summary will include costs and benefits for existing and potential practices, including vineyard-specific adoption costs and potential water savings that benefit the Subbasin. To organize and summarize findings in a concise format, a matrix concept was developed whereby practices would be ranked by criteria including costs, private benefits, water savings benefits, implementation timeline, overall feasibility, and other required studies. The concept was presented to the TAG in March for feedback and discussion, and the draft findings are being presented at this meeting. Included is a proposal to focus on the practices that show the potential for the highest impact.

Question: Are the matrix findings consistent with your experience? Do the proposed practices seem like the right ones to prioritize?

The GPR Workplan will also include an implementation plan, which the technical team will begin to outline in May and June and will present to the TAG in July. The implementation will cover voluntary practices, education, and benchmarking, assessing the effectiveness of the voluntary program, and an adaptive management process with potential mandatory measures if the voluntary program is ineffective. The implementation plan will also define when and how different actions could be triggered as the subbasin is adaptively managed over time. This meeting provides an overview of some of the components of implementation: namely, incentives for participation, funding, education/outreach, defining metrics for success, and developing the adaptive management process if voluntary efforts are unsuccessful.

Question: What approaches should be considered for the Implementation Plan? How should options identified in the GPR Workplan (e.g., water conservation, certification, benchmarking) be selected for implementation? Should other factors in addition to groundwater metrics trigger certain implementation actions?

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

- A. ERA Economics PowerPoint Presentation: Napa Valley Subbasin, Groundwater Pumping Reduction Workplan, May 2023
- B. Groundwater Pumping Reduction Workplan, Draft Outline, February 6, 2023