2022 Indio Subbasin Alternative Plan Update

Public Workshop #1

SUMMARY

February 20, 2020 at 2:00 pm – 4:00 pm

Coachella Valley Water District, Board Room

75-515 Hovley Lane East, Palm Desert, CA 92211

Welcome and Introductions

Mr. Steve Bigley, Coachella Valley Water District, welcomed everyone to the public workshop. Mr. Edwin Lin, Todd Groundwater Inc., presented the meeting objectives and agenda, and introduced the project team working on the Indio Subbasin Alternative Plan Update. The Indio Subbasin Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSAs) are Coachella Valley Water District (CVWD), Coachella Water Authority (CWA), Desert Water Agency (DWA), and Indio Water Authority (IWA). The Consultant team includes Todd Groundwater Inc. and Woodard & Curran Inc.

Overview of Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA)

Mr. Lin presented an overview of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA). SGMA provides a framework for sustainable management of groundwater basins, promotes local management, and sets regulatory deadlines for submitting plans and reporting progress towards sustainable management. SGMA also offers State assistance in the form of funding, data, and technical support. Local GSAs are required to prepare a Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) or submit an Alternative Plan. "Sustainable" management is defined as the management and use of groundwater in a manner that can be maintained without causing undesirable results.

Mr. Lin explained that the Indio Subbasin is designated as a medium-priority basin and is subject to SGMA legislation. The State has recognized the existing water management plan, the *2010 Coachella Valley Water Management Plan* (CVWMP), as a functionally equivalent Alternative Plan. The State recommends that the Indio Subbasin GSAs quantify sustainability criteria and incorporate additional elements into the *2022 Alternative Plan Update*. SGMA also requires that the Indio Subbasin be sustainably managed within 20 years.

Each Indio Subbasin GSA is responsible and has the authority for water management within its respective boundaries. The Indio GSAs have a history of cooperation, which is ongoing. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) has been executed and establishes an intent to foster cooperation, coordination, and communication regarding management of the Indio Subbasin. The GSAs have also agreed on collaboration and joint submission of the Alternative Plan, Annual Reports, and 5-Year Plan Updates.

Mr. Lin presented the current SGMA timeline for the Indio Subbasin. The Indio GSAs formed in June 2017 and the Alternative Plan, submitted in December 2016, was approved by DWR in July 2019. The 2022 Alternative Plan Update must be submitted by January 1, 2022. From then, the GSAs are

required to prepare four 5-Year Plan Updates, with the expectation that the Indio Subbasin will achieve groundwater sustainability by 2042.

Water Management Planning in the Indio Subbasin

Mr. Lin presented the history of water management in the Indio Subbasin. Multiple sources of water have been developed to ensure a reliable supply for the region. Stormflows from the Whitewater River were captured and used for groundwater recharge beginning in 1918. The Coachella Canal, which imports Colorado River water, was completed in 1949. CVWD and DWA contracts for State Water Project (SWP) water began in 1963. SWP water is exchanged for Colorado River water via the Colorado River Aqueduct as there are no physical SWP facilities to deliver the SWP allocations. Since 1973, this SWP exchange water has been used to recharge the Indio Subbasin at the Whitewater River Groundwater Replenishment Facility. Finally, water recycling within the Indio Subbasin began in 1965.

Mr. Lin then presented the history of the CVWMP and other water management plans. The 2010 CVWMP serves as the Indio Subbasin Alternative Plan. The Plan assessed future growth and land use changes, estimated future water demands and supplies, and established data collection and monitoring programs to track groundwater conditions and Plan performance. The 2010 CVWMP also identified management actions needed to meet current and future water demands in a cost effective and reliable manner. Mr. Lin then explained that the Alternative Plan shared the same goals and met the requirements of a GSP. Agencies in the Indio Subbasin use a combination of management actions to meet local water demands, including local stormwater water and imported water for direct replenishment of groundwater, non-potable water and recycled water for source substitution, and agricultural, golf, and urban conservation. The Alternative Plan has resulted in a significant increase in groundwater storage across the Indio Subbasin and groundwater levels have increased regionally. More work is needed to ensure continued success of the Alternative Plan.

Indio Subbasin Alternative Plan Update

Mr. Lin described the purpose of the Alternative Plan and outlined the tasks involved in preparing the plan. Tasks include assessing the existing plan, estimating future water demands and supplies, establishing quantifiable sustainability goals, and implementing a stakeholder and public outreach plan. The Alternative Plan Update will include an update of the Coachella Valley groundwater flow model to support the development of current and future water budgets. The process will include eight quarterly public workshops, in which the project team will report on progress, share results and findings, and solicit input and feedback. The 2022 Alternative Plan Update Report Draft is expected to be ready for public review and comment in early Fall 2021. The Final Report will be prepared in Winter 2021.

Mr. Lin encouraged workshop participants to visit the Indio Subbasin website (www.IndioSubbasinSGMA.org) for more information on the planning process and to learn how to get involved. He emphasized that public participation and input are important components to this planning process. The goals of the public outreach task are to keep the public informed about the planning process, engage diverse interested parties, and respond to and incorporate public concerns and feedback.

Public Comment

Mr. Lin invited workshop participants to ask questions and provide comments:

- The East Area of Benefit (east of Washington) has been depleted since 2010 and is down 4.5 million acre-feet. SGMA doesn't necessarily address putting water back into the [Indio Subbasin] and some wells are 200 feet down.

- The SWP is dependent on the Delta Conveyance Project (Delta Fix) and may add 22,000 acre-feet per year (AFY) of water (8%) in deliveries. However, the cost is $380 million in present value, which is $1 billion over a 30-year timeline. The 2010 CVWMP shows a 14% conservation goal for agriculture and a 20% reduction for Municipal & Institutional demands. Agricultural users have never met their 14% conservation goal. Why would we pay $1 billion for the Delta Fix, when we would save equally as much through agricultural conservation?
- CVWD has more water than it knows what to do with. The Palm Desert Groundwater Replenishment Facility was built so that it could store the water. The CVWD Board of Directors has taken the approach to sell water as cheaply as possible to get rid of that water. We need to look more at conservation. Why can't we bank that water in the groundwater basin or Lake Mead or somewhere else?
- Golf irrigation is an "unreasonable use" of water. CVWD's goal is to get golf courses off groundwater supply and sell Coachella Canal water.
- Consumptive returns of agriculture water amount to 90 AFY. However, this water hits the aquitard and doesn't get back into the aquifer. This should not be counted as "sustainable groundwater."
- The 2010 CVWMP is based on assumptions of 138 golf courses. I would love to see rapid growth of golf, but there is not enough playership to support this kind of growth.
    - Do we have access to growth projections from the golf industry? We would like this data.
- Is the GSP goal for 2042 to get back to 1970s levels? Or is this undetermined at this point?
    - The goal is to prevent undesirable results. We have not determined "undesirable results" for Indio Subbasin yet. Example goals include maintaining the good trend we are on or not allowing groundwater elevations to reduce further.
- Will all six sustainable management criteria identified by DWR be addressed?
    - Five sustainable management criteria will be addressed. Seawater intrusion is not applicable to Indio Subbasin and will not be addressed.
- Why are we not addressing seawater intrusion? We don't have ocean water, but we do have high salinity water intrusion from the Salton Sea.
    - We are looking at this issue under the "water quality" criteria. We will evaluate salinity along the margin between the Salton Sea and the Indio Subbasin.
- Fifty-two percent of golf courses are connected to the Non-Potable Water (NPW) system. Do we have a list of those golf courses and what is the process for connecting new systems?
    - CVWD will follow up with the commenter on the process for connecting golf courses to the NPW system.
- How will the Coachella Valley Salt and Nutrient Management Plan (SNMP) be incorporated into the Alternative Plan?
    - The SNMP is currently under review by the Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB). The RWQCB said it is planning additional outreach and studies. We need to move forward with the Alternative Plan Update while waiting on the RWQCB's decision on the SNMP. The Alternative Plan will report out on the progress of the SNMP for the 2022 Alternative Plan Update.

- The SNMP is a Coachella Valley-wide effort and is not specific to the Indio Subbasin. We will need to incorporate all stakeholders. The first SNMP took three years. This Alternative Plan update is due in less than two years.

- The RWQCB released findings on Coachella Valley SNMP yesterday.
  - CVWD has not received notice that the findings were released, but will look for them.
  - The GSAs are working to address salt and nutrient management issues through the SNMP development process, and DWR is aware of this approach.
- The CVWD rate system disincentivizes source substitution – there is a disparity between the Replenishment Assessment Charges (RACs) and Coachella Canal rates. The golf course rates should be modeled after incentives that coastal California water agencies are using. For example, Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP) based its water budgets on 80% Model Water Efficient Landscape ordinance (MWELO) if signed up for the program. In the program, operations decisions are open/free.

Next Steps

Mr. Lin announced to workshop participants that the next Public Workshop will be held on May 21, 2020 from 2:00 – 4:00 PM at a location to be determined. He reminded participants to make sure they're on the stakeholder email list to receive workshop updates. For additional information, please contact Rosalyn Prickett at: IndioSubbsinSGMA@woodardcurran.com or (858) 875-7420.