

Data Collection, Characterization, Monitoring

Charge from Groundwater Management Area Advisory Committee

Working Group Members

Melanie Redding (Chair); Andres Cervantes; Bob Stevens; Charles (Pony) Ellingson; David Bowen; Chelsea Durfey; Dave Cowan; Donald Brown; Doug Simpson; Elizabeth Sanchez; Eric Winiecki; Frank Lyall; Ginny Stern; Jaclyn Hancock; Jan Whitefoot; Jean Mendoza, Jennifer MacDonald; John Van Wingerden, Kevin Lindsey; Laurie Crowe; Lino Guerra; Mike Shuttleworth; Ralph Fisher; René Fuentes; Robert Farrell; Ron Cowin; Scott Stephen; Sheila Fleming; Steve Swope; Stuart Turner; Dr. Troy Peters

Meetings/Calls Dates

Meeting: Wednesday, October 12, 2016, 1:00-3:00 PM
Call Number: 509-574-2353 pin: 2353#

Participants

Present: Melanie Redding* (Chair), Vern Redifer, Jean Mendoza, Margie Van Cleve, David Bowen, Steve George, Steve Swope*, Pony Ellingson*, Chris Saunders (County support staff) *via phone

Key Discussion Points

The meeting convened at 1:04pm. After the customary introductions, Vern passed out a document from the Pacific Groundwater Group dated June 8, 2016, titled “~~Draft~~ Lower Valley GWMA Proposed Ambient Groundwater Monitoring Network”. The edited document contained changes made by PGG in response to comments from Data working group members. Vern hoped that the group could recommend the report to the GWAC at the October 20th meeting, where he anticipated further discussion about allocating resources based on the report’s contents.

Discussion ensued on whether this report had been sent out in a timely manner so as to solicit adequate and informed comment from working group members. Vern cautioned that delaying the matter until the December GWAC meeting would hinder the ability to install the monitoring stations by the Spring of 2017, as laid out in the timeline on pages 11-12.

Vern pulled up the submitted comments, contained in the document “AMN final draft comments from data workgroup”, and the group proceeded to discuss them. Melanie reiterated that PGG’s ambient monitoring network could be supplemented with more testing sites or monitoring beyond nitrates at a future date. PGG had attempted to address concerns about shallow basalt in Section 3.1 (pages 4-5) of their report.

A group member inquired, whatever number of well monitors are installed, how will we know whether they’re pointing us in a direction to know that we need to expand our monitoring

capacity? Vern suggested that this could be addressed by ongoing consultation with PGG. Group members representing PGG stated that they can better answer this question if they have more clarity as to what goals the GWMA and/or their successor entities want to accomplish. Acknowledging that there can be a high degree of variability between well results, they stated that the goal of a broad network was to come up with an average variability that would be useful enough to get an average picture.

Vern cautioned the group that the GWMA's budget did not allow for the installation of all of PGG's suggested wells by the end of the GWMA's mandate in December 2017. Adding to the system would most likely have to be a formal recommendation to the GWMA's successors, in his view. Another member saw the PGG report as an early phase plan designed to inform the implementation of a broader nitrate mitigation plan down the road. Once more data became available, it would be easier to approach legislators with funding requests for future endeavors.

It was decided that copies of PGG's latest report would be e-mailed out to working group members after the meeting, with a deadline of noon on October 17th (Monday) for submitting comments, questions, or concerns. The PGG monitoring plan would be tentatively placed on the October 20th GWAC agenda, subject to removal if working group members raised substantial objections upon review.

Results of voting on Other Monitoring Objectives: Melanie reviewed the results of the working group's rankings of PGG's 2013 recommended monitoring objectives. "Water Supply Aquifer" had taken the top spot by a comfortable margin, with "Hot Spots" in second place. She felt that a broad-enough base of workgroup members had voted since the last meeting to bring the matter before the October 20th GWAC for discussion.

Other Monitoring Factors: After stating that a cost analysis of what was affordable was still in the works, Melanie invited the group to give input on how they saw a monitoring program being implemented.

In terms of hot spots, a group member wanted to see wellhead assessments performed on previously-sampled wells with nitrate concentrations in excess of 25 mg/L in order to identify what might be leading to the contamination of those wells. Vern stated that the county already had some of that data. Doing further assessments would require obtaining permission from the property owner. The group kept the idea open for consideration.

A member stated that they had heard from USGS and Ecology that it was possible to get a comprehensive assessment of Lower Valley aquifers using private and public wells. The group also discussed how to handle the question of well depth. It was PGG's intention to focus on shallow alluvial wells, although it was possible to have different ranges within any network. Yakima County had a separate contract out looking at water supply issues, which could also be a useful data source.

Melanie stated that so far she had only heard positives about using existing wells for monitoring purposes, and asked the group if this reflected their opinions. A group member replied that it depended on the goal. For example, are we trying to find new hot spots, or address the existing ones? Melanie reiterated that cost estimates were in the works for a plan to address hot spots. Another group member inquired whether cost estimates would include private wells. Pony

replied that existing wells were a good way to measure the water supply aquifer, but that drilling should occur under water tables because it provides information not available otherwise. Asked whether PGG had done any 3D modeling of the water supply aquifer, Pony answered that they had done a study that included seven sedimentary layers, but that it hadn't been classified by aquifer. Department of Health data on deep municipal wells, combined with data on county-owned wells, could be utilized to paint a picture of water supply aquifers.

Melanie felt that the Data workgroup had enough to tell the GWAC in broad terms, "This is our next step; addressing common water supply aquifers using existing wells". The GWAC members would ask questions and discuss the matter, vote on establishing this as a top-priority goal for an ambient monitoring system to address, and then Data could fill in the details and line up the resources. This would take place at the same time as they were reviewing PGG's latest report.

Melanie asked the group what their priorities were beyond the constraints of an ambient monitoring program. Vern noted that the nitrate loading results should be forthcoming from the Department of Agriculture soon, and that these would inform the development of any program.

A member noted that several groups had discussed the subject of identifying abandoned wells and the potentially significant costs of fixing them. Discussion ensued on whether this item was best handled by Data, or by a joint meeting of different working groups.

The group also discussed the question of passive vs. active samplers. Vern stated that passive samplers were less expensive in the short term, and that while normally, he would lean in favor of long-term savings, the expiration of the GWMA's mandate in December 2017 tilted the scales in favor of getting as much data as fast as possible, in order to hand off to their successors.

The meeting adjourned at 3:00pm.

Resources Requested

Recommendations for GWAC

Approval of PGG's latest proposal will be tentatively placed on the October 20th GWAC agenda, subject to removal if working group members raise objections after reviewing the document.

"Water Supply Aquifer" and "Hot Spots" will be recommended to the October 20th GWAC as priority items for an ambient monitoring program to address.

Deliverables/Products Status

Proposed Next Steps

Working group members will review PGG's latest report and submit comments, questions, or concerns to Melanie by noon on October 17th.

Agenda items not covered will be moved to the November 9th Data Working Group agenda.

Abandoned wells may be added to the Data workgroup agenda, subject to discussion with other working group chairs who are interested in the issue.