

ALAB MEETING MINUTES

Monday, September 9, 2013

Members and Alternates Present: Jean-Pierre Wolff, Cindy Steinbeck, Lisen Bonnier, Bill Struble, Jerry Diefenderfer, Dick Nock, Richard Hawley, Don Warden, Chuck Pritchard, David Pruitt, Richard Quandt, Mark Battany

Absent Members: Tom Ikeda, Mark Pearce, Eric Michielssen, Neil Roberts

Guests Present: Patricia Wilmore - Paso Robles Wine Country Alliance (Government Affairs Coordinator)

Staff Present: Marc Lea – SLO County Dept. of Agriculture

1. **Call to Order:** 6:04 pm by Chair, Jean-Pierre Wolff. Quorum present.
2. **Open Comment:** none
3. **Announcements from ALAB Members & County Ag Department Staff Updates:**
 - Chuck Pritchard passed out the NRCS publication “Conquest of the Land Through 7,000 Years”. The document was written in 1938, but is still germane to the issue of resource management, especially considering that 75 years is a drop in the bucket in the grand scheme of human history. Chuck noted that there are some tough decisions that are going to have to be made with regard to managing our finite resources, and he implored everyone to take the time to read this valuable information.
 - Dick Nock commented that agriculture really needs to lead the way on the water issue.
 - Marc Lea gave updates on the “Economic Contributions of San Luis Obispo County” report. The report presented valuable information and garnered a good amount of interest from the media, although it was somewhat overshadowed by the gravity of the Paso Robles Groundwater Basin situation. Only a small number of hard copies of the report were printed, but the PDF is available on the Department of Agriculture’s website.
 - Marc also noted that the North County Habitat Conversation Plan (HCP) has been put on hold due to a lack of staffing in the Planning Department and a lack of funding. He did not have any additional details, but can contact the Planning Department if anyone would like further explanation.
 - Rick Hawley mentioned that the Cambria CSD put intent to serve notices on hold. A lot of water was used over the Labor Day Holiday weekend, and it’s clear that Cambria is also dealing with severe water shortage issue, not unlike the situation going on within the Paso Robles Groundwater Basin.

- Dick Nock reported that Ag Preserve land will be considered for solar production without having to go through an EIR process. This led to a discussion regarding solar issues. It was reported that the Agriculture Preserve Review Committee (APRC) recently recommended to the Board of Supervisors to allow solar production on grazing land, but not prime farmland, without an EIR. Lisen asked about the level of water use needed on these solar farms in order to wash the panels and manage dust levels due to Valley Fever concerns. Questions were generated regarding solar facilities property tax status. Are they exempt from property taxes? Are there differences between the large solar facilities and smaller ones on private property? Marc will followup on the property tax questions and James Caruso from Planning will be invited to answer questions regarding the solar permitting streamlining grant that he is coordinating.
4. **Previous Minutes:** It was noted that Jerry's motion for more rain in the August minutes was obviously facetious, but that there was no need to amend the minutes. It was also noted that Lynda Auchinachie did an excellent job recording the minutes, capturing all of the comments from a long and complex meeting. **MOTION:** Approve August 19, 2013, minutes: **Motion: Pritchard 2nd: Struble Approved: Unanimous**
5. **Establishing ALAB meeting location, meeting dates, and meeting times for 2014**
- Marc reported that the UC Cooperative Extension auditorium will be available for use in 2014, and the meetings can remain in this location unless someone has another preference AND access to another location site. Everyone agreed to maintain the 2014 meetings at the UC Cooperative Extension auditorium.
 - The group then discussed the possibility of changing the meeting from Mondays to a different day of the week, or adjusting to an earlier time. Rick H. commented that he has arranged his schedule specifically to allow for Monday evening meetings and that it would be difficult to change to another day or time. Richard Q. mentioned that the Santa Barbara County version of ALAB does host their meetings in the afternoon. Don mentioned that the reason that ALAB meetings had historically been held during the evening was to accommodate people's work schedules, and that it can be difficult for agriculturalists to get away from their farming operations during the busy times of the year. Bill S. agreed, and added that during harvest season there are crews to be supervised and getting away during the day may be impossible. Jerry commented that earlier is better for him since he has a long distance to travel. Jean-Pierre suggested that the meetings remain on Monday, but that we explore changing them to an earlier time.
 - The group agreed to have Marc conduct an email poll of members and gather their preference amongst a 2 p.m., 4 p.m., or 6 p.m. meeting start time. Marc will report back at the next meeting with the results of the member poll.

6. Evaluation of the Urgency Ordinance covering the Paso Robles Groundwater Basin and its effects on local agriculture (Chair Jean-Pierre Wolff)

- Jean-Pierre initiated comments on the topic. He regularly attends the Water Resources Advisory Committee (WRAC) meetings as a member of the Regional Water Quality Control Board. He believes that there is a bit of a disconnect between WRAC and the adoption of the urgency ordinance, and that there has been minimal input in WRAC from the agricultural industry. Jean-Pierre suggested that there should be more interaction between WRAC and ALAB, especially on issues that are so closely tied to agriculture. He asked if it would be beneficial for WRAC and the County to have more input from ALAB. Jean-Pierre offered to discuss the issue with members of WRAC and inquire about how the two groups could better communicate.
- Rick agreed with Jean-Pierre's comments.
- Lisen suggested having a standing WRAC update item on the ALAB agenda so that we could remember to cover any upcoming crossover items that ALAB may need to get involved with on upcoming WRAC agendas.
- Patricia Wilmore noted that we could begin by simply making public comments at a WRAC meeting regarding the need for more involvement from ALAB.
- Chuck asked if we should have ALAB representation on the WRAC committee.
- The group noted that having permanent representation may not be possible or desirable since WRAC may not be able to add another agricultural representative and that their rules of procedure need to be followed. In addition, it may be difficult for ALAB to find someone available who can attend every WRAC meeting; we would also need an alternate available and that may be taking us down a path that we are not ready to permanently commit to. It was agreed that it would be easier to comment on issues that pertained to ALAB as they arose, but that we should do a better job of tracking WRAC activities by monitoring their agendas and notes. It was decided to add a standing item to our ALAB agenda where we would discuss current or upcoming WRAC issues.
- Jerry mentioned that he is not familiar with the current agricultural representatives on the WRAC committee, and did not want to appear to be criticizing the current representation without additional knowledge. He would be willing to offer assistance to WRAC if they needed our assistance, but he wasn't fully apprised of the status of the current ag representative's involvement and wasn't sure that assistance was necessary.
- The group concurred that this didn't need to be a formal process, but rather that we should seek more collaboration with WRAC and also do a better job of staying up to date with the WRAC meetings.
- The group decided that we had spent enough time on the topic of collaboration between ALAB and WRAC, and that we should move on to a discussion of the Urgency Ordinance itself.

- Marc mentioned that we are in the midst of the 45-day period of the Urgency Ordinance.
- Chuck asked if the Blue Ribbon Committee report had been released yet.
- Cindy mentioned the importance of the vested rights issue. Growers will potentially have to submit evidence to the Planning Department for decline or approval.
- Jerry commented that agriculturalists will now need a permit to plant. Whether that is good or bad is uncertain, but it's another step that must be followed and he is not sure that's what the ordinance intended. Jerry also wondered how you would gain vesting rights when there wasn't a permit process in place prior to August 27th.
- Cindy discussed how in the past, ag operations over the PRGWB were not subject to this type of regulation, and it's a huge shift in the way of doing agriculture and that change in procedure must be recognized and acknowledged.
- Rick agreed that it IS a big difference, and that is exactly the point and that change was necessary because there is a crisis situation.
- Jean-Pierre added that the Board needed to take measurable, defensible actions or open up the County to additional regulatory pressures. They had to show a good faith effort at addressing the problem in order to prevent further depletion of the aquifer. The need for people to drill deeper wells due to a ground water basin decline doesn't automatically trigger any involvement of the State and Regional Water Quality Control Board. However if people are drilling deeper due to wells drying-up and not reaching any water or the wells water quality is degrading compared to a previous healthy ground water basin, then the State and Regional Water Quality Control Board may be required to become involved with the issue.
- Marc mentioned that the exact timing of the hearing to extend the Urgency Ordinance is not known at this time. During that hearing, the Board will also likely make a decision on defining the "vested rights" exemption that is included in the ordinance. The Urgency Ordinance will expire on October 11th; if the hearing is scheduled for October 8th, then the vested rights information would be available for review at ALAB's October 7th meeting.
- Don mentioned that County Public Works has been charged with bringing back information to the Board on what type of water district is possible or even preferred. Don asked if ALAB was going to get involved with that discussion.
- Jean-Pierre said that Public Works will be commenting on what type of management system would be best. He asked the group if we should invite Public Works or possibly PRAAGS and PRO Water Equity to address ALAB and explain some of the different options.
- Jerry added that the Public Works staff report would be helpful if it explains the various options regarding the different types of water districts.
- Jean-Pierre mentioned that there are success stories out there, and examples of situations that have improved, such as in the Pajaro Valley Water District and the Santa Rosa area. He continued that there is more than one way to skin a cat, and that the

success stories have varied with some being irrigation districts and others being drinking water districts.

- Richard Q. relayed the example of the situation in the Santa Maria area. Fifteen years ago, the Santa Maria government made the decision to expand available water supplies at great expense, but they made the conscious decision that it was better for the urban areas to have access to State water and leave the groundwater for use by agricultural operations. It is possible to develop other sources of water.
- All agreed that a wide variety of efforts would be required to ultimately solve this issue. Additional capture of water, higher re-use of water, along with conservation methods all need to be a part of the solution. Everyone also agreed that leadership was needed to avoid potential water wars and competing lawsuits, and in order to develop genuine long-term solutions.
- The group discussed requesting speakers for future meetings that could inform ALAB on possible solutions to the groundwater shortages in the PRGWB. It was mentioned that it would be helpful to have PRAAGS and PRO Water Equity give us a presentation on their suggested solutions. After further discussion, it was decided that those two groups could be worth hearing from in the future, but that first, ALAB would like to have someone from the Blue Ribbon Committee address the group and discuss various options.

7. Discussion and evaluation of countywide water challenges (Chair Jean-Pierre Wolff): we ran out of time to sufficiently address this topic and it will be carried over to subsequent meetings.

8. Future Agenda Items: Next meeting: October 7, 2013

- ALAB Meeting time; Paso Robles Groundwater Basin issue; Countywide water challenges

Meeting Adjourned: 8:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Marc Lea, County Department of Agriculture/Weights and Measures