

Creston Advisory Body



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June 20, 2013

San Luis Obispo County Board of Supervisors
County Government Center
San Luis Obispo, California 93408

RE: Adoption of Emergency Measures over the Paso Robles Groundwater Basin

Dear Supervisors,

The Creston Advisory Body (CAB) met on June 19, 2013 at the Creston Community Church for a regularly scheduled meeting. The June meeting, as well as every monthly meeting for several months, had water as one of the most important topics of discussion. It is our understanding that the County has declared the PR Groundwater Basin is at a Severity Level III, with the latest data from the Groundwater Basin Update (2012) indicating that the Basin is essentially in overdraft. At every meeting we have, there are new reports of water levels dropping in local wells and an increase in the frequency of water trucking to those whose wells have dried up. Some of these people can not afford to drill new wells. Creston residents are united in their concern over the water crisis.

The members of the CAB and the attending public are in agreement that although long term measures for securing supplemental water are useful, there is a huge problem now that needs to be addressed immediately with an array of emergency measures. The drop in the water table is currently affecting families in our community and it is only going to get worse through the summer. There is no alternative but to begin to slow the pumping immediately or there will be no tomorrows for many of our local residents. They won't be able to continue living here and they won't be able to sell their properties because they will be worthless without water.

The following emergency measures were discussed and suggested as items that the Blue Ribbon Committee should endorse and the Board of Supervisors should consider for immediate implementation.

Purpose:

- 1) Stop the increase in pumping until the basin is stabilized**
- 2) Reduce future unnecessary pumping**
- 3) Stop wasteful water usage overall**

1. Stop the building of new Ag ponds. Dry ponds of 1 acre foot or less for catching rainwater and recharging the Basin are okay. Farmers need to rethink the type of crops they plant, and crops that use less water and aren't susceptible to frost damage.
2. Create an allocation system for new wells, allowing only a fixed number per year. The allocation system would be similar to the one used in the past to restrict number of new residences in the County. Re-drilling of wells that have gone dry would be exempt from getting a new allocation.
3. Require new wineries to install recycling catch basins so all processing water is captured and reused.
4. Install flow meters on wells with discharge pipes of 3" or larger and require reporting of usage. This would only impact large pumpers. Vineyards have claimed they already have flow meters so this would not be a hardship. Also, the vineyards, who are already only using "their fair share," won't care since they will be okay. Data bases already exists that could be used for collecting reported information (i.e., either the system for tracking pesticide/herbicide permits or the system for filing run off plans). This requirement makes sense because irrigated Ag pumps 79% of the water from main

Basin. Additionally to add teeth to the measure, the penalty for not reporting would be risking revocation of Williamson Act contracts, or denial of tax payer subsidized crop insurance. 71% of Ag over the Basin is in Williamson Act (pay 83% less taxes than they would otherwise) and many have tax payer subsidized crop insurance. Additionally the names of non-compliers will be made public.

5. No use of overhead sprinklers. Impose fines on properties with standing water or repeated breaks or leakage from drip systems. Leaks should be repaired within 24 hours of occurrence or the water should be turned off.

6. Make potable water source available to assist those whose wells have gone dry, or who need it in the interim while they drill a new well. Many people are already trucking water and it is costly.

7. No subdividing or lot splits until the Basin stabilizes. Many who currently complain about rural residential water usage are the ones who have pushed for allowing subdividing to occur in the past.

8. Impose a bonding requirement on new vineyards. They must post a bond to insure they will do no harm to their neighbor's wells. Consider a "zone of impact system." If a new vineyard is planted all the neighboring properties adjacent or within ½ mile of the vineyard, "zone of impact," would be entitled to restitution if the level in their wells drop below a certain level (50ft?) and most definitely if their well goes dry.

9. Create incentives for new construction that install gray water recovery systems. Such as no property tax on the cost of the improvements (like solar panels or other renewable energy programs).

10. Make permits for vineyards discretionary so they have to go through review process. No vineyard planting on slopes greater than 15 degrees. And/Or, no planting of vineyards on lands that have not been previously irrigated.

11. Require water offsets for new irrigated crops like they do for development. For each acre of irrigated Ag planted, 4 acres must be set aside un-irrigated. Rationale: If we divided the water up by acreage over the basin there would only be 0.19 AF/acre and most crops, including grapes need 1 AF/acre or more of water, so to use the limited water fairly those who want to use 1 AF/acre would need to offset their usage somehow.

The primary authority the Board of Supervisors has for assisting with the current water crisis is the management of land use in the County. To shirk this responsibility in the face of imminent disaster that many residents of this County are sure to face if the Paso Robles Groundwater Basin is not stabilized, or worse destroyed forever, is unthinkable. Please continue forward with finding a water management structure that gives equal representation to landowners over the Basin when voting and when deciding on how water is to be allocated. In the meantime, we ask that you discuss and adopt meaningful emergency measures at the earliest possible time (in July rather than waiting until August) in order to stave off an even worse disaster.

The CAB representatives voted **unanimously**, with the support of the attending public, to recommend that the County implement steps immediately, such as implementing appropriate "Urgent Moratoriums", long term land use measures and establishing a basin-wide management structure, to stem the run away increase in pumping from the basin. Management of the basin can protect everyone's water rights and keep our local economy safe.

Sincerely,
Sheila Lyons
CAB Chairperson

Cc: Courtney Howard, Water Resources Engineer, SLO County Public Works Department
Larry Werner, Chairperson PR Groundwater Basin Management Blue Ribbon Committee
Supervisors Paul Teixeira, Debbie Arnold, Frank Mecham, Adam Hill & Bruce Gibson