

ALAB MEETING MINUTES

Monday, October 7, 2013

Members and Alternates Present: Jean-Pierre Wolff, Lisen Bonnier, Bill Struble, Jerry Diefenderfer, Dick Nock, Richard Hawley, Tom Ikeda, Don Warden, Chuck Pritchard, Mark Battany, Dan Rodrigues, Claire Wineman, Joy Fitzhugh, Eric Michielssen

Absent Members: Mark Pearce, Cindy Steinbeck, Neil Roberts, David Pruitt

Guests Present: Larry Werner – Chair Blue Ribbon Committee for the Paso Robles Groundwater Basin Management Plan, Patricia Wilmore - Paso Robles Wine Country Alliance (Government Affairs Coordinator)

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

1. **Call to Order:** 6:00 pm by Chair, Jean-Pierre Wolff. Quorum present.
2. **Open Comment:** none
3. **Announcements from ALAB Members & County Ag Department Staff Updates:**
 - Eric Michielssen shared that the annual California State Grange Convention will be held October 9 – 13, 2013, in Sebastopol. San Luis Obispo is hoping to host next year. There are typically 300-400 Grangers and the event would include local vendors and workshops on farming and gardening.
 - Lisen Bonnier reminded ALAB members that Cal Poly is selling compost and there are deals this month. Jean-Pierre added that they now have a screener therefore the quality of compost has improved.
 - Jerry Diefenderfer asked about the location of the temporary Farm Bureau office. Joy Fitzhugh and Tom Ikeda indicated the office, without a conference room, will be located off South Higuera. The new permanent office, with a conference room, will be located across from the airport and the target move in date is sometime in 2015.
 - Jean-Pierre Wolff updated ALAB members on his effort for further collaboration with the Water Resources Advisory Committee (WRAC). Jean-Pierre indicated he had initiated discussions with Carolyn Berg, the WRAC coordinator with Public Works, and that in the future ALAB members will be provided with WRAC agendas and minutes. Both Carolyn and Jean-Pierre look forward to cross communication. Carolyn is anticipated to attend a future ALAB meeting.
4. **Previous Minutes: MOTION:** Approve September 9, 2013, minutes: **Motion:** Richard Hawley
2nd: Bill Struble **Approved: Unanimous**

5. Establishing ALAB meeting times for 2014, report on the results from member preference poll (Marc Lea – Ag Dept)

- Marc Lea reported that the majority of members preferred keeping the meetings at 6pm rather than 2pm or 4pm. The stated preference for the later time slot was because work conflicts could preclude attendance.
- Jean-Pierre Wolff indicated that the consensus was to maintain the 6pm meeting time. Jean-Pierre also recommended that if there was a need to address time consuming items a special meeting could be scheduled earlier. Meetings will continue to be held in the UC Cooperative Extension Auditorium until further notice.

6. Renewable Energy Streamlining Project (RESP) (James Caruso absent due to illness)

- Lynda Auchinachie informed ALAB members that the County was awarded a grant from the California Energy Commission to develop a Renewable Energy Streamlining Program (RESP) that would include revisions to policy and ordinance documents to encourage and streamline renewable energy development in the unincorporated inland areas of the county. Properties under a Williamson Act contract will be included for consideration as part of the RESP. This effort is breaking new ground and stakeholder input is critical. James Caruso's document provided a summary of RESP tasks and initial direction with the agenda. Stakeholder interviews and meetings will begin soon and the Planning Department is looking to ALAB for input regarding who might be interested in being a stakeholder as well as other RESP related issues associated with impacts to agricultural lands. Some of the issues ALAB members may want to provide input on include 1) what is the maximum size in acreage for Tier 2 and 3 streamlined projects? 20-40-50 acres or perhaps up to 100? 2) Are there growing areas that should be avoided? 3) Are there potential incompatibilities between renewable energy facilities and agricultural operations? Are buffers adequate to address potential land use conflicts with existing agriculture? Lynda indicated the Planning Department's website has a link on the homepage to the Renewable Energy Streamlining Program that connects to the project timeline, scope of work including detail on how the Agriculture Element may be revised to meet the objectives of the RESP, opportunity to request a stakeholder interview, sign-up for notification of public hearings, and mapping examples. James Caruso will continue to interact with ALAB members throughout the 18 month process, scheduled for completion in March 2015. Do not hesitate to contact James with questions and comments at 781.5702 or jcaruso@co.slo.ca.us.
- Jerry Diefenderfer inquired about the solar project that is currently being installed on El Pomar Drive. Lynda Auchinachie indicated that this project was approximately 15-20 acres in size and is the scale of project envisioned for the RESP. Lynda also shared that this project was on Williamson Act land and a solar use easement was required. Jerry also asked about why the Tier 4 projects were not going to be part of the RESP effort. Lynda stated she believed that the environmental review for these multi-thousand acre

projects was more complicated than what was envisioned for streamlining and recommended further input from James Caruso.

- Jean-Pierre shared that the footprint of a project is often the focus and it was important to consider different applicable renewable technologies that may have a different level of impact on agricultural land such as solar vs. biodigesters. Jean-Pierre indicated that we should invite James Caruso to the November meeting to discuss renewable technologies options.
- Lisen Bonnier questioned whether the California Coastal Commission supported this effort. It was clarified that the RESP is for the inland portion of the county only, not the coastal zone. Lisen Bonnier also suggested consideration of a subcommittee.
- ALAB members raised several questions regarding resource impacts and how the current system will be changed to accommodate the RESP. ALAB members indicated they can contribute a lot to the process particularly regarding what should or should not be on agricultural land. There was agreement that the past approach for the Conservation and Open Space Element with “workshops” was useful and that James Caruso should be invited to the November 2013 meeting for further discussions.
- Lynda Auchinachie clarified that the scope of work includes stakeholder group discussions as well as the stakeholder interviews.
- Claire Wineman stressed the importance of ALAB providing input early in the process as members can speak to compatibility issues amongst other things. Claire pointed out that the focus is often on the footprint of the facility; however, there is considerable supporting infrastructure that needs to be considered as well. These types of projects could certainly impact the surrounding agricultural landscape.
- James Caruso will be invited to the November 2013 ALAB meeting.

7. Current status of issues concerning the Paso Robles Groundwater Basin (Larry Werner-Chair Blue Ribbon Committee)

- Jean-Pierre introduced Larry Werner, Chair of the Blue Ribbon Committee (BRC) for the Paso Robles Groundwater Basin Management Plan.
- Larry Werner provided a snapshot of his background as an engineer and how he was voted Chair of the BRC. Larry shared that the BRC consisted of 18 very diverse volunteer stakeholders and that the group has been meeting for the past year and a half with the job of implementing the groundwater management plan. Larry presented a PowerPoint presentation (see attachment) that provided detailed information about the past studies and recent efforts of the BRC. Highlights included:
 - While the basin has been studied since the early 2000’s, the main study was the Resource Capacity Study that identified the groundwater wells were in decline. The result of this study was the adoption of a Level III severity.
 - Both 2009 and 2013 well monitoring maps show areas of decline. The red areas are bulls eyes where well depths have declined greater than 70 feet.

- One of the first things the BRC recommended and facilitated was the collection of additional well monitoring data. The BRC also produced a rural residential water conservation brochure, assisted with obtaining grant money for modeling, developed a website, and focused on solution recommendations for the Board of Supervisors (BOS).
- The BRC provided a final ranking of solutions to the BOS on August 27, 2013. The number one ranked recommendation was that a basin-wide groundwater management structure(s) should be created.

Larry concluded his presentation with a summary of the October 1, 2013, BOS hearing in which the urgency ordinance was not supported by Supervisor Arnold because of concerns regarding the definition of vested rights that would qualify for an exemption from the ordinance.

- ALAB members embarked on a discussion of vested rights and noted that the original definition was broader than what was proposed in the resolution at the October 1, 2013 BOS hearing. Many members were concerned that the Planning Department did not have time to adequately reach out to agriculturalists to gain an understanding of how agriculture works and that substantial investments are made upfront. Members shared that some clients or contacts had spent over a million dollars and that they would not meet the vesting right definition as presented in the resolution. It was noted that if the urgency ordinance was extended at the October 8, 2013, BOS hearing, the vesting right discussion would be back before the BOS in November, 2013.
- Chuck Pritchard acknowledged that he did not have experience with irrigated agriculture, but he recognized that with a cattle business you need to ensure you have an adequate water supply before you start a business. Chuck questioned why investments in planting more grapes were made when there was considerable information available that there may not be an adequate supply of water. Chuck also raised the question of what the impact would be to the critical red areas with additional draw on the basin.
- Richard Hawley questioned the wisdom of investing a million dollars in a “bulls eye.”
- Jean-Pierre acknowledged the challenges of defining vested rights particularly due to the limited amount of time available between hearings. Jean-Pierre also expressed his belief that there are bigger issues than the current debate over the definition of vested rights. Jean-Pierre emphasized the importance of the groundwater balance and how that may be affected over time by climate change.
- Dick Nock questioned how the City of Paso Robles was involved in the management of the basin. Dick noted that considerable new development has been announced in the past weeks.
- Larry Werner shared that the City of Paso Robles pumps about 6,000 acre feet a year from the basin with approximately 4,000 acre feet from the Salinas underflow and 2,000 acre feet from the Estrella area. Larry indicated that new development within Paso

Robles will be using Nacimiento water. Paso Robles has a 4,000 acre foot allocation of Nacimiento water.

- Bill Struble asked if the groundwater management district would include Paso Robles. Larry Werner indicated it was unknown at this time.
- Jean-Pierre reminded ALAB members that municipalities working with the greater community can provide tertiary recycled water and infrastructure to make water available for agriculture in the future.
- Jerry Diefenderfer asked if the perennial yield information from 2006 is still accurate. Jerry also shared that wells were monitored back in the 1970s and it appears that a high value was not placed on retaining this data because it is no longer available.
- Lynda Auchinachie indicated that updated information regarding perennial yield and water balance will be presented to the BOS in December 2013. Joy Fitzhugh shared that the information will be released to the public in November.
- Larry Werner cautioned that the model will help provide information about the perennial yield but hydrogeology is not an exact science.
- Jean-Pierre commented that we need to think in terms of sustainability to better define a basin's perennial yield. Jean-Pierre shared that there are very accurate ways to determine if a water basin is being mined such as radioisotope technology that can determine the age of water – a finger print of water. This technology is used in Orange County to verify the age of water to meet basin management requirements for injected water.
- Joy Fitzhugh indicated there was a need for a countywide groundwater management plan.
- Lisen Bonnier inquired if the BRC had identified ways to help rural residential properties owners. Larry indicated they had not. Lisen also asked if the BRC had a favored management district type. Larry indicated they did not.
- Dan Rodrigues and Claire Wineman volunteered to participate in stakeholder discussions as part of the Planning Department's outreach to define "vested rights" should the urgency ordinance be extended.

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

- Jean-Pierre indicated that time constraints precluded detailed comments.

9. Future Agenda Items: Next meeting: November 4, 2013

- RESP with James Caruso; Paso Robles Groundwater Basin issue; Countywide water challenges

Meeting Adjourned: 8:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Lynda Auchinachie, County Department of Agriculture/Weights and Measures