

Borrego Water District
MINUTES
Borrego Water District 2016 Town Hall
Sustainable Groundwater Management for the Borrego Valley Groundwater Basin
Wednesday, March 30, 2016, 4:00 PM – 5:30 PM
PERFORMING ARTS CENTER
590 Palm Canyon Drive
Borrego Springs, CA 92004

Attendance:

Directors Present: President Hart, Vice-President Lyle Brecht, Secretary/Treasurer Tatusko, Delahay, Estep

Staff: Jerry Rolwing, General Manager
Greg Holloway, Operations Manager
Kim Pitman, Administration Manager
Diana Del Bono, Administrative Assistant
Esmeralda Garcia, Customer Service Representative
Wendy Quinn, Recording Secretary

Public: Charlie Rennie M.B. McCaffray
John Peterson Richard Gray
Kathy Dice, CA State Parks Susan Leahy
Dick Troy Dennis Jensen, Oasis Ranch Management
Elaine Tulving Susan Percival, Club Circle East HOA
Kathy Johnston G. Woodby
Paulette Asche Bill Berkley, Rams Hill
Mark Jorgensen Jim Engelke
Joya Granbery Hoyt Walter Kilchin
Pat Matthews, Desert Dave Duncan
Shadows HOA John Thompson
William Burton Elena Thompson
Bob Moore Janie Kimball
Selden McKee Michael Sadler, *Borrego Sun*
Hans Hoefer Robert Keeley
Grant Williams Andrew Page
Kori Peterson

1) **Video Presentation:** “Will this desert community survive its overdraft problem?”, part of a “Worth of Water” series for High Country News, by Zoe Meyers. The video outlined Borrego’s overdraft issue and the prediction that if the extraction continues at its present rate, the aquifer will be exhausted in 35 to 50 years. Comments from John Peterson, Jerry Rolwing and Mark Jorgensen were included. The video referenced the work of the Borrego Water Coalition in promoting water conservation, and the movement to reduce agriculture in the Valley.

2) **Greetings and introductions: Beth Hart, President of the Board of Directors, Borrego Water District.** President Hart welcomed the attendees and introduced the Board members and staff present.

3) “Groundwater Overdraft – Just the Facts”: Jerry Rolwing, General Manager, Borrego Water District. Mr. Rolwing began by emphasizing that we have a chance to control our own destiny. He showed graphs depicting the dropping water levels, but noted that progress is being made in slowing down the overdraft. The Borrego Water Coalition has been instrumental in this effort. Domestic pumping has been reduced by 20 percent over the last five years. Farmers, golf courses and parks have also reduced their pumping and improved efficiency. Mr. Rolwing informed the group that conservation information is available from the District. The assistance of a master gardener is available, and plans are underway to reinstate the free irrigation audits for BWD customers. The effort continues toward the State-mandated goal of a 70 percent extraction reduction in the next 20 years, and the adoption of a plan to achieve this by 2020. Mr. Rolwing closed by announcing his retirement in July, making this his final Town Hall Meeting.

4) “Addressing Infrastructure for Future Water Quality”: Greg Holloway, Operations Manager, Borrego Water District. Mr. Holloway summarized the history of water delivery in Borrego Springs, explaining that there once were several different water agencies which were eventually consolidated into the Borrego Water District. He went on to explain plans for a new two million gallon reservoir, pumping station and pipeline to replace aging facilities and ensure reliability delivery of high quality water to the District’s customers.

5) Overview of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act and Borrego Valley Groundwater Basin Boundary Adjustment. Trey Driscoll, Principal Hydrogeologist, Dudek (California-based environmental and engineering consulting firm with more than 300 planners, scientists, engineers, licensed contractors, and technical staff). Mr. Driscoll spoke about the background of SGMA and the basin boundary modification request, which was just submitted to DWR. He explained that SGMA is comprised of three senate bills signed into law in 2014 and applies to medium and high-priority basins. BWD and the Counties of San Diego and Imperial are the responsible parties for the Borrego Valley Groundwater Basin, but upon approval of the boundary modification, Imperial County will become a separate basin. BVGB is considered medium priority, because of its low population, but in a state of critical overdraft. SGMA requires medium and high-priority basins to achieve groundwater sustainability and to designate a Groundwater Sustainability Agency to oversee this effort. For the BVGB, it is anticipated this will be a joint effort between BWD and the County of San Diego with stakeholder input. Tools for implementation of SGMA include registration of wells, management of extraction and required reports. A Groundwater Sustainability Plan must be developed and approved by 2020.

Mr. Driscoll went on to explain the proposed basin boundary adjustment, which will facilitate creation of a GSP specific to the overdrafted area of the basin. The new BVGB would end at San Felipe Wash, and the area beyond that, which is not in overdraft, would be designated as the Ocotillo Wells Groundwater Basin and will probably be designated low priority.

6) “How Planning for Water Quality Changes Due to the Overdraft will Impact Water Rates”: Lyle Brecht, Vice-president of the Board of Directors. Director

Brecht summarized the current Board's history since assuming office in 2011 with the District's cash depleted by \$6 million, a \$1 operating deficit and no credit. The new Board cut operating expenses and staff and developed a financial rescue plan. Water rates were increased by nearly 100 percent, and the District is now approaching credit-worthiness. Reserves and operating cash are building up.

Director Brecht presented graphs depicting Options A and B, A being unsustainable and B sustainable. He explained that the longer the basin is in overdraft, the more expensive water will become because of the necessity to increase treatment levels. In the 30 years the overdraft has been studied, it has doubled. Today there is an opportunity under SGMA to attain sustainability by 2040. Agriculture and golf courses will have to contribute to the cost. Director Brecht explained the costs involved over the next five years to protect public health by ensuring delivery of potable water 24/7. The District will be entering into a Proposition 218 process to introduce proposed rate increases for 2017-21. Monthly base rates will decrease and residential usage rates, designated Tiers 1 and 2, will increase. Commercial rates and sewer rates will also increase. Director Brecht noted that residential customers using less than seven units of water per month will not see a significant change in their bill. He urged residents to join in supporting the District's plans to meet SGMA requirements and avoid adjudication or State take-over.

7) "How Overdraft Planning will Impact the Community": Board President Beth Hart. President Hart expressed the Board's hope that the community will continue working together to retain local control and address the overdraft. She cited the Borrego Water Coalition, SGMA and USGS studies as contributing factors in this effort. BWD is working with the County, agriculture, the golf courses and DWR to develop a workable and effective Groundwater Management Plan. She urged the attendees to participate in the planning process, attend Board meetings and visit the BWD website.

8) Moderated, written questions from the audience for specific presenters.

9) Comments from the audience.

The first question was whether there was any data indicating the likelihood that agriculture would reduce pumping. President Hart pointed out that farmers participated in the Coalition, and that they are business people who are working to either continue their business as efficiently as possible or develop an exit strategy. She added that under SGMA, the District can begin monitoring agricultural wells and imposing penalties for using water beyond a sustainable level.

In response to an inquiry about enforcement mechanisms to ensure compliance with SGMA, Mr. Rolwing explained that if BWD doesn't create an acceptable Groundwater Management Plan by 2020, the State will do it for us. President Hart added that the District and the County are working together on land development, air quality and environmental issues.

The next speaker asked about issues affecting someone with a swimming pool. Mr. Rolwing stated that if you own the land, you generally own the rights to the water under it. However, in the case of former customers of the Borrego Water Company, the rights were owned by the Company and transferred to BWD at the time of the merger. The District will make sure the water rights are available to these landowners.

Responding to a question about the lower aquifer, Mr. Rolwing that some testing has been done of the upper, middle and lower aquifers, indicating the lower levels contain more clay. The District is working with the USGS to begin a depth dependent water quality testing program to provide more information on water quality at all levels. The inquirer went on to ask about other closed basins in California and whether they were achieving sustainability. Mr. Driscoll replied that he was in contact with other districts going through the same process as BWD, for example in Box Canyon. Part of their basin was adjudicated. They have a water master, and are looking at different options to achieving sustainability.

President Hart informed an attendees asking for a copy of the Dudek report that it would be available on the BWD website in a few days. She went on to respond to an inquiry about the continuation of Christmas Circle, explaining that it was governed by an organization separate from BWD.

The next questions dealt with whether all water users would experience rate increases. President Hart replied that the cost of implementing SGMA would be spread across all extractors in Borrego Valley. She stated that upon adoption, the new rates would be effective July 1 and appear on the August water bills.

In response to an inquiry as to whether farms and private well users were asked to reduce water usage by 25 percent in response to the current drought, Mr. Rolwing explained that this reduction only applied to municipal water users.

President Hart announced a series of questions on the recent urgency ordinance limiting irrigation to two days a week. She informed the group that information was available on the District website. Small water agencies had the choice of reducing usage by 25 percent or limiting irrigation to two days a week. Since the 25 percent reduction was based on a comparison with usage in 2013, a wet year, we did not achieve it and had to limit irrigation or face a \$500 per day fine. The Board hopes to amend the ordinance to make it more applicable to the Borrego desert climate. Public input will be requested at the April 19 meeting.

Responding to a question about the mathematical factors involved in the water use reduction plans, Mr. Rolwing reiterated that all users in the Valley need to eventually reduce by 70 percent.

Hans Hoefler expressed concern that 80 percent of the water in the Valley was used by a minority who didn't participate in the cost. Director Brecht explained again that this would change under SGMA. Mr. Hoefler mentioned the water used at the solar facilities, and Director Brecht replied that it had been regulated by the County in the past but would change.

Elena Thompson thanked the presenters for tonight's program and pointed out that water rates in Encinitas are higher than those in Borrego. She hoped to see agriculture cut back on its water usage.

John Peterson stated that he had been involved in water rights issues for 35 years and previously served as a County groundwater geologist. He thanked the Board and pointed out that they were faced with issues involving both the quantity and quality of water.

The next question was whether all wells would eventually be monitored, and if so, what was the timeline. President Hart replied that the District was working on an MOU with the County to serve as joint Groundwater Sustainability Agencies, and once that is approved by DWR, metering of all wells will begin.

Another attendee asked whether under the new ordinance they could water three days a week for two hours each rather than two days for six hours. President Hart urged attendance at the April 19 meeting where possible updates to the ordinance will be discussed.

Concern was expressed regarding plans for Rudyville and whether density could be controlled. Mr. Rolwing replied that the District had recently revised its new development policy, so the purchase of water credits would be required for new development. Concerns regarding land use should be presented to the Community Sponsor Group.

Economic issues were addressed, including the long-term cost of water and the impact of departure of agriculture from the Valley.

There being no further comments, the meeting was adjourned at 5:50 p.m.