

Cuyama Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency Board of Directors Meeting

November 5, 2025

Meeting Minutes

PRESENT:

Directors

Bantilan, Cory – Chair
Yurosek, Derek – Vice Chair
Albano, Byron – Treasurer
Anselm, Arne
Higbee, Jason
Jackson, Steve
Reely, Blaine – Alternate
Williams, Debby
Wooster, Jane
Young, Matthew – Secretary
Zenger, Katelyn

Staff

Beck, Jim – Executive Director
Bianchi, Grace – Project Coordinator
Blakslee, Taylor – Assistant Executive Director
Dominguez, Alex – Legal Counsel
Van Lienden, Brian – Woodard & Curran

1. Call to Order

Cuyama Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency (CBGSA) Chair Cory Bantilan called the meeting to order at 2:01 p.m.

2. Roll Call

Ms. Bianchi called roll (shown above) and informed Chair Bantilan that there was a quorum of the Board.

3. Pledge of Allegiance

The pledge of allegiance was led by Chair Bantilan.

4. Meeting Protocols

Ms. Bianchi provided an overview of the meeting protocols.

5. Report from Auditors on Fiscal Year 2024-2025 Audit

Patrick Paggi from Daniels Phillips Vaughan & Bock provided an overview of the fiscal year 2024-2025 audit report.

Director Yurosek asked about the auditors note regarding segregation of duties and asked if staff have done an analysis to determine costs to segregate duties.

Mr. Beck and Mr. Blakslee responded that staff had provided an analysis in March.

CLOSED SESSION

6. Conference with Legal Counsel- Existing Litigation

At 2:16 PM, the Board adjourned to closed session. At 3:10 PM, the Board returned from closed session at which time Legal Counsel reported to the public that there was no reportable action.

7. Standing Advisory Committee Meeting Report

Standing Advisory Committee Report Meeting Date: October 30th, 2025 Submitted to the CBGSA Board of Directors on November 5th, 2025 By Brenton Kelly, SAC Chair

Last week the Standing Advisory Committee met at the Family Resource Center in a hybrid format, with 6 members present at the start, 4 in-person and 3 on the conference line, but Committee Members Lewis and Jaffe had to step away part way through. GSA Staff Taylor Blakslee was joined by Grace Bianchi in the room, with Technical and Legal Staff on the video call. The room was sparsely attended by the public in the room and many more stakeholders were online. The meeting lasted a little over 3.5 hours. Executive Director Jim Beck led the meeting off with the announcement of his retirement. Appreciations were shared all around with reflections of the past 7 years of challenging, constructive and engaging efforts by some passionately dedicated people. Jim's artful and pragmatic guidance of this Committee and the GSA Board was a crucial part of getting us this far. Credit was extended to the whole Staff team with special recognition to the competent Executive team in place to carry us forward. Best wishes to Mr Beck and his family and congratulations to Mr. Blakslee on his promotion. Much of the meeting addressed the update of Groundwater Model accuracy Analysis for Ventucopa. No recommendation or action is needed until our new year meeting but the conclusions are not expected to change much from the consensus that the Model is currently inadequate for the task of determining a Sustainable Yield for Ventucopa much less defining a Management Area and assigning allocations. The most critical item of the evening was regarding the potential Water Market policy. The SAC made a recommendation in support of a variance pool derived from the previous year's unused allocations to provide the minimal amount of water needed to support the viability of small family farms.

8. a) Discuss Allocations in the Ventucopa Management Area Committee Member Haslett asked for staff to define Deep Percolation as the Model sees it. Mr. Ceyhan described deep percolation as a model term where precipitation and surface waters percolate through the soil to the groundwater table as recharge. Chair Kelly asked if there is a way to measure the rate it takes deep percolation to descend sometimes over 500 feet through the unsaturated vadose zone to the groundwater table. Mr. Ceyhan responded that the model does not calculate those rates. It is assumed to be instantaneous. Not a very realistic model parameter. Committee Chair Kelly asked again if the groundwater elevations of the wells shown in the simulated groundwater level slides could reflect depth from the surface. Mr. Ceyhan responded that he'll try to include slide graphs with depths from the surface for the board

packet. Committee Member DeBranch asked if staff had calculated an estimate of what a theoretical Sustainable Yield would be for Ventucopa. Mr. Ceyhan responded that the sustainable yield has not been calculated because the model is not adequate in capturing wet years, and was unable to closely simulate the measured well depths and pumping data. Committee Chair Kelly asked if the model is likely to perform as poorly in other areas of the basin outside of the Central Management Area (CMA), where the Monitoring Network is even less robust than it is in Ventucopa. Mr. Ceyhan responded that there had been little information about the western and eastern side of the CMA, but that now new and better data has been added to and improved the Model. Mr. Ceyhan acknowledged that Ventucopa was hydrologically unique with flashy flows from a mountainous catchment and that the basin has very diverse conditions which presents a challenge to model accurately. Chair Kelly asked Mr. Van Lienden if the upcoming SBC Fault data and analysis does locate the fault, will it provide anything to improve the Model uncertainty in Ventucopa? Mr. Van Lienden responded that it should give some new information for modeling parameters, but Jim Strandberg would need to confirm this.

8, b) Discuss Tri-County Pistachio Variance Request There was a general agreement that the ad hoc committee had made the right call with making corrections to inaccurate land use data. The SAC supports all efforts towards factual accuracy and appreciated that the Variance Process allows time for landowners to petition for data corrections whenever they are discovered. MOTION: Committee Member Haslett made a motion to support the ad hoc recommendation. The motion was seconded by Committee Member Kelly. A roll call vote was made, and the motion passed. 4 to 0.

8, c) Discuss the CMA Allocation Exchanges Policy (i.e. Water Market) Chair Kelly expressed concern for all the time being spent on drafting a policy that will not likely provide any water for family farms whose operations require even a small amount of water to remain viable. He stated that the amount of water needed by farmers like David Lewis and the Zannons to avoid losing trees and losing their business is little more than 1000 acre feet total over the next five years. The latest SFAR memo was discussed with the idea of using a small portion of the previous year's unused allocations to provide the minimum needed variance pool for the smallest farmers who may be at risk of crop loss. This is not being seen as a long term solution but a stop gap opportunity to stay alive until 2030 or as soon as allocations are resolved in Phase 3 of the adjudication.

Committee Member DeBranch declared his support of a water market, but suggested that a voluntary water market is difficult to achieve. He opined that the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) does not recognise a tiered approach to land use, crop type or size. Chair Kelly responded that SGMA and the legislature does recognize the vulnerability of the small family farms as beneficial users and the need to take protective measures to support their long term viability. He believes that this policy is an opportunity to move toward that goal. Committee Member Giallard expressed concerns for water markets and that most attempts in this State have been a flop. Two farmers need a little water and the two farmers with the most water are not interested in selling. The small farmers will be squeezed out if not protected by this GSA and the small farmers must continue to be able to farm in Cuyama. Stakeholder Tristan Zannon representing Tri-County Pistachios stated that he has been offering

a cashiers check for \$200,000.00 for the purchase of 400AF over 2 years. He has no takers. Slide 111 in the GSA packet shows the 20 acres of dying pistachio trees where irrigation has been cut off to accommodate the demand reductions. He feels that a policy to offer a small portion of unused allocations would still be inline with these pumping reductions and would buy time to get through the uncertainties of the Adjudication. MOTION: Committee Member Gaillard made a motion to allocate small farmers up to 1,200 AF for the 2025-2029 allocation period for existing permanent crop demand. The motion was seconded by Committee Member Haslett. A roll call vote was made, and the motion passed (3-1). AYES: Gaillard, Haslett, Kelly. NOES: DeBranch

8, d) Discuss Adaptive Management Processes The SAC is encouraged to see the Adaptive Management Process in motion and looks forward to some constructive outcomes within the specified timelines. Chair Kelly noted that these wells that are in excess of their Minimum Thresholds do not include the two monitoring wells in the nested clusters that have gone completely dry since the USGS drilled them in 2009. This illustrates the continued decline of the water table in the CMA. 8. e) Discuss how to Address New Pumping Outside the CMA Committee Member Haslett commented that the previous agenda item was on adaptive management process and so there is a plan in place to manage the rest of the basin and is in favor of option 1, To continue with current approach. Chair Kelly was concerned that the Adaptive Management Policy can only work well if there is a monitoring well nearby and only kicks in after the Minimum Threshold is nearly exceeded.

Staff suggested that historical use could be unregulated but that new additional groundwater extraction may need to be regulated and that the adaptive management framework needs to have a plan to identify potential problem areas. Legal Counsel Alex Dominguez commented that SGMA provides the GSA with powers that include the ability to regulate or halt the extraction from groundwater wells. Committee Member DeBranch commented that reported pumping outside of the CMA will still cause exceedance of sustainable yield. He said that the GSA should consider how to manage the whole basin to the sustainable yield. He's in favor of a more proactive approach to demand reduction in areas outside the CMA. Committee Member Gaillard was concerned for operations like the new cannabis farm in Salisbury Canyon that will likely expand the CMA back to the west. Chair Kelly shared Gaillard's concern for land use conversion from rangeland to new irrigation operations or for any other land use changes that may represent major increases in groundwater extraction. He is not as concerned about historic pumping rates outside the CMA which have not been contributing to the long term over draft.

Respectfully submitted, Brenton Kelly SAC Chairperson

CONSENT AGENDA

8-11. Consent Agenda

Chair Bantilan asked if any Directors wanted to move any of the consent items out to discuss in more detail.

Chair Bantilan pulled the 2026 meeting calendar for discussion.

There was board consensus to have the July board meeting before the federal holiday.

Director Yurosek asked about the accounts receivable for September 2025 and the status of the landowner groundwater extraction fee.

Mr. Blakslee responded that staff is contacting landowners regarding payment status.

There were no public comments on this item.

MOTION

Director Jackson made a motion to approve the consent agenda item nos. 8-11. The motion was seconded by Director Young. A roll call vote was made and the motion passed unanimously.

AYES:	Albano, Anselm, Bantilan, DeBranch, Jackson, Wooster, Young, Yurosek, Zenger, Reely, Williams
NOES:	None
ABSTAIN:	None
ABSENT:	None

ACTION ITEMS

12. Groundwater Sustainability Plan Implementation

a. Discuss and Take Appropriate Action on the Plan and Timeline to Evaluate Allocations in the Ventucopa Management Area

Mr. Blakslee provided an overview of the objective and timeline for evaluating allocations in the Ventucopa Management Area.

Sercan Ceyhan from Woodard & Curran provided a presentation on the model results on evaluating allocations in the Ventucopa Management Area.

Director Wooster asked about the discrepancy in the simulated streamflow versus the observed streamflow at United States Geological Survey (USGS) 11136500 and if that means the model is inadequate.

Mr. Ceyhan responded that some processes are not fully captured in the model and he will address implications in the conclusions.

Director Albano asked if the reduction of acreage is reflected in the model. Mr. Ceyhan responded that Land IQ data was used and it would depend on when their data was collected.

Director Higbee asked how the percentage (80%) of the infiltration that goes to evapotranspiration (ET) was determined. Mr. Ceyhan explained the model's element-level mass balance and time-step aggregation.

Director Higbee asked how the subsurface flows were derived. Mr. Ceyhan explained that

subsurface flows were derived from element-level mass balance outputs aggregated by time step and summed.

Director Young asked whether surface streamflow was being underestimated and, if so, how the “unaccounted” water was handled in the model. Mr. Ceyhan said “unaccounted” water is explained by ET losses in small watersheds and by local recharge that does not translate to measurable surface flow at the gage.

Mr. Ceyhan responded that the water is lost from ET at the small watersheds.

Director Albano added that as a grower, 80% of infiltration to ET seems high.

Director Young asked how many of the recommended items are included in the budget. Mr. Van Lienden responded that none of the recommendations

Chair Bantilan opened the floor for public comment.

Stakeholder Jim Wegis commented that the flow (1752) into the Qatal Canyon doesn’t seem accurate.

Stakeholder Joe Haslett asked how native vegetation ET rate was calculated in the model.

Mr. Ceyhan responded that native vegetation ET is based on soil moisture.

Stakeholder Mark Ellsworth asked how ET is calculated. Mr. Ceyhan responded that is reduced to soil moisture, which is dependent on many factors, which is calculated within the model.

Mr. Van Lienden added that during Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) an agronomist was hired to develop ET estimates, which accounted for all available data.

Chair Bantilan closed the floor for public comment.

SAC Chair Brenton Kelly provided the SAC report.

Director Jackson said the basin wide goal is sustainability and noted that long-term groundwater storage is declining, including in Ventucopa.

Director Albano commented that the situation in the Central Management Area (CMA) is different than other areas in the basin. He asked how much model recalibration would cost.

Mr. Ceyhan responded that the Ventucopa Management Area is much smaller than CMA and they can assess costs.

Mr. Van Lienden provided a brief update on the Santa Barbara Canyon Fault Investigation.

b. Discuss and Take Appropriate Action on the Tri-County Pistachio Variance Request

Mr. Blakslee provided an overview of the Tri-County Pistachio Variance Request and the ad hoc recommendation.

SAC Chair Brenton Kelly provided the SAC report.

There were no comments on this item.

MOTION

Director Jackson made a motion to proceed with the ad hoc recommendation to correct Tri-County Pistachio's data. Director Albano seconded, a roll call vote was made and passed unanimously.

AYES: Albano, Anselm, Bantilan, Higbee, Jackson, Reely, Young, Yurosek,
Williams, Wooster, Zenger

NOES: None

ABSTAIN: None

ABSENT: None

c. Discuss and Take Appropriate Action on CMA Allocation Exchanges Policy

Mr. Blakslee provided background on the CMA allocation exchanges, the issues discussed with the ad hoc committee, and the ad hoc recommendations. He reviewed the map of the CMA plus Farming unit boundaries.

SAC Chair Brenton Kelly provided the SAC report.

Chair Bantilan opened the floor for public comment.

Stakeholder Tristan Zannon commented on importance of this policy to support his family business.

Stakeholder Robbie Jaffe noted the urgency establishing a program to support small farmers at risk of losing allocations and provided a letter from the Small Farmer and Rancher Network with the recommendation to use less than 4% of the unused allocations (1,200 AF).

Stakeholder David Lewis commented that the policy hasn't been revised sign last brought to the board.

Chair Bantilan closed the floor for public comment.

Chair Bantilan noted that if Tristan can't find any sellers for \$500/acre-foot, then what is the point.

Director Yurosek commented that this is the first time that he is learning that small farmers are looking to buy water.

Director Young asked if all farming units are required to sign off allocation exchanges will

impact ability to participate.

Director Yurosek responded that he doesn't support requiring all individuals within a farming unit to sign off on allocation exchanges.

Director Wooster commented on the complexity of the issue and noted that selling water could impact your future water rights.

Director Anselm commented on his experience with the pilot water market in the Fox Canyon CMA. He noted that this is less of a water market, but more of an administrative process to do transfer of allocations between two parties.

Director Wooster reviewed the ad hoc recommendation. She proposed using 1,200 AF

Legal Counsel Alex Dominguez commented that pooling 1,200 AF of a common resource and only allowing certain people to trade poses a risk to the GSA. In another basin, he has

Director Higbee asked if it would have any impacts on allocations or water rights.

Legal Counsel Alex Dominguez responded that the GSA can't impact water rights.

Director Young asked how many pumpers have used all their allocations in the past year.

Director Anselm commented in support of incentives for pumpers that don't use all their allocations.

Director Young commented that there is a market of sellers and if we can resolve the issues of the farming unit, then we can consider a variance pool. He thinks the policy should be passed today to help small farmers needing water.

Director Albano commented that he doesn't think the board is ready to decide anything today. He added that any transfers should be recorded online.

Mr. Beck commented on the various types of transfer pools that he has had experience in the past. He reminded the board that there is no excess water available in the basin and recommended moving forward with the policy tonight. He suggested doing an interim one-year policy.

Director Yurosek asked if the farming unit allocation is a combination of landowners within a farming unit and if the allocated amount for each landowner within the farming unit.

Staff responded that the farming unit allocation is a combination of landowners within a farming unit and each landowner within a farming unit is given allocations.

MOTION

Director Williams made a motion to accept allocation exchange policy with the ad hoc

recommendation to include farming units with time limit of one year, with direction for the ad hoc to evaluate variance pool recommended by the small farmers. Director Wooster seconded, a roll call vote was made and passed unanimously.

AYES: Albano, Anselm, Bantilan, Higbee, Jackson, Reely, Young, Yurosek,
Williams, Wooster, Zenger
NOES: None
ABSTAIN: None
ABSENT: None

d. Discuss and Take Appropriate Action on Standard Operating Procedures for Adaptive Management Process

Mr. Blakslee provided an update on the status of the adaptive management implementation.

SAC Chair Brenton Kelly provided the SAC report on this item.

There were no public comments on this item.

e. Discuss and Take Appropriate Action on Options to Address New Pumping Outside the Management Area

Mr. Blakslee provided an overview of the options to address new pumping outside the management area and the board direction provided in September 2025. He reviewed the current management actions in the CMA and Ventucopa Management area.

SAC Chair Brenton Kelly provided the SAC report on this item.

There were no public comments on this item.

Director Wooster asked if someone starts irrigating and pumps over 25 AF, then do they need to report. She suggested that we should monitor the water level of the wells.

Mr. Beck commented that the board has provided a lot of ideas and staff is looking for how the board would like to proceed with the methodical evaluations of potential ideas.

Director Anselm commented that annual reports are due in March and that it would be a good time to see if there is any new pumping.

MOTION

Director Young made a motion to move forward with option 1 to evaluate during the qualitative assessment. Director Anselm seconded, a roll call vote was made and passed with 89%.

AYES: Albano, Anselm, Bantilan, Higbee, Jackson, Young, Yurosek, Williams,
Wooster, Zenger
NOES: None
ABSTAIN: None

ABSENT: Reely

REPORT ITEMS

13. Administrative Updates

a. Report of the Executive Director

Mr. Beck noted that he will be leaving Hallmark Group at the end of the year. He thanked the board and committee.

b. Report of the General Counsel

Nothing to report.

14. Technical Updates

a. Update on Groundwater Sustainability Plan Activities

Mr. Blakslee noted that these updates are included in the board packet.

b. Update on Grant-Funded Projects

Mr. Blakslee noted that these updates are included in the board packet.

15. Report of Ad Hoc Committees

Nothing to report.

16. Directors' Forum

Nothing to report.

17. Public comment for Items Not on the Agenda

George Peraza with DWR noted a grant opportunity from the Department of Conservation's Multi-Benefit Land Repurposing Program that funds repurposing agricultural land to reduce groundwater use, and provided the following email: mlrp@conservation.ca.gov.

18. Correspondence

Mr. Blakslee noted the correspondence that was included in the packet and distributed to stakeholders prior to the meeting.

19. Adjourn

Chair Bantilan adjourned the meeting at 7:02 PM.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE
CUYAMA BASIN GROUNDWATER SUSTAINABILITY AGENCY

Chair: Steve Jackson
Steve Jackson (Sep 22, 2026 10:15:22 PDT)

ATTEST:

Secretary: Matthew Young