

Cuyama Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency Board of Directors Meeting

January 14, 2026

Meeting Minutes

PRESENT:

Directors

Jackson, Steve – Chair
Anselm, Arne – Vice Chair
Bantilan, Cory - Treasurer
Young, Matthew – Secretary
Ellsworth, Mark
Grant, Brian
Reely, Blaine – Alternate
Richardson, Kyle
Ricci, Malcom – Alternate
Yurosek, Derek
Zenger, Katelyn

Staff

Bianchi, Grace – Hallmark Group
Blakslee, Taylor – Executive Director, Hallmark Group
Ceyhan, Sercan – Woodard & Curran
Dominguez, Alex – Legal Counsel
Hughes, Joe – Legal Counsel
Strandberg, Jim – Woodard & Curran
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. Standing Advisory Committee Meeting Report

Meeting Date: January 8th, 2026

The Standing Advisory Committee met at the Family Resource Center in a hybrid format, with four Committee Members present in person and two on the conference line, with one member absent. GSA Staff Taylor Blakslee and Project Coordinator Grace Bianchi were present, and they were joined by Brian Van Lienden, Jim Strandberg, and Mr. Ceyhan on the call. Several stakeholders were in the room, with many more on the video conference.

In public comments, several Committee Members expressed their appreciation for Jane Wooster and Byron Albano for the time and commitment they have put toward groundwater sustainability in the Cuyama Valley as Directors on the GSA representing the CBWD. Their local perspective and community investment will be missed on the GSA moving forward.

Thank you for your service.

Several Committee Members expressed a desire for an introduction of the new CBWD Directors and their affiliation or experience in the Cuyama Valley specifically. We were told that this would happen, as it is on the GSA agenda.

Committee Member Robbie Jaffe asked the GSA to expedite the unanimous motion at the last GSA meeting regarding the Allocation Exchange that directs the Ad Hoc Committee to consider a small variance pool of water derived from the previous year's unused allocations to be made available to the smallest farmers who need a minimal amount of additional allocations to remain commercially viable. For certain small-scale farmers with minimal allocations who cannot afford to participate in the exchange, the lack of a variance pool for this allocation period will threaten their farm's existence.

Committee Member Lewis said the current allocation exchange process is inadequate for small pumpers like him who will fall victim to the lack of consideration for the small-scale family farm. He hopes the development of a variance pool will not die on the vine.

The Committee voted unanimously to keep the current slate of Officers, with Joe Haslett as Vice Chair and myself as Chair.

A significant amount of in-depth review and questioning went into the three-and-a-half-hour meeting. One motion was made with a split vote regarding what to do with the timeline of the next model calibration to include the additional Ventucopa Management Area information. Many recommendations were made, and I will endeavor to present them as those items are brought up in this meeting.

11a) Discuss and Take Appropriate Action on the Plan and Timeline to Evaluate Allocations in the Ventucopa Management Area

Appreciation and compliments were expressed to Staff for the accomplishment of identifying the Santa Barbara Canyon Fault. The location and complexity of the fault zone are now better known, and it appears that a naming process may be needed to identify several previously unknown faults found in this process. The series of faults depicts a distinct stair-stepping of groundwater elevations across the SBC Fault Zone that is assumed to be continuous across the width of the river valley.

Chair Kelly asked how this information will inform the model regarding the flow rates and volumes of groundwater flowing across the fault zone into the main basin. Mr. Strandberg responded that the faults are a barrier to flow and the fault zone is difficult to model because it does not present a constant gradient. Mr. Ceyhan suggested that the new data will improve gradient resolution, but the complexity of the stair-stepping is harder to simulate than an even gradient. The impacts to flow cannot be estimated without

recalibration of the model.

Committee Member DeBranch asked whether this model recalibration will require supplemental study or whether it will fit within the scope of the current work. Staff responded that recalibration would require additional costs and that the next agenda item includes estimated costs for model improvements.

Committee Member Caufield asked whether the current groundwater model already incorporates faults in the Ventucopa area. Mr. Ceyhan explained that the model includes faults based on prior USGS interpretations and that the representation is simplified. He clarified that the model currently treats the fault as one simple barrier to flow below a defined depth and assumes groundwater can flow over the fault at higher water levels, as well as around the fault zone in the east. Mr. Ceyhan stated that incorporating the improved fault characterization would reduce conductance values and increase resistance to flow across the fault zone. He explained that recalibration would be required and that the updated model should show much less flow over and around the fault than the current model suggests.

Stakeholder Byron Albano questioned whether additional funding and time should be allocated to fully determine fault extents, given the potential implications for Ventucopa groundwater management. Staff acknowledged the concern and stated that prioritization would be considered in the context of overall model improvement and budget constraints.

Stakeholder Jim Wegis asked when the next comprehensive model update is anticipated. Mr. Blakslee responded that staff is targeting 2028 to allow sufficient time for data collection, technical work, and preparation for the next periodic review in 2030. Stakeholder and Committee discussion focused on which items are time-sensitive and top priority and which could be deferred to the next comprehensive update. Mr. Blakslee stated that the timeline is driven by the GSA Board's priority to better understand and potentially implement allocations in the Ventucopa Management Area.

Stakeholder Jim Wegis suggested that because options #1–4 are required before #5, and #5 would need to be completed in a few years regardless, the GSA should spread out additional studies to collect more information. He stated that observed well data have not indicated decline and questioned the need for a Ventucopa allocation effort at this time. He recommended moving forward without taking action in Ventucopa until additional data are available and deferring costs until the next scheduled update.

Stakeholder Jane Wooster expressed concern about the wide cost ranges presented and requested refined cost estimates before major decisions are made.

Committee Chair Kelly expressed concern that the current model is insufficient basin-wide. He stated that Ventucopa is unique and complex and will benefit from incorporating data from improvement #1, but other studies should include input from major side channels throughout the basin, including Salisbury Canyon, Aliso Canyon, Schoolhouse Canyon, and others where similar data gaps exist. He emphasized that the GSA cannot make management decisions based on understanding one area in isolation and must understand the entire basin, given shared unknowns in stratigraphy and surface and subsurface flows. Committee Member DeBranch emphasized that overdraft is a basin-wide issue and cautioned against viewing Ventucopa in isolation. He noted that the prior 6 to 7 million dollars in grant funding provided significant data, but future work will be landowner funded and costly. He stated that while more data are always beneficial, he is not currently in favor of proceeding with additional work focused only on Ventucopa when needs exist across the

basin.

Stakeholder Byron Albano stated that improvements #1 and #2 addressing basin structure and fault behavior are foundational and should be prioritized, particularly #2 because it addresses headlands south of the fault. He stated that #1 will need to be completed eventually, while #5 can wait until the next scheduled model update. He added that no allocation for Ventucopa is needed because he believes Ventucopa is not overdrafted.

MOTION: Committee Member Jaffe made a motion to recommend Option 4, to defer model improvements until the next model update. The motion was seconded by Committee Member Haslett. A roll call vote was taken and the motion passed.

AYES: Haslett, Jaffe, Lewis, Kelly

NOES: DeBranch, Caufield

11b) Discuss and Take Appropriate Action on Options to Address New Pumping Outside the Management Area

There was general agreement that policy decisions should be driven by real groundwater data and ground truthing rather than solely by model predictions of less than two feet of drawdown over 50 years. Committee Members stated that land use changes, pumping records, and well improvement permit information should trigger localized staff analysis of impacts to sustainable yield. Concern was expressed that the monitoring network and sustainability criteria may not identify problems until it is too late. Several Members referenced the new Salisbury Canyon cannabis operation as an example.

Committee Member DeBranch emphasized that the basin is managed as a single interconnected system designated as overdrafted under SGMA. He stated that pumping increases outside the CMA could affect basin-wide sustainability and that cumulative pumping outside management areas could exceed what might otherwise be allocated under sustainable yield assumptions. He stated that pumping levels outside the CMA should remain static going forward.

Stakeholder Jane Wooster expressed concern about interpretation of the monitoring network, citing examples from the western area color-coded map. She stated that areas with no pumping and rising groundwater elevations are labeled as declining and emphasized the need for additional ground truthing and situational analysis.

13c) Update on October 2025 Groundwater Level and Quality Conditions Reports

Stakeholder Jim Wegis stated that he pays for water analysis out of pocket while the GSA collects similar data. He suggested that the GSA request irrigation well records required by the state for large pumpers, which include groundwater elevations, water quality, and pump capacity information.

Stakeholder Byron Albano agreed and stated that consulting costs could be reduced if duplication of data collection is minimized.

13d) Update on Adaptive Management Processes for Minimum Threshold Exceedances

Committee Member Robbie Jaffe stated that she remains confused about how Minimum Thresholds are established and is further concerned that the only solution to exceedances appears to be lowering the threshold.

Committee Member DeBranch stated that the concept of "Well Protection Depth" has technical merit and that correcting thresholds may be justifiable in some cases.

Chair Kelly expressed concern about continued downward groundwater trends. He cited Opti wells 91 and 99 as examples, noting that although they recover seasonally, they are declining nearly ten feet year over year. He stated that lowering Minimum Thresholds under Adaptive Management creates the appearance of compliance and risks failure under SGMA.

*Respectfully submitted,
Brenton Kelly
SAC Chairperson*

6. New Director Welcome

Chair Bantilan thanked the previous directors Wooster and Albano for their time serving on the board. He added that the new directors representing the water district, Kyle Richardson, Brian Grant, and Mark Ellsworth.

Director Richardson introduced himself as a representative of Diamond Farming on Apis Lane.

Director Grant introduced himself as representing Lerner and stated he previously served on the Board from 2015 through 2018.

Director Ellsworth introduced himself as representing Duncan Family Farms and noted their operations have been farming in the basin since 2010.

7. Election of Officers

Chair Bantilan noted that four positions, Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary, and Treasurer are up for election.

Director Yurosek commented that it would be beneficial to have board chair rotation and recommended Steve Jackson as chair.

Stakeholder Byron Albano commented that Chair Bantilan has been a fair and reasonable chair for the CBGSA.

Stakeholder Tristan Zannon asked if directors are being compensated for being on the board.

MOTION

Director Yurosek made a motion to nominate Director Jackson as Chair. The motion was seconded by Director Ellsworth. A roll call vote was made and the motion passed with 67%.

AYES: Anselm, Ellsworth, Grant, Jackson, Reely, Richardson, Yurosek, Zenger
NOES: Bantilan, Young
ABSTAIN: Ricci
ABSENT: None

MOTION

Director Young made a motion to nominate Director Anselm as Vice Chair. The motion

was seconded by Director Yurosek. A roll call vote was made and the motion passed with 89%.

AYES: Anselm, Bantilan, Ellsworth, Grant, Jackson, Reely, Richardson, Young, Yurosek, Zenger

NOES: None

ABSTAIN: Ricci

ABSENT: None

MOTION

Director Anselm made a motion to nominate Director Young as Secretary. The motion was seconded by Director Jackson. A roll call vote was made and the motion passed with 89%.

AYES: Anselm, Bantilan, Ellsworth, Grant, Jackson, Reely, Richardson, Young, Yurosek, Zenger

NOES: None

ABSTAIN: Ricci

ABSENT: None

Stakeholder Jane Wooster commented that Chair Bantilan has served as fair chairman and thanked him for his time as chair.

MOTION

Director Young made a motion to nominate Director Bantilan as Treasurer. The motion was seconded by Director Yurosek. A roll call vote was made and the motion passed with 67%.

AYES: Anselm, Bantilan, Ellsworth, Grant, Jackson, Reely, Richardson, Young, Yurosek, Zenger

NOES: None

ABSTAIN: Ricci

ABSENT: None

CONSENT AGENDA

8-10. Consent Agenda

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

Director Yurosek asked about the minutes and requested clarification on the motion regarding the allocation exchange policy. Mr. Blakslee noted that staff can review the recording to confirm the motion language.

MOTION

Director Anselm made a motion to approve the consent agenda item nos. 8-10. The motion was seconded by Director Young. A roll call vote was made and the motion

passed with 69%.

AYES: Anselm, Bantilan, Jackson, Reely, Young, Yurosek, Zenger
 NOES: None
 ABSTAIN: Ellsworth, Grant, Richardson, Ricci
 ABSENT: None

ACTION ITEMS

11. 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 introduced the item and stated that staff previously informed the Board that the current model may not be sufficient to support allocation decisions in the Ventucopa Management Area. He explained that staff committed to returning with a final recommendation after completing additional fault investigation.

Mr. Strandberg presented findings from additional Santa Barbara Canyon Fault (SBCF) investigation and noted it appears to extend farther than previously modeled. He added that the faults appear to act as zones of reduced permeability that slow groundwater movement but do not completely block flow. He noted that groundwater elevations appear to change in a step-like pattern across fault zones.

Mr. Ceyhan outlined five potential model improvements, including incorporating updated fault information, refining streamflow inputs, evaluating subsurface inflows, improving stream geometry representation, and recalibrating the model. He estimated costs ranging from approximately \$160,000 to \$280,000 depending on scope.

Director Ellsworth asked what prompted the additional fault investigation. Mr. Blakslee responded that there has been longstanding uncertainty regarding groundwater flow across the fault area, and the investigation was intended to clarify the fault’s extent and influence on model results.

Director Young asked when the LiDAR data used for stream geometry was collected and whether timing could affect reliability. Mr. Van Lienden responded that LiDAR was flown in 2023 during dry conditions and acknowledged that stream channels are dynamic but the data remains useful.

Director Reely asked if, given the new subsurface information, Jim feels confident he can extend the mapped fault to the eastern edge of the basin so the model no longer lets water “flow around” an artificial fault endpoint. Mr. Strandberg responded that based on new findings, there is no reason to believe the fault abruptly ends, and extending it in the model would likely provide a more accurate representation.

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

Mr. Ceyhan clarified that while additional faults lengthen the low-conductance zone and would likely restrict cross-fault flow, the effective cross-sectional area may also be larger, so impacts on flow must be evaluated with the model.

Chair Jackson opened the floor for public comment.

Stakeholder Jim Wegis noted his historical water-level data from his Ventucopa-area well showing large inter-annual fluctuations but a long-term decline averaging about 5 inches per year, below the 2 ft/yr overdraft benchmark.

Stakeholder Jane Wooster expressed concern that once studies are done, their findings must be incorporated into the plan rather than used selectively, and criticizes that some well data supplied by landowners have not been fully integrated into the model.

Chair Jackson closed the floor for public comment.

Mr. Blakslee clarified that all fault-investigation work will be incorporated in the next major model update in 2028 even if no Ventucopa recalibration is funded sooner.

Chair Jackson asked whether potential model improvement #5, relating to model recalibration, is specific to the Ventucopa Management Area. He requested clarification on whether the scope is localized or basin-wide.

Mr. Ceyhan responded that some improvement tasks are specific to the Ventucopa Management Area, while others apply to the basin as a whole. He confirmed that development of a Cuyama River hydraulic model would benefit the entire basin, whereas isotope sampling and related analysis would focus more directly on conditions in the Ventucopa area.

Stakeholder Tristan Zannon asked when, after a model update, the board would decide whether Ventucopa needs allocations or is not in overdraft.

Stakeholder Byron Albano asked if model improvement #2 would inform the sustainable yield in the VMA or the whole basin. Mr. Ceyhan responded that the 2 ft/year is from the 50-year simulation and a better streamflow simulation will significantly affect sustainable yield estimates for Ventucopa but have a smaller effect on basin-wide yield because wet-year dynamics are more critical there than elsewhere.

Stakeholder Adam Lovgren asked whether doing this Ventucopa work now will reduce the amount of work and cost needed in 2028, or if it will essentially need to be redone then.

Mr. Ceyhan responded that work done now would generally not need to be repeated in 2028 unless new data reveals additional issues.

Director Ellsworth asked about impacts of waiting to complete the model improvements. Mr. Ceyhan responded that postponing the work is acceptable if the board is comfortable

delaying Ventucopa allocation decisions, though a few lower-cost tasks (e.g., isotopes or small watershed module checks) could still proceed earlier.

Mr. Blakslee presented four options: include recalibration in the upcoming budget, defer to the budget ad hoc process, decline recalibration at this time, or wait until the next scheduled model update in 2028.

Director Yurosek commented that the projected costs are significant and questioned whether immediate recalibration is necessary.

Director Grant stated he did not see urgency to update the model before reviewing the final report.

Alternate Ricci suggested that because the model seems inaccurate in this area, Option 2—having the budget ad hoc review and then the board revisit during budget deliberations—makes sense.

Mr. Blakslee clarified that Option 2 would include decision in the current budget cycle, while Option 3 would postpone it to the 2027–28 budget aligned with the 2028 model update. He added that staff will also be bringing other model-related projects (e.g., ET/irrigation efficiency studies) to the budget ad hoc this year.

MOTION

Director Ellsworth made a motion to move forward with option 2 to evaluate during the qualitative assessment. Director Grant seconded, a roll call vote was made and passed with 82%.

AYES: Anselm, Bantilan, Ellsworth, Grant, Ricci, Richardson, Jackson, Young, Zenger

NOES: Reely, Yurosek

ABSTAIN: None

ABSENT: None

b. 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.

Chair Jackson opened the floor for public comment.

Stakeholder Joe Haslett urged the Board to carefully evaluate the impacts of additional regulation. He emphasized the importance of fairness across different areas of the basin.

Director Bantilan commented that the Board must balance flexibility with the responsibility to prevent worsening overdraft conditions. He stated that proactive discussion is necessary before impacts become more severe.

Director Ellsworth asked whether all wells in the basin are currently monitored. Mr. Blakslee responded that wells in the representative monitoring network are measured quarterly, but not every individual production well is directly monitored.

Stakeholder Ann Myhre commented that groundwater level changes do not appear uniform across the basin and expressed concern about broad management actions. She encouraged the Board to consider localized conditions before imposing restrictions.

Chair Jackson closed the floor for public comment.

Director Zenger asked for clarification on the Agency's authority under SGMA to regulate pumping outside designated management areas. Legal Counsel Dominguez referenced the applicable Water Code provisions and stated that the Agency has authority to manage groundwater extraction to achieve sustainability, subject to adopted policies and procedures.

REPORT ITEMS

12. Administrative Updates

a. Report of the Executive Director

i. Report on Fiscal Year 2026-2027 Budget Schedule

Mr. Blakslee provided an overview of the fiscal year 2026-2027 budget schedule.

ii. Report on Water Year 2025 Annual Report Schedule

Mr. Blakslee provided a brief overview of the water year 2025 annual report schedule.

b. Report of the General Counsel

Mr. Dominguez provided an update on his employment at Klein DeNatale Goldner.

13. Technical Updates

a. Update on Groundwater Sustainability Plan Activities

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

b. Update on Grant-Funded Projects

Mr. Van Lienden briefly reported that CIMIS stations are expected to be installed by February.

14. Report of Ad Hoc Committees

Nothing to report.

15. Directors' Forum

Nothing to report.

16. Public comment for Items Not on the Agenda

Karen Lewis provided public comment regarding the allocations framework and the financial impacts to small farms. She described her family’s farming history and stated that, after planting pistachios and lavender, their water needs have increased as trees mature. She stated the GSA has denied a permanent variance and that purchasing water from the pool, combined with extraction fees and adjudication costs, creates significant financial hardship, and she requested the Board consider a permanent option to address impacts to small farms under the current methodology

17. Correspondence

No correspondence was received.

CLOSED SESSION

18. Conference with Legal Counsel – Public Employment (Gov. Code section 54957)

Title: General Counsel

19. Conference with Legal Counsel – Existing Litigation

Pursuant to Government Code section 54956.9(d)(1)

- a) Bolthouse Land Company, LLC, et al v. All Persons Claiming a Right to Extract or Store Groundwater in the Cuyama Valley Groundwater Basin (BCV-21-101927)

20. Adjourn

Chair Jackson adjourned the meeting at 6:22 PM.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE
 CUYAMA BASIN GROUNDWATER SUSTAINABILITY AGENCY

Chair: Steve Jackson
Steve Jackson (Mar 4, 2026 21:23:59 PST)

ATTEST:

Secretary: Matt Young
Matt Young (Mar 5, 2026 08:35:51 PST)