

Cuyama Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency Standing Advisory Committee Meeting

February 26, 2026

Meetings Minutes

PRESENT:

Kelly, Brenton – Chair
Jaffe, Roberta
DeBranch, Brad
Gaillard, Jean
Lewis, Dave

Bianchi, Grace – Project Coordinator, Hallmark Group
Blakslee, Taylor – Executive Director, Hallmark Group
Van Lienden, Brian – Woodard & Curran

ABSENT:

Haslett, Joe – Participating as stakeholders
Caufield, John – Participating as stakeholders

1. Call to Order

Cuyama Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency (CBGSA) Standing Advisory Committee (SAC)
Chair Kelly called the meeting to order at 5:04 p.m.

2. Roll Call

Ms. Bianchi called roll of the Committee (shown above).

3. Pledge of Allegiance

Chair Kelly led the pledge of allegiance.

4. Meeting Protocol

Project Coordinator Grace Bianchi provided an overview of the meeting protocols in facilitating a hybrid meeting.

5. Public Comment for Items Not on the Agenda

Chair Kelly opened the floor public comment.

Committee Member Lewis expressed concern about allocation process inadequacy for small pumpers.

ACTION ITEMS

6. Approval of January 8, 2026, Minutes

Committee Chair Kelly opened the floor for comments on the January 8, 2026, CBGSA SAC meeting minutes.

MOTION

Committee Member Kelly made a motion to approve January 8, 2026, CBGSA SAC meeting

minutes. The motion was seconded by Committee Member Lewis. A roll call vote was made, and the motion passed.

AYES: DeBranch, Jaffe Kelly, Lewis
NOES: None
ABSTAIN: Gaillard
ABSENT: Caufield, Haslett

7. Groundwater Sustainability Plan Implementation

a. Discuss and Take Appropriate Action on DWR Review of GSP and Periodic Evaluation

Mr. Blakslee provided an overview of the comments from the Department of Water Resources (DWR) on the Groundwater Sustainability Plan and Periodic Evaluation. He reported that staff met with a Board ad hoc committee and DWR, and written responses are due July 31, 2026, with draft responses to return to the SAC in April and the Board in May.

Committee Member Jaffe if staff was surprised by any of DWR's comments. Mr. Blakslee responded that he was surprised by the number of comments and noted policy-level items related to nitrate and arsenic monitoring, subsidence SMC methodology, and the timing of promoting dedicated monitoring wells.

Mr. Van Lienden added that DWR staff appeared receptive to explanations regarding updated minimum thresholds but requested clearer written justification. He noted that subsidence comments likely reflect DWR's newer Best Management Practice guidance affecting many basins statewide.

Chair Kelly asked whether metered pumping data could be incorporated into the groundwater model. Mr. Van Lienden responded that the model simulates long-term historical and projected conditions, so metered data are used for calibration rather than direct model input.

Chair Kelly opened the floor for public comment.

Stakeholder Jane Wooster asked whether the model is more accurate for small irrigators with fewer wells. Mr. Van Lienden responded that single-well fields provide clearer location data, whereas larger farming units with multiple wells introduce more estimation uncertainty.

Chair Kelly asked whether the DWR comments would be reviewed by the Technical Forum. Mr. Blakslee responded that staff does not plan to convene the Technical Forum because the responses largely clarify existing work rather than develop new technical approaches.

Committee Member Gaillard asked whether DWR oversees Groundwater Sustainability Plan governance or Board composition and expressed concern about local representation. Mr. Blakslee responded that DWR focuses on Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) compliance and public agency requirements and would not weigh in on Board membership decisions.

b. Discuss and Take Appropriate Action on Potential Areas of Overdraft Outside the Central Management Area

Ms. Bianchi provided background on the Board's prior direction to evaluate potential increased pumping outside the Central Management Area (CMA). She explained that the initial assessment includes groundwater pumping, groundwater levels, and land use and well permitting data.

Mr. Blakslee stated that the goal is to identify significant changes that may warrant further investigation, rather than make immediate sustainability determinations. He noted that land use and well permit data are still being compiled from the counties.

Chair Kelly commented on Well 99 and expressed concern that the annual groundwater level change map may not reflect longer-term declines shown in the hydrograph. He stated that a 50-foot increase year-over-year does not fully capture an 80-foot decline followed by partial recovery.

Mr. Van Lienden responded that the map reflects year-to-year change based on measured groundwater levels. He noted that other basins often use model-based groundwater change maps rather than measured data.

Committee Member Jaffe stated that comparing only two years of data can be misleading, particularly when rainfall varies significantly between years. She recommended reviewing longer-term trends before drawing conclusions.

Mr. Blakslee responded that this evaluation is intended as an initial screening tool and that additional analysis would follow if conditions warrant further review.

Stakeholder Byron Albano commented that annual groundwater level fluctuations outside the CMA are common and should not automatically be interpreted as overdraft. He encouraged maintaining that distinction when presenting data.

Ms. Bianchi confirmed that land use and well permit data will be incorporated into the next update of the assessment.

c. Discuss and Take Appropriate Action on FY 2026-2027 Strategic Plan and Budget Components

Mr. Blakslee provided an overview of the proposed budget components and explained that the SAC is being asked for high-level feedback before staff prepare cost estimates. He clarified that inclusion on the list does not commit the Board to funding but signals that pricing should be developed.

Chair Kelly reminded the Committee that budget adoption is a Board responsibility and encouraged comments to remain at a strategic level.

Mr. Blakslee continued to review the budget components.

Chair Kelly referenced DWR's comments regarding allocations beyond 2029 and questioned whether future allocation updates should be planned regardless of adjudication status. Mr. Van Lienden responded that DWR requested confirmation of the plan to continue allocations and that the Board has previously directed model updates at least every five years.

Committee Member Jaffe asked about the adjudication line item and whether allocation policy updates, including carryover and exchange provisions, would be included. She emphasized the importance of these policies for small farmers and supported pricing them for consideration.

Committee Member DeBranch commented that past budgets relied heavily on grant funding and stated that, in its absence, the GSA should prioritize essential data collection and regulatory compliance.

Chair Kelly asked whether staff had considered pulling water quality sampling data from the Irrigated Lands Program, noting that Jim Wegis had previously mentioned growers are required to submit sampling data that may overlap with GSA requirements.

Stakeholder Byron Albano responded that agricultural wells already submit water quality data through the Irrigated Lands Program and suggested the GSA explore accessing that data to supplement the monitoring network and avoid duplicative reporting costs.

d. Discuss and Take Appropriate Action on Water Year 2024-2025 Annual Report

Mr. Van Lienden reported that the Water Year 2024-2025 Annual Report must be submitted to DWR by April 1, 2026. He summarized key components, including data and model updates, estimated groundwater extractions, change in groundwater storage, updated groundwater conditions, and salinity conditions.

Committee Member Jaffe asked whether the net reduction in groundwater storage in 2025 is concerning. Mr. Van Lienden responded that a drier year combined with additional pumping resulted in reduced storage, but long-term trends remain within expected variability.

MOTION

Committee Member Jaffe made a motion to approve the annual report. The motion was seconded by Committee Chair Kelly. A roll call vote was made, and the motion passed.

AYES:	DeBranch, Gaillard, Jaffe, Kelly, Lewis
NOES:	None
ABSTAIN:	None
ABSENT:	Caufield, Haslett

Technical Updates

a. Update on Groundwater Sustainability Plan Activities

Mr. Van Lienden reported that GSP activities update is provided in the SAC packet and reported that the fault investigation study.

b. Update on Grant-Funded Projects

Mr. Van Lienden reported that the updates on the grant-funded projects, which is provided in the SAC packet.

c. Update on Groundwater Conditions Report

Mr. Van Lienden reviewed the quarterly groundwater conditions report for January 2026.

8. Administrative Updates

a. Report of the Executive Director

Nothing to report.

b. Report of the General Counsel

Nothing to report.

c. Report on 2025 Basin-wide Groundwater Use, 2025 CMA Allocation Compliance, and Groundwater Allocation Exchanges

Mr. Blakslee reported that there are three landowners to provide the pumping data, however the total extraction has decreased from 2024.

Committee Member DeBranch commented on the discrepancy between modeled and reported pumping trends. Mr. Blakslee clarified the difference in reporting periods.

Mr. Blakslee reviewed 2025 CMA allocation compliance and noted that two landowners exceeded their allocations.

Stakeholder Joe Haslett commented that minor allocation exceedances should be considered in context.

Committee Member Jaffe noted that 58 percent of allocations were used and suggested unused allocations may provide flexibility for small farmers.

Committee Member DeBranch stated that the unused allocation gap is expected to narrow under the glidepath.

Committee Member Lewis asked about the process for water allocations.

d. Board of Directors Agenda Review

Ms. Bianchi briefly reviewed the March 4, 2026, CBGSA Board Meeting agenda, which is provided in the SAC packet.

9. Items for Upcoming Sessions

Committee Member Jaffe requested additional information regarding the adjudication process at a future meeting.

10. Committee Forum

Nothing to report.


11. Correspondence

There was no correspondence.

12. Adjourn

Chair Kelly adjourned the meeting at 8:56 p.m.

STANDING ADVISORY COMMITTEE OF THE
CUYAMA BASIN GROUNDWATER SUSTAINABILITY AGENCY

Chair Kelly: 
Brenton Kelly (May 4, 2026 15:34:28 PDT)

ATTEST:

Vice Chair Haslett: 
Joe Haslett (Apr 30, 2026 18:57:35 PDT)