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May 14, 2020

Mr. Craig Altare
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California Department of Water Resources
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Email: Craig.Altare@ca.water.gov
Portal Submission: https://sgma.water.ca.gov/portal/gsp/comments/42 and /57

Ms. Deanna Jackson
Executive Director
Tri County Water Authority (Tule and Tulare Lake Subbasins)
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Mr. Joe Hopkins
Consulting Engineer
Southwest Kings GSA
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Dear Messrs. Altare and Hopkins, and Ms. Jackson,

El Rico GSA respectfully submits the following comments regarding(1) the Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) of Tri County Water Authority ("TCWA") for the Tule Subbasin, and (2) the portions of the GSP for the Tulare Lake Subbasin relating to TCWA and Southwest Kings GSA ("SWK").

El Rico GSA is located wholly within the Tulare Lake Subbasin and shares substantial boundaries with both TCWA and SWK.

Sandridge Partners ("Sandridge"), which we understand is primarily owned and controlled by John Vidovich, is the biggest/majority landholder in both TCWA and SWK. We also understand that Mr. Vidovich and/or Sandridge owns and controls a substantial number of acres of land in Westlands Water District in the Westside

Subbasin and in other districts in the Kern Subbasin. We further understand that Mr. Vidovich has caused both surface and pumped groundwater to be physically moved via pipeline and canals from and to lands controlled by him, thereby crossing boundaries of counties, GSA's, water districts, subbasins, defined places of use, and perhaps areas that are otherwise regulated. It is believed that the pipeline/canal system begins in TCWA in the Tule Subbasin and in Westlands Water District in the Westside Subbasin, meanders through South Fork Kings GSA in the Tulare Lake Subbasin, and merges in or near Dudley Ridge Water District within SWK for use in that district and distribution to lands in various Kern County Subbasin GSA's and districts. These transfers are not described by TCWA in the Tule Subbasin GSP or by TCWA or SWK in the Tulare Lake Subbasin GSP. We believe that a detailed description of this complicated water transfer structure be provided and that sufficient data be provided in order to quantify all transfers that have occurred and that may occur in the future, including full and complete data regarding the quantities and types of water transferred, and the sources and ultimate places of use of the transferred water. Without such information the subject GSPs are incomplete and we are concerned that SGMA compliance is thereby jeopardized in the Tulare Lake Subbasin.

There is some uncertainty by El Rico GSA with regard to this request because of the hidden nature of Sandridge's operations. Litigation is pending with respect to some of the suspected transfers, but not all. A complete listing of transfers is requested for each of the years covered by the GSP's, including base period years and initial annual update years submitted pursuant to SGMA. We believe it is important that this information be provided promptly so that it can be properly incorporated into the GSPs.

One important aspect of this missing transfer data is that other reporting by TCWA and SWK may be misleading. For example, TCWA has decided to allow satellite imagery in lieu of using well meters to determine and report pumping within its area. However, Sandridge in TCWA pumps water and transports the water via pipeline/canal to other locations from mostly fallow ground. This method of accounting could allow Sandridge to show little to no evapotranspiration in TCWA, and therefore little or no extrapolated pumping, while in reality there is extensive pumping and exportation of significant amounts of groundwater to the detriment of other landowners in the GSA and surrounding GSA's. The underreporting of pumping, and the groundwater storage shortfall caused thereby, could harm other GSA's including El Rico GSA.

OTHER COMMENTS ON THE TCWA AND SWK TULARE LAKE SUBBASIN GSP'S:

CHAPTER 3 WATER BUDGET

- Irrigated Crop Acres (Figure 3-46) for TCWA from 1990 through 2016 ranged from about 22,000 acres to about 75,000 acres. During 2012 through 2016, irrigated acreage (primarily from pasture) was about 22,000, 28,000, 59,000, 30,000, and 23,000 acres, respectively for those years. Such a large area of irrigated acres with zero surface water deliveries would appear to be inherently unsustainable.
- TCWA made no Surface water diversions for the 2012 through 2016 period (Figure 3-41).
- Imported groundwater supplies for El Rico and TCWA (Angiola) were 13,000, 18,000, 16,000, 18,000, and 17,000 afy, respectively for 2012 through 2016. No imported groundwater to SWK from TCWA was reported. It appears based on crop patters that SWK has a high crop demand. Were intra-basin transfers not documented? (Figure 3-42). If not, they should be.
- Interestingly, Figure 3-44 shows river and canal seepage for TCWA for 2012 through 2016, with 2016 having the largest amount. It is difficult to determine the volume due to the figure scale but the pattern of annual seepage/recharge for 2012 through 2016 does not follow the pattern of imported groundwater supplies which should be the only conveyed water that should have canal seepage. This incongruity of more seepage when less water is run should be explained.
- Groundwater pumping for ag and muni (Figure 3-47) is difficult to quantify the TCWA annual amounts due to the scale provided on the figure, however, the variation from year to year does not vary too much between 2012 through 2016. A greater variation would likely occur given the different hydrologic conditions of those years. Please explain the lack of variation.
- The irrigated crop demand during 2012 through 2016 was met entirely from groundwater pumping and imported groundwater, however, the TCWA still showed about 18,000 to 23,000 afy declines in aquifer storage (combined from upper and lower aquifer). This is significant because it shows that although the irrigated crop acreage was reduced significantly during this period (to about 5,000 acres) compared to prior years in the historical water budget, the amount of groundwater pumping was not sustainable and still resulted in a significant amount of storage decline. These results convey that the TCWA reduction in demand during dry years is not enough to stabilize declines in groundwater storage which is a concern for the 2020 through 2040 period. The TCWA and SWK portions of the GSP do not account for this lack of sustainability.

PROJECTED WATER BUDGETS, PROJECTS AND MANAGEMENT ACTIONS

- TCWA relies on a single surface water storage project to address overdraft in the form of groundwater storage decline. This project will not be implemented until 2030 and relies on obtaining flood water from the Kings River to be the sole source of supply. The GSP and model report appendix provide conflicting information on the annual average amount of water that will be available for this project. The GSP reports an annual average of 15,000 acre feet while the model report appendix reports an annual average of 17,000 to 18,000 acre feet. However, by 2040 when sustainability needs to be demonstrated, the annual average is only 10,000 acre feet for the 2017 through 2040 projected period. This is less than half the historical deficit reported in Table 3-6a. The project appears to be insufficient to meet SGMA sustainability requirements.
- The amount of water estimated to be stored during any one year for a 13,000 acre surface storage basin with six foot high berms from March to July is reported by the GSP to be 80,000 acre feet. This volume seems overly optimistic for the size of the basin that is described, not to mention that availability of flood flows for that long a period of time may not occur in the future due to projected increases on the demands for Kings River flood flows. The flood flows are projected to occur in three of the remaining 10 years (2031, 2032, and 2039) for the 2017 through 2040 period. As mentioned above, this is an average annual value of 10,000 acre feet. This is less than half the annual historic decline in aquifer storage for the TCWA. This project appears to be insufficient to meet SGMA sustainability requirements.
- There is no analysis that is provided that demonstrates that the TCWA projects and management actions will allow TCWA to be sustainable by 2040.

  TCWA lists demand reductions as a management action, however, no information is provided as to how demand reduction will be implemented or how it will address declines in groundwater storage. Based on a review of the historical groundwater budget for TCWA, especially during the 2012 through 2016 period when irrigated acreage water was reduced substantially reduced to approximately 4,500 acres and groundwater storage still declined by 20,000 to 23,000 acre feet it is difficult to envision demand reduction being a viable management action.

El Rico GSA appreciates the opportunity to provide comments on the TCWA and SWK GSP's.

Regards,

Jeof Wyrick

Jeof Wyrick
Chairman
El Rico GSA