

LOCAL VIEWPOINT

Supervisors have chance to vote for good water policy on Tuesday



BY JERRY REAUGH

On Jan. 1, 2015, the new Sustainable Groundwater Management Act, SGMA, became law in California.

For the first time in many decades, California addressed the critical issue of groundwater management; SGMA is a comprehensive approach on how groundwater basins are going to be managed for the next 40 years. The most important requirement of SGMA is that groundwater basins will have to submit to the state a Groundwater Sustainability Plan, or GSP.

The GSP, which will be reviewed and approved by the state, must demonstrate how each basin is going to manage its water resources for the next 40 years. For a "critical" basin, such as the Paso Robles Groundwater Basin, the GSP must be submitted to the state by June 30, 2020.

In recognition of this requirement, local agencies and interested parties in the Paso Basin began meeting in 2016.

By the end of 2016, six groups emerged as active parties interested in developing the GSP for our basin: the city of Paso Robles, SLO County, San Miguel CSD, Heritage Ranch CSD, and the proposed new water districts of Shandon/San Juan and the Estrella-El Pomar-Creston, or EPC.

Early in 2017, the SGMA Implementation Group began drafting a Memorandum of Agreement, or MOA, on how the interested parties were going to cooperate in creating and drafting the complex GSP document required by the state. EPC was a very active participant and contributor to that effort.

Another requirement of SGMA is that each basin must be covered by one or more Groundwater Sustainability Agencies, or GSAs.

Applications to become a GSA were due July 1, 2017. The EPC Water District was not yet fully formed, but it was widely understood that if EPC was officially formed by

Dec. 31, 2017, EPC would be included in the MOA. The MOA was approved by all existing agencies in the summer of 2017. The Board of Supervisors approved of the MOA by a vote of 5-0.

In April 2017, the San Luis Obispo County LAFCO approved the formation of the EPC Water District. The primary purpose of the EPC Water District was to become a GSA and participate with the other local agencies. LAFCO approved formation by a 5-2 vote. The EPC Water District was officially certified as a water district on Dec. 8, 2017, meeting the deadline of Dec. 31, 2017.

Twice, in November 2016 and again in March 2017, SLO County approved its SGMA Strategy, voting 5-0. In the strategy, the county states it "supports . . . eligible entity formation." These were clear references to EPC.

So for 18 months, EPC has proceeded in good faith, expending considerable resources; EPC has participated in the MOA process; LAFCO approved EPC Water District formation; EPC Water District concluded its successful formation; and the county's SGMA Strategy has repeatedly supported EPC becoming a GSA.

One issue that continues to be of concern is the issue of export of water from the Paso Robles Basin. There are many things in place that make export of water impossible. They are:

- The county has an ordinance to severely limit export of water

- LAFCO restrictions prohibits the Shandon/San Juan Water District from exporting water

- LAFCO restrictions prohibit the EPC Water District from exporting water

- SGMA requires our basin to be managed sustainably, and it's preposterous to think the state would approve a GSP that includes export of water from a "critically" over-drafted basin

- Additionally, there's an initiative currently circulating that would further exclude any export

- All of our larger entities have established extensive operations here in the basin and have invested millions of dollars in fixed assets. It's unrealistic to believe that they would put their in-

vestment at risk by allowing their most critical resource to be exported.

EPC has stated publicly and in a recent press release that we oppose any sort of export of water from the basin.

On Tuesday, March 6, the Board of Supervisors will consider a resolution that would allow the county to withdraw from serving as the Groundwater Sustainability Agency over properties that are within the service area of the Estrella-El Pomar-Creston Water District.

Additionally, the resolution would allow the EPC Water District to become a party to the Paso Robles Basin's Memorandum of Agreement. Becoming a GSA and being a part of the MOA is important to the EPC Water District because it will allow our members the have a seat at the table, along with other County GSA agencies as they begin to craft the framework for groundwater management for decades to come.

We urge the board to vote yes.

EPC represents that largest group of water users in the basin. Our membership includes many folks who have participated for years in the county's efforts to cooperatively manage our basin for the benefit of all. These efforts include the Blue-Ribbon Committee and the Basin Advisory Committee. Sustainable management is a tall order for a "critical" basin. Tough decisions are coming and it's logical that those most likely to be affected should be at the table.

EPC is a voluntary opt-in water district demonstrating that concerned rural residents, farmers and landowners are willing to step forward and participate with others in the Basin to find solutions. Not only do we bring our participation and support, EPC has successfully completed

a Prop 218 funding vote and we have funding available of over \$500,000 per year to support developing a cooperative management plan for our Basin, the GSP. We have volunteered.

We are anxious to cooperate with our fellow agencies. We bring financial resources to building better solutions now and far into the future.

A successful GSP is a great down payment on the health of our Basin and continued economic success of our community.

Including a willing, cooperative partner with financial resources is good policy.

We hope our leaders will put good policy first.

Jerry Reaugh is secretary/treasurer of the Estrella-El Pomar-Creston Water District.

Be WARM & Comfy





Fireplaces Get FREE Setup & Delivery in SLO County





