



# Solano Subbasin Groundwater Sustainability Virtual Town Hall Meeting Summary

May 22, 2024 | Held virtually via Zoom, 5:30 pm - 7:00 pm Pacific Time

## Objectives and Background

1. Provide an overview of the State of the Solano Subbasin
2. Share context - the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA), the Solano Subbasin Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP), and associated work toward Projects and Management Actions (PMAs)
3. Interactive discussion about groundwater recharge
4. Answer questions and share opportunities to get involved

## Virtual Town Hall Agenda and Presentation

View the Town Hall agenda [here](#).

View the presentation slides [here](#).

Consulta [aquí](#) la agenda del Ayuntamiento.

Ve las diapositivas de la presentación [aquí](#).

## Participation Summary

Registrations: 80

Participants: 41

## Outreach Summary

The Solano Subbasin Virtual Town Hall was publicized in multiple forums to raise awareness of the event and encourage participation by community members. A newsletter and two e-blasts went out to a listserv of 707 subscribers. The event was shared on Facebook via local groups including Dixon 411 and the Rio Vista Community Bulletin.

## Participant Poll

Virtual Town Hall participants were asked to respond to four poll questions via Zoom polls in both English and Spanish. The poll asked how many Town Halls participants have attended; how participants heard about the Town Hall; if they have seen the Solano Subbasin Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) or the most recent Annual Report; and if they are landowners in the Solano County Subbasin, to share something about groundwater recharge practices they are interested in and/or practicing (see responses below).

## Presentation Highlights

Below are highlights from each section of the Virtual Town Hall. Throughout the meeting, links to information were shared via the chat, including the [2024 Annual Report](#), the [State of the Subbasin](#), [SolanoGSP.com](#), and its subpages.

## Welcome, Introductions, and Meeting Overview

Chris Lee, Solano County Water Agency and the Solano Subbasin GSA, welcomed participants on behalf of the Solano Subbasin GSA and the other GSAs who worked to develop the Solano Subbasin GSP. The meeting was simulcast in Spanish and recorded.

Jenn Fox, Ag Innovations, thanked everyone for joining. She emphasized the importance of community involvement and invited those on the call to use the chat feature to introduce themselves and share where they lived and worked. Participants included local growers and landowners, staff at RCDs and public agencies. The meeting included presentations on the implementation of the Sustainable Groundwater

Management Act (SGMA) in the Solano Subbasin, an overview of current groundwater and surface water conditions in the Solano Subbasin, updates on implementation activities and related conservation efforts, and ways to stay involved. The meeting also included significant time for questions/answers.

### Sustainable Groundwater Management Act and the Solano Subbasin

Chris Lee provided an overview of SGMA, including the requirement to create a GSP in the Solano Subbasin. Chris described the Solano Subbasin's geographic boundaries. GSAs that worked together on the GSP include: reclamation districts, the City of Vacaville GSA, Sacramento County GSA, Solano Irrigation District (SID) GSA, Solano Subbasin GSA, and Northern Delta GSA.

The GSP was submitted to the Department of Water Resources (DWR) in 2022 and DWR approved the GSP in January 2024. Chris shared the timeline for the implementation of the GSP. Implementation activities include a comprehensive update every five years, monitoring and data management, outreach, annual reports, regional coordination, and work on Projects and Management Actions (PMAs).

### State of the Solano Subbasin

Nick Watterson, Principal Hydrogeologist at Luhdorff & Scalmanini Consulting Engineers (LSCE), gave an overview of current hydrologic conditions in the Subbasin. The Annual Report for water year 2023 summarizes groundwater conditions and activities in the Subbasin from October 2022 through September 2023; and was submitted to DWR in April 2024. The primary sources of water supply in the Solano Subbasin are surface water (from the Delta and the Solano Project from Lake Berryessa), and groundwater.

In 2023, surface water was about two-thirds, and groundwater comprised about one-third of the total water used in the Subbasin. Lake Berryessa's storage capacity is about 1.6 million acre-feet. The lake was near capacity in April of this year. Since 1991 the Subbasin has had relatively stable groundwater levels with a slight increase in storage. In 2023 groundwater pumping was ~50,000 acre-feet less than the prior year. This is largely due to the wet year - increased precipitation reduces demand for groundwater supplies.

Nick shared a graphic of wells monitored in the subbasin, including Representative Monitoring Site (RMS) wells tracked with specific metrics defined in the GSP. Nick described that during the water year 2023, all but three of the wells in the representative monitoring site network had increases in groundwater levels.

Nick described coordinated activities with multiple entities to support groundwater sustainability. He shared highlights from the Annual Report, and graphics on water quality, including nitrates and land subsidence. Areas of work include expanded monitoring and outreach, implementation of grant funding, and multi-benefit project planning to enhance recharge and water supplies, mitigate flooding, and buffer future dry periods. Nick encouraged participants to use this [interactive web map](#) to learn more about groundwater conditions in the subbasin.

Nick said that coordinating with local landowners, RCDs, and adjacent subbasins is important for long-term sustainability. The Solano Collaborative is coordinating to implement the GSP and maintain sustainable groundwater conditions in the subbasin. Work on multi-benefit projects can enhance recharge, improve stormwater management, and increase the resiliency of the subbasin.

### Panel on Groundwater Recharge and Sustainability

Jenn Fox provided a summary of the related efforts in the Solano Subbasin that were discussed in last year's Virtual Town Hall. Cary Keaton of Solano Irrigation District described how some things were different given the wet winter last year; Justen Cole of the City of Vacaville talked about work towards water recycling; Misty Kaltreider talked about the Solano County-wide One Water framework, and Martha

McKean of the Dixon RCD talked about the Irrigated Lands Regulatory Program. She then introduced this year's panelists.

Austin Miller of the Sacramento County Department of Water Resources & Groundwater Sustainability Agency said that Sacramento County is a part of four subbasins. Austin shared examples of work in a few subbasins to advance groundwater recharge. Austin shared images showing ways farmers and ranchers are working toward groundwater sustainability, ranging from large-scale projects to smaller, farm-specific projects.

Kelly Huff, of Dixon RCD, shared that Dixon RCD's primary mission is to provide drainage services to about 33,000 acres of agricultural land in the eastern part of the county, using 70 miles of drainage ditches. Dixon RCD works together with several other agencies, landowners, and farmers to identify groundwater recharge opportunities. Work to "slow, sink, and spread" drainage water can take pressure off of the systems and help with retaining stormwater. Kelly shared examples of water infiltration on farmlands and tailwater return systems that were originally put in place as recycling for flood irrigation water but can also be repurposed to slow stormwater during the rainy season. Dixon RCD is also working with GSAs to measure the benefits of these practices.

Thomas Bottoms of Timothy and Viguie Farming described his experience and efforts. He encouraged Town Hall attendees to think of a kid at a buffet that overloads his plate without thinking about the amount he could eat. The older you get, you learn that you need to be selective of what you put on your plate. Tommy said this is similar to the need to be selective about techniques and methods to keep water on farms and recharge groundwater. He shared methods he is using to work on water quality, runoff retention, sediment, and nutrient loss. Tommy also shared more about retention ponds and cover cropping with sedan grass, ryegrass, and legumes in orchard furrows.

Chris Lee gave an overview of funding for GSP implementation. Under SGMA, local agencies take on the burden of paying for GSP administration and implementation and each of the GSAs in the Subbasin pay their share. The Subbasin was awarded a \$4.4 million Proposition 68 grant from DWR. Activities funded under the grant include: improved understanding of water use in the Subbasin, enhanced groundwater monitoring, assessment of interconnected surface waters and groundwater-dependent ecosystems along Putah Creek, groundwater recharge pilot studies, City of Vacaville recycled water project planning, education and outreach on water conservation practices, and preparation of annual reports and the 5-Year GSP Update.

## Panel Discussion

Throughout the meeting, participants were encouraged to share questions and comments. Jenn Fox, of Ag Innovations, moderated a panel discussion. The questions and comments below are submissions from individual participants; followed by a summary of answers provided live and answers shared with all via the Zoom Q/A feature.

### Questions submitted and answered via Zoom Q/A

**Question:** Are there any other GSAs like ours that have already built demonstration projects?

**Answer:** Though not quite a 'demonstration' project, Omochumne-Hartnell Water District is a GSA in Sacramento County that is doing [recharge projects](#), as Austin mentioned. You can view a [video](#) of the Omochumne Hartnell Water District groundwater recharge project.

**Question:** What water quality assurances have to be met for recharge projects?

**Answer:** Monitoring for potential water quality impacts from large-scale recharge projects is important. Some of the existing monitoring programs can support this, but additional monitoring may be appropriate, depending on the recharge approach and setting.

**Question:** What are the public health issues with the noted pollutants? Is there a risk standard?

**Answer:** There are established drinking water standards (maximum contaminant levels - MCLs) established by regulatory entities for water that is served to the public for drinking water consumption. The State Water Board Division of Drinking Water and the US EPA have more information on MCLs and potential public health issues related to different chemicals. In the live discussion, it was also noted that public water systems are required to comply with established drinking water standards established by regulatory entities for water that is served to the public for drinking water consumption.

### Summary of panel discussion and questions answered live

When asked about unexpected challenges, Tommy shared how it can be difficult with slim margins and tight windows for crops in the agricultural industry. Austin shared how water rights in California are a challenging topic, and said that the GSAs are trying to work on recharge projects to be stronger together.

A question was asked about locally controlled funding for groundwater recharge demonstration projects. Chris Lee shared that the Subbasin was very fortunate to receive a significant Prop 68 grant - over \$4 million that will help do several things, including additional monitoring, help with reporting, and improving understanding of the groundwater hydrology and interconnected surface waters.

Tommy shared that some companies will incentivize growers because they care about the sustainability of their products and will partner to support testing for new growing practices. He also discussed how groundwater recharge and growing methods work differently in different parts of California.

Kelly shared an example of innovation in the southern Central Valley, where irrigation districts are working on direct incentives for farmers to take extra water during different times of the year and reduce their price of water during the growing season. There has also been a recognition of the chance to reduce some regulatory barriers.

Nick talked about how different types of soil can impact groundwater recharge potential. Depending on the approach taken and the tools used, there are different options for landowners to pilot and explore. He said it is important to work with those who are most familiar with the local conditions.

### Responses to poll question

The following was submitted in response to the Zoom poll question: If you are a landowner in the Solano Subbasin, please share something about groundwater recharge practices you are interested in and/or practicing.

- "I only have a quarter acre in suburban Dixon, but have installed small cisterns to capture roof runoff and spread it. I'd be interested in lawns that are deeper-rooted perennials. I'm super excited to learn about low-residue cover crops."
- "I want to hear more about data-driven project results based on the scientific PDCA method."
- "In my area, the water table is only at about 4'. Therefore, we do not need to worry about groundwater recharge on our property."
- "Might we as a GSA collectively think about a goal of recharging through basin-wide reduced runoff from ag lands, 1020, or even 30,000 acre-feet of water each year?"

### Additional comments

The following comments were submitted by participants directly in the Zoom chat.

- "Dunnigan WD in Yolo County has been doing a [groundwater recharge project](#) for the past couple of years, providing habitat during the pre-growing season."
- "Hugh Bennett, Father of the USDA's soil conservation service said it best nearly 100 years ago: Keep the raindrop where it falls!"

## Next Steps and Ways to Stay Involved

Jenn shared a timeline of the long-term process to maintain sustainability in the Subbasin. She encouraged participants to visit the [SolanoGSP.org](https://solanogsp.org) website, links shared in the chat, and to get involved in additional ways, including:

- Attend an event in partnership with a local RCD
- Attend individual GSA Board Meetings
- Visit SolanoGSP.com, join the Solano GSP newsletter list
- Attend Town Hall Meetings
- Stay engaged with beneficial user groups
- Visit <https://groundwaterguide.com/>, which also includes information in Spanish.
- Learn more about the Solano County One-Water efforts: [OneWater@SolanoCounty.com](mailto:OneWater@SolanoCounty.com)

In closing, Jenn extended her gratitude to the panelists, the agencies working on the GSP, all those who attended the 2024 Virtual Town Hall. She thanked the RCD partners, panelists, and Spanish translators for their contributions. She encouraged participants to share feedback and ideas and used the chat to share links to feedback surveys - in English and in Spanish. Participants were encouraged to contact [Guadalupe@aginnovations.org](mailto:Guadalupe@aginnovations.org) with additional questions and ideas.