

Paula Hugi

From: Grant Davids <grant@davidsengineering.com>
Sent: Monday, July 7, 2025 2:55 PM
To: Clerkoftheboard
Cc: Carol Scianni; KSicke
Subject: Comments Submitted for the Board of Supervisors July 8, 2025 Meeting Packet

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Dear Yolo County Board Clerk,

The following comments are respectfully submitted to the Yolo County Supervisors for inclusion in their July 8, 2025 meeting packet . The comments pertain to Yolo County groundwater management in general with particular focus on the Hungry Hollow area. My comments do not align with any particular item on the July 8 agenda.

I have cc'd this email to Carol Scianna, YSGA Board Chair, and Kristin Sicke, YSGA Executive Officer, for their information.

Thank you,

Grant Davids, P.E.

Temporary Groundwater Well Drilling Moratoriums: A Blunt but Possibly Useful Tool

The Yolo Groundwater Subbasin is extensive and generally resilient and has reliably met agricultural and municipal water demands for decades. However, there are particular areas within the subbasin where groundwater levels have been persistently declining, the land surface is subsiding, and/or relatively shallow groundwater wells are going dry. Because of these indications of unsustainable groundwater use, the Yolo Groundwater Sustainability Agency (YSGA) has delineated "focus areas" within the subbasin that require special attention. Notably, Hungry Hollow and the area around Winters, (as well as other areas), fall within focus areas. Both of these areas are experiencing ongoing declines in groundwater levels, signaling that more groundwater is being pumped than is being recharged. The YSGA is working diligently in collaboration with local interests to evaluate what can be done in these areas to balance the groundwater system to achieve sustainability.

The preferred course of action is to identify and implement projects to increase groundwater recharge, but increasing recharge depends on accessing and using more surface water. Portions of some focus areas, such as around Winters, have access to more surface water while others do not. Hungry Hollow is an area with limited access to surface water and so balancing the groundwater budget might require setting limits on how much groundwater can be pumped. In portions of the San Joaquin Valley, groundwater allocations are being implemented (along with recharge projects) to manage toward groundwater sustainability. And even in the relatively water-abundant Sacramento Valley, some groundwater sustainability agencies are examining allocations as one possible element of their "groundwater demand management" programs. Setting groundwater allocations requires quantifying the

volume of pumping that can be sustained over the long term, through wet and dry cycles, apportioning that volume among landowners, and then measuring each landowner's use relative to his allocation. These are technically challenging, time-consuming, costly, and contentious undertakings, but in some subbasins they are necessary to achieve sustainable groundwater management as State law requires.

In locales where damaging impacts, such as wells going dry, are occurring or are imminent, and setting an allocation cannot be accomplished in time, temporarily suspending the issuance of well drilling permits might be a useful option. To be sure, limiting the number of wells that can be drilled is not a viable (or probably legal) permanent means of controlling groundwater extraction. But a temporary "time out" on drilling new wells while groundwater recharge projects and allocations are being explored might make sense. The benefits would be to avoid or minimize costly damage to existing landowners' groundwater wells, and potentially irreversible damage to the groundwater system itself. And it might stall legal action by landowners who feel they are being harmed and progress toward sustainability is inadequate.

Land use in the Hungry Hollow area is in transition, with historically dry (unirrigated) grazing land being converted to irrigated crop land. (Such land use transitions are also occurring in other areas of Yolo County.) Accordingly, irrigation water demands are increasing, and new groundwater wells are being permitted by Yolo County to meet those demands, despite the fact that groundwater levels have been declining for the past roughly two decades, the operability of existing, relatively shallow wells is threatened, and local landowners are expressing concern. Given these conditions, it is reasonable that the Board of Supervisors consider adopting a temporary well drilling moratorium in the Hungry Hollow area while lasting solutions are urgently pursued.

Respectfully,

Grant Davids, P.E.
Water Resources Engineer, Retired
Resident, City of Winters