

Data Collection, Characterization, Monitoring

Charge from Groundwater Management Area Advisory Committee

Working Group Members

Melanie Redding (Chair); Andres Cervantes; Bob Stevens; Charles (Pony) Ellingson; David Bowen; Chelsea Durfey; Dave Cowan; Doug Simpson; Elizabeth Sanchez; Frank Lyall; Ginny Stern; Jaclyn Hancock; Jan Whitefoot; Jean Mendoza, John Van Wingerden, Kevin Lindsey; Laurie Crowe; Lino Guerra; Mike Shuttleworth; Ralph Fisher; Robert Farrell; Ron Cowin; Scott Stephen; Steve Swope; Stuart Turner; Dr. Troy Peters

Meetings/Calls Dates

Meeting: Wednesday, May 11, 2017, 10:30 AM to 12:30 PM

Call Number: 509-574-2353 pin: 2353#

Participants

Present: Melanie Redding (Chair)*, Steve George, Jean Mendoza, David Bowen, Vern Redifer, Bobbie Brady (County Support Staff) *via phone

Key Discussion Points

Meeting Overview: The meeting got underway at 10:33 PM and everyone introduced themselves.

Where are we at on the Ambient Groundwater Monitoring, Drinking Water Monitoring, Drain Monitoring, Nitrogen Availability Assessment and Data Analysis: Melanie asked Vern to update everyone on these projects. Vern had no updates from Matt Bachmann (USGS) since he reported at the last GWAC meeting (April 20). Vern reminded everyone Matt reported then that 89 homeowners had agreed to participate in the well testing and he were hopeful for another 50 or 60. USGS had already begun gathering samples. Vern was also working to provide comments on the QAPP USGS had proposed. With regard to the ambient monitoring network the scope of work proposed by PGG was reviewed and there are some suggested changes. One change was to delete the \$10-15,000 charge to assist with data analysis as both Melanie and Vern felt that the group had the expertise to do this (other members agreed as well). PGG is installing the purpose built shallow wells and will sample them because their initial tests go beyond nitrates in order to establish a standard. Once that is done USGS will take over the sampling of the purpose built wells as well. All USGS test results will go through their lab in the Midwest so there may be a two week turn around time. Vern assumes that Matt will update the GWAC next week as part of the Data Working Group report. A member asked when the first set of data would be available. Vern thought next month. Vern went on to say that when the data is available and passed on to the County it would be put in the USGS data center where everyone can see it.

A member asked what the objectives were. Vern said they are spelled out in the QAPP developed by the USGS. Melanie added they were as the group had discussed. The member stated that she

would like to see the information in writing. Melanie said that Matt will make the data available as quickly as possible. The member wanted to know what criteria will help determine the water quality. Melanie stated that the topic of data analysis was an agenda item and the group will need to determine what to do with the data and who will do long-term data collection and analysis in the future. Melanie wants to make sure whoever takes this over knows what to do with the data. The member agreed the expertise was in the room. Melanie added that the group had had a lot to work on and the first priority was to get the monitoring going.

The member was also bothered that there was no testing for chloride as this was a tracer test and there was no plan for analysis prior to proceeding. Vern agreed but felt they had made a pragmatic decision because of the time crunch to proceed without a plan for analysis in order to get samples with seasonal variation. Melanie agreed but pointed out that PGG does have a level of detail for analysis in the QAPP and that there was a small subset of statistical data to look at trends. Melanie stated that there was a need to talk about how to capture a trend and not overestimate the trend. Further discussion ensued.

Vern continued his update and stated that there were lengthy comments on the Nitrogen Availability Assessment (NAA) which were under review by the authors, but a response won't be ready for the May 18 GWAC meeting because they were substantive. He thought the GWAC discussion on the NAA would be more of a question and answer session. Vern added that three individuals (Jean, Kevin Lindsey (EA Engineering) and Frank Lyall) had all made submittals, Jean's comments were very comprehensive. There was no real duplicity or themes that Vern saw. Jean asked how the authors would respond. Vern said he thought in writing and all comments will be shared with the GWAC. The GWAC will not "accept" the NAA on May 18, but he will see if an overview could be prepared. He hadn't talked with Gary Bahr, but Kevin Lindsey pointed out a few things in RCIM. Vern added that the RCIM report will be updated to include biosolids and the Port of Sunnyside waste field.

Melanie was pleased with the group's efforts and the resulting data being accumulated which would result in science based decisions. She was proud too that USGS was out sampling.

EPO Message: Melanie reminded everyone that EPO was looking for long and short-term messages from each working group. Vern thought an important short term message was:

1. Monitoring efforts have been started; monitoring with oversight will push us in the right direction.
2. The intention is for the monitoring efforts to continue.
3. Here's what we hope to accomplish through these monitoring efforts.
4. Any reactions to the data from the monitoring efforts will be based on what we learn and success or failure will be monitored over time.

Another member thought this message should go to a wide audience not just homeowners because of health concerns, but also the ag industry because it would provide them with another reason to convert to a better technology.

A member wanted to know if there was a commitment from agencies to monitor domestic wells.

Other members agreed there was a commitment. Vern added that there will be a meeting of the Funding Working Group in June and it would be their job to help determine funding sources. The group will need know what will need to be funded, how much funding will be required and when it is needed. Vern thought that the funding group should discuss an aquifer protection area as a funding source. He explained that property owners would be assessed a fee on their taxes to create funding. However an aquifer protection area must be voted on by the residents of Yakima County; it cannot be approved by the County Commissioners. David thought it would be appropriate to use public money for the monitoring effort. Jean thought it was as important as having safe highways as this is infrastructure.

Melanie stated that she is optimistic that entities like the Department of Ecology and State Legislature will step up and she believed that as there is a broader involvement from the community additional funding sources would become available. Vern said that the goal is to vigorously pursue funding sources but he had learned that because the GWMA is talking about domestic wells, Department of Health funding is not available. Another member thought chances were good funding would be available from the legislature if both the Department of Ecology and Yakima County were making these requests.

The member was concerned that testing of domestic wells would be dropped. David said that wouldn't happen unless private homeowners decided to withdraw their well from the program. He did think that if some of the wells continued to test low those may potentially be dropped but added that he didn't foresee the Department of Ecology dropping the well testing until the issues are resolved. Melanie added that Whatcom County had been testing now for 15 years. Originally the testing occurred more frequently to get a good baseline, but then the frequency was dropped back to annual testing. Vern thought that the monitoring program was one recommendation out of the whole program that needed to continue and that it was a common goal everyone in the group agrees on. Melanie agreed. Vern added that monitoring is the only real scientific unbiased data – a true report card – that will reveal on an annual basis whether everything is getting better, staying the same or getting worse.

The member wanted to know if well testing was in with the ambient monitoring network plan. Melanie said that they were two projects with different goals that were complimentary so the funding could be tied together. Another member wanted to make sure the drain testing was tied into the same request as well. The member added that she thought the program should be written up with a scheduled reevaluation.

Long Term Messages:

The primary concern was a way for people to look at the collected data and conclusions (which will be updated every year). A member wanted to know what USGS protocol was. Vern said USGS will do a summary. A member asked who is going to do the data reporting. Vern said the lead entity. Another member asked if the analysis would be done by the GWMA. Vern said for the first year USGS will do the data analysis of seasonal variations and report to the GWMA on the website, but he doesn't expect any trends to be established that soon. In the future Vern thought it could be on the Department of Ecology website under water quality, but there had also been a discussion with Yakima Health District to do it.

David wanted to know how the EPO will consolidate all of the messages for the working Groups. Vern was going to recommend that members of each group join the EPO Working Group as the current membership of EPO is not involved in the working groups. He thought this would bolster the EPO Working Group as it tries to accomplish this task.

Nitrogen Management Strategies: Melanie pointed out that this group had not discussed nitrogen management strategies (e.g., soil moisture sensors) thus far. A member noted that most of the working groups had this discussion and will be making recommendations. Melanie verified with David Bowen that this was already happening in his group (Livestock/CAFO). He said recommendations had been made with the caveat that as we go forward and learn more adaptations would be made.

Other Issues: Melanie asked if there were any other issues the group should address. A member said that she had tried to get the Regulatory group to come up with a list of costs related to elevated nitrates in groundwater, but met resistance and the group suggested that perhaps it should be something the Data Working Group should take on. The member believed that an economist should do a study. After a great deal of discussion Melanie asked the member to email her the specific questions she would like answered through undertaking this project and the purpose for getting these answers. Melanie felt the member's explanation would help the group's discussion on the topic and determine if the project was part of the goals of the GWMA. Another member suggested that Jean send Melanie a copy of the cost analysis (Costs Related to Elevated Nitrates in Groundwater) she prepared for the Regulatory Working Group. David explained that part of the Regulatory group's issue with it was that it included expenses to communities to improve infrastructure in their entirety. Many members of the group felt that the entire cost shouldn't be attributed to nitrates in the groundwater as the projects were done for a variety of different reasons and needs. Debate over these issues in the Regulatory group made it difficult to move forward. The member believed that an economist should do a study and also mentioned that this was something that Frank Lyall had been vocal about - the need for an agricultural economist as he had said that economics motivate agriculture to make decisions (an opinion Jean agreed with).

The member also wanted to know if the group was going to talk about the NAA as a group or leave it to the GWAC. Vern and David thought the group had discussed it already. The meeting was adjourned at 12:20 PM.

Resources Requested

Deliverables/Products Status

Proposed Next Steps

Jean will email Melanie the specific questions she would like answered through undertaking this project and the purpose for getting these answers. She will also send Melanie a copy of the costs analysis (Costs Related to Elevated Nitrates in Groundwater) she prepared for the Regulatory Working Group.