

**Borrego Springs Watermaster  
Environmental Working Group (EWG) Meeting  
May 26, 2021 @ 2:00 p.m.**

**Due to COVID-19 Meeting Available by Remote Access Only**

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**AGENDA**

*Items with supporting documents in the EWG Meeting Package are denoted with a page number.*

**I. OPENING PROCEDURES**

- A. Roll Call
- B. Committee Meeting Guidelines

**II. PUBLIC COMMENTS**

*This is an opportunity for members of the public to address the EWG on items included on the agenda. Comments will be limited to three minutes per commenter. If you wish to comment, please join the meeting five minutes early to request to speak (verbally or via GoTo meeting Chat feature).*

**III. TOPICS OF INTEREST FOR THE ENVIRONMENTAL WORKING GROUP**

Objective: Review the table: “Topics of Interest for the Environmental Working Group.” The review and discussion will help prepare a recommended EWG scope and budget for WY 2022 to the Board.....**Page 2**

**IV. DEVELOP A RECOMMENDED SCOPE-OF-WORK AND BUDGET FOR THE EWG FOR WY 2022**

Objective: Begin the process to recommend a scope-of-work and budget for the EWG for WY 2022 for the Board’s consideration.

**V. PUBLIC COMMENTS (time permitting)**

*This is an opportunity for members of the public to address the EWG on items discussed during the meeting. Comments will be limited to three minutes per commenter, time permitting.*

**VI. FUTURE MEETINGS**

- Discuss the need for and timing of future EWG meetings.

**VII. ADJORNMENT**

**Borrego Springs Watermaster  
Environmental Working Group Meeting  
May 26, 2021  
AGENDA ITEM III**

**To:** Environmental Working Group (EWG)  
**From:** Andy Malone, PG (West Yost), Lead Technical Consultant  
**Date:** May 24, 2021  
**Subject:** Topics of Interest for the EWG

**Background**

Section IV.H of the proposed Stipulated Judgment provides that:

*An Environmental Working Group (EWG) will be established to advise the Watermaster on GDE and any other matters approved by the Watermaster. The EWG budget, which shall be adequate for the EWG to carry out its responsibilities as directed by the Watermaster, will be included in the Watermaster Budget.*

For water year (WY) 2021, the Watermaster budget included in the Settlement Agreement includes \$20,000 for implementation of the EWG (WY 2021 ends on September 30, 2021). The Watermaster Board needs to approve a scope-of-work and budget for the EWG for WY 2022 which begins on October 1, 2021.

The EWG held its inaugural meeting on February 26, 2021 where it discussed various topics that the EWG could engage in pursuant to its purview and duties as defined by the Judgment and Rules & Regulations. The meeting minutes from the February 26, 2021 EWG meeting are attached to this memorandum.

Following the February EWG meeting, the Watermaster's Technical Consultant prepared a table of the potential EWG topics discussed at the meeting. The table described: the EWG topic; its relevance to the Watermaster's mission; how the EWG could be involved or engaged in the topic; and potential cooperating entities and supporting resources. The table was circulated amongst the EWG members to rank the topics by relative importance and indicate individual interests and/or expertise in each topic. Table 1 is attached to this memorandum to assist the EWG in developing a recommended EWG scope and budget for WY 2022.

**Objectives**

The objectives of the EWG for this meeting are (i) to identify the most important topics on Table 1 to pursue in the near term and (ii) to outline the ways the EWG could make progress on addressing these topics in WY 2022. The Technical Consultant will utilize the feedback received at this meeting to prepare a recommended scope-of-work and budget for the EWG for WY 2022.

## **Discussion**

The EWG members that ranked the topics of interest on Table 1 indicated the following top two topics:

1. **Biological Restoration.** Biological restoration could be a solution for addressing potential adverse impacts associated with fallowing agricultural lands, such as air-quality degradation and invasive species growth.
2. **Groundwater Dependent Ecosystems (GDEs).** More study may be necessary to determine if historical GDEs are still dependent on groundwater, or not.

Biological Restoration is especially appropriate since it is related to other topics of EWG interest, including: Removal of Invasive Species; Air Quality; and Abandoned Wells.

At the meeting, the EWG should discuss the relative ranking of importance by topic and focus its discussions on the highest ranked topics. For the highest ranked topics, the EWG should:

- Provide guidance on the type and scope of work necessary to address the topic(s).
- Identify potential cooperating agencies and organizations that could provide support and resources to address the topic(s).

## **Next Steps**

Based on the EWG discussion at the meeting, the Technical Consultant will prepare a draft recommended scope and budget for the EWG for WY 2022 and distribute to the EWG for review, comment, and suggested revision. The objective is to deliver a recommended EWG scope and budget for WY 2022 to the Board for consideration its meeting in June 2021.

**Table 1**  
**Topics of Interest for the Environmental Working Group**

Average Rank	Topic	Nexus to Watermaster Mission	Potential EWG Involvement	Potential Cooperating Entities and Resources	EWG Member(s) with Expertise
2.0	<b>Groundwater Dependent Ecosystems (GDEs)</b> More study may be necessary to determine if historical GDEs are still dependent on groundwater, or not.	The Watermaster's groundwater management plan is intended to avoid the the undesirable result of adverse impacts to environmental uses/users of groundwater, such as GDEs.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Develop specific questions regarding the dependency of local ecosystems on groundwater.</li> <li>2. Recommend appropriate monitoring strategies to answer the questions.</li> </ol>	Steele/Burnand Anza Borrego Desert Research Center. UC Irvine. UC Reserve system.	Mark Jorgensen Andy Malone
5.0	<b>Removal of Invasive Species</b> Invasive species commonly consume more water than native species, and can out compete native species which adversely impacts natural ecosystems. Invasive species within the Basin include tamarisk, Sahara mustard, and Volutaria.	Removal of invasive species could result in water conservation and increase the sustainable yield of the groundwater basin.	Facilitate partnerships with state and local entities to encourage the removal of invasive species within the Borrego Springs subbasin.	California State Parks currently conducts invasive plant management and restoration programs within Anza Borrego State Park and throughout the region.  County Board of Supervisor Jim Desmond has ongoing Revitalization Committee meetings in Borrego Springs and there is an invasive species subcommittee.	Mark Jorgensen Mike Wells
4.0	<b>Development.</b> Historical development has modified natural surface-water flow and recharge patterns. New development could have similar hydrologic impacts, which could result in groundwater-level changes and reductions in the Sustainable Yield of the groundwater basin.	The Watermaster is charged with sustainably managing the Borrogo Springs subbasin to its Sustainable Yield.	Review and comment on CEQA documents for any future development projects.		Mark Jorgensen John Peterson
1.5	<b>Biological Restoration</b> Biological restoration could be a solution for addressing potential adverse impacts associated with fallowing agricultural lands. This could be done on a parcel-by-parcel basis as farmers choose to consider restoration of their fallowed land. Or, for example, while potentially difficult to setup, a mitigation bank could fund ecosystem restoration efforts on fallowed lands, which could avoid the potential for air-quality degradation and invasive species growth associated with fallowed lands.	Fallowing of agricultural lands is an important component of the rampdown in groundwater pumping that is required to achieve sustainably pumping.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Identify and describe the various methods for implementing biological restoration projects.</li> <li>2. Identify opportunities and partners for biological restoration projects.</li> <li>3. Perform a GIS review of land that has been fallowed or has potential for future fallowing. Then perform a high level biological assessment of those lands. There is different mitigation credit values for different habitat types.</li> <li>4. Once methods for restoration, potential partnerships, and a biological assessment is conducted, seek interest of farmers/landowners of existing or future fallowed lands.</li> </ol>	State and Federal Wildlife Agencies County of San Diego Anza Borrego Foundation	Jim Bennett Mark Jorgensen John Peterson Mike Wells
3.5	<b>Air Quality</b> Degradation of air quality is a concern related to fallowed lands.	Fallowing of agricultural lands is an important component of the rampdown in groundwater pumping that is required to achieve sustainably pumping.		Steele/Burnand Anza-Borrego Desert Research Center owns and operates air quality monitoring stations in the region.  County Board of Supervisor Jim Desmond has ongoing Revitalization Committee meetings in Borrego Springs and there is an air quality subcommittee.	
5.0	<b>Abandoned Wells</b> Improperly abandoned wells are a public health and safety issue.	Improperly abandoned wells can adversely impact groundwater quality.	Coordinating with the County of San Diego to ensure that abandoned wells are properly destroyed or converted to monitoring wells.	County of San Diego.  County Board of Supervisor Jim Desmond has ongoing Revitalization Committee meetings in Borrego Springs and there is an abandoned wells subcommittee.	John Peterson

**MINUTES**  
**ENVIRONMENTAL WORKING GROUP**  
**BORREGO SPRINGS INTERIM WATERMASTER**  
**Meeting Conducted Virtually via GoToMeeting**  
**Friday, February 26, 2021, 9:00 a.m.**

**I. Opening Procedures**

- Andy Malone (Lead Technical Consultant, Borrego Springs Watermaster) called the meeting to order at 9:03 a.m.
- Mr. Malone called roll and confirmed that five out of the six Environmental Working Group (EWG) Members were present at the start of the meeting. Michael Wells joined the meeting at 9:48am. The following individuals were present at the meeting:

<b>Environmental Working Group Members</b>	Jim Bennett, County of San Diego (and Watermaster Board Member)
	Mark Jorgensen, Community Rep. (and Watermaster Board Member)
	Jim Dice, Reserve Manager at the Steele/Burnand Anza Borrego Desert Research Center
	Danny McCamish, Senior Environmental Scientist for the Colorado Desert District of California State Parks
	John Peterson, retired County Groundwater Geologist, California Professional Geologist and Certified Hydrogeologist
	Dr. Michael Wells, retired District Superintendent for the Colorado Desert District of California State Parks (arrived at 9:48 am)
<b>Watermaster Staff</b>	Samantha Adams, Executive Director (West Yost)
	Andy Malone, Lead Technical Consultant (West Yost)
	Kristan Culbert, Staff Scientist (West Yost)
<b>Others Present</b>	WMB Member Shannon Smith – Watermaster Vice Chairman, Recreation Representative
	Leanne Crow (Board Alternate) – County of San Diego
	Trey Driscoll, Dudek
	Diane Johnson, Borrego Water District
	Nancy Karas – County of San Diego
	Michele Staples, Jackson Tidus, Representing AAWARE (Agriculture)
	Devin Pritchard-Peterson, Dudek
	Tammy Baker, Borrego Water District
	Lyle Brecht, Borrego Water District

- *EWG Meeting Guidelines.* Mr. Malone covered the guidelines for Committee meetings, which specify that (a) Committee meetings are open to the public and (b) public comments are allowed during the public comment period at the beginning and end of each EWG meeting.
- *EWG Member Introductions.*

- Jim Bennett, PG, CHG (County of San Diego) – Mr. Bennett has 23 years of experience in hydrogeology. He was the manager of the development of the GSP for the Borrego Springs Groundwater Subbasin. He sits on the Borrego Springs Watermaster Board, representing the County of San Diego.
- Mark Jorgensen (Community Representative) – Mr. Jorgensen is a retired Park Superintendent for Anza Borrego State Park, and worked for California State Parks for 30 years. He sits on the Borrego Springs Watermaster Board representing the community of Borrego Springs.
- Jim Dice, Reserve Manager at the Steele/Burnand Anza-Borrego Desert Research Center. Mr. Dice has been Reserve Manager since the Steele/Burnand Anza-Borrego Desert Research Center opened in 2012. He retired in 2012 from California State Parks after 25 years of service with the State of California. He served as manager for San Diego State University’s Santa Margarita Ecological Reserve from 1987-88 and Curator of the Desert Garden at Huntington Botanical Gardens in San Marino, California from 1981-1985.
- Danny McCamish, Senior Environmental Scientist for the Colorado Desert District of California State Parks. Mr. McCamish is a supervisory scientist overseeing Natural Resources Management for Colorado Desert District at California State Parks. He has 15 years of experience working in natural resources management and experience in climate change research.
- John Peterson, retired County Groundwater Geologist, California Professional Geologist and Certified Hydrogeologist. Mr. Peterson is a long-time resident of Borrego Springs with 40 years of experience in hydrogeology. He joined the County of San Diego as County Groundwater Geologist in 1981, and retired from the County in 2003. He also serves as Anza-Borrego Foundation Board Member.
- Dr. Michael Wells, retired District Superintendent, Colorado Desert District, California Department of Parks and Recreation. Dr. Wells has over three decades of experience in natural resources management and a 34-year career with California State Parks. Dr. Wells has a PhD in physical geography from a joint program between San Diego State University and the University of California, Santa Barbara. He and his wife recently wrote a book on the natural history of the Anza-Borrego Region.

## II. Public Comments

No public comments.

## III. Objectives and Operation of the Environmental Working Group

Mr. Malone provided an overview of the EWG’s purview and duties as defined by the Judgement and Rules & Regulations and provided recommended operating procedures for EWG meetings and reporting to the Watermaster Board. Mr. Malone emphasized the following:

- (a) the EWG works at the direction of the Board,
- (b) the EWG focus is on the protection of human health and the environment,
- (c) the EWG should attempt to reach consensus on recommendations to the Watermaster Board and

(d) and that EWG activities should always include a nexus between environmental issues and the sustainable use of groundwater in the Borrego Springs Subbasin.

Mr. Malone reviewed the EWG mission statement, which was adopted by the Board in December 2020.

A discussion ensued on various topics that the EWG could engage in pursuant to its purview and duties as defined by the Judgement and Rules & Regulations:

- **Groundwater Dependent Ecosystems (GDEs).** More study may be necessary to determine if historical GDEs are still dependent on groundwater, or not.
- **Biological Restoration.** Biological restoration could be a solution for addressing potential adverse impacts associated with fallowing agricultural lands. For example, a mitigation bank could fund ecosystem restoration efforts on fallowed lands, which could avoid the potential for air-quality degradation and invasive species growth associated with fallowed lands.

The Borrego Water District (BWD) is conducting biological restoration work on the Viking property in partnership with the Army Corps of Engineers. Mr. Peterson asked Mr. Driscoll to present a summary of BWD's work on the Viking property, and Director Bennett asked Mr. Driscoll to give a presentation of potential funding sources for biological restoration. Mr. Driscoll said that he would be happy to give a presentation on these items at a future EWG meeting.

Director Bennett offered to explore the how the County is involved in mitigation banking activities and to report his findings to the EWG. Mr. Bennett's post meeting research is below:

"Setting up a private mitigation bank requires working with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) and partner agencies (US Fish & Wildlife, US Army Corps of Engineers, and others) to obtain approval. It is an involved process. The mitigation bank is approved by the Wildlife Agencies, not the County. The following is a link to the CDFW website with info on setting up a bank:

<https://wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Planning/Banking/Templates>

Once a private mitigation bank is approved by the Wildlife Agencies, mitigation credits created could be considered for use on proposed projects within the County. The County Planning & Development Services would review proposals for use of mitigation credits and would submit a recommendation on the use of such credits to the approving authority. Use of mitigation credits would be reviewed and approved by the County on a case-by-case basis.

It should be emphasized that creation of a private mitigation bank is an onerous process. A simpler approach would be what Borrego Water District is doing in restoring one site for biological mitigation that would apply to a proposed project elsewhere, in which Mr. Driscoll can elaborate on in the next EWG meeting."

- **Removal of Invasive Species.** Removal of invasive species could result in water conservation and benefit ecosystem restoration. Invasive species within the Basin include tamarisk, Sahara mustard, and *Volutaria*. California State Parks currently conducts invasive plant management and restoration programs within Anza Borrego State Park and throughout the region.

- **Development.** Historical development has modified natural surface-water flow and recharge patterns. For example, in the northern portion of Viking Ranch, a 0.5-mile berm structure was constructed that diverted Coyote Creek.
- **Air Quality.** Air quality is a concern related to fallowed lands. Mr. Dice noted that 4-5 air quality monitoring stations are managed by the Steele/Burnand Anza-Borrego Desert Research Center, and that they have applied for grant funding to install additional air quality monitoring stations.
- **Abandoned Wells.** Abandoned wells are a public health and safety issue that falls within the purview of both the EWG and the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC).
- **Grant Funding.** Grant funding opportunities should be pursued, potentially through collaboration with other conservation groups, agencies, tribes, and researchers, such as the Anza Borrego Foundation and the University of California.

Mr. Malone offered to summarize this list of potential EWG topics into a table to be circulated amongst the EWG. The table will describe how the EWG could be involved or engaged in each topic, rank the topics by relative importance, and list the individual EWG members that have expertise and community connections related to the topic. The table could support the development of a recommended scope-of-work and budget for the EWG in water year 2022. Executive Director Adams asked the EWG to make clear connection between the EWG topics and the Watermaster's mission.

#### IV. EWG Schedule for FY 2021

Mr. Malone noted that a pressing issue for the EWG is to prepare a recommended scope of work for WY 2021/22 for Watermaster consideration. Ms. Adams informed the EWG that a WY 2021/22 budget will need to be in place by the start of the fiscal year (October 1), and added that she would do more research to understand the timeline for creating and submitting a budget for Board approval. Ms. Adams suggested that May 2021 would be a logical next meeting time for the EWG.

#### V. Public Comments (time permitting)

- No public comments.

There were closing comments from the EWG:

- Dr. Wells introduced himself since he arrived after EWG introductions.
- Mr. Peterson asked for a contact list for the Board and EWG. Mr. Malone agreed to assemble a contact list to distribute to EWG members.
- Both Mr. Jorgensen and Mr. Bennett expressed gratitude to the EWG for volunteering their time to serve on the committee.

#### VI. Adjournment

Mr. Malone adjourned the meeting at 11:03 a.m.