

MINUTES
BORREGO SPRINGS WATERMASTER BOARD MEETING
Conducted Virtually via GoToMeeting
Wednesday, February 19, 2025, 3:00 p.m.

The following individuals were present at the meeting:

Directors Present	Chair Dave Duncan – Borrego Water District (BWD)
	Vice Chair Tyler Bilyk – Agricultural Sector
	Secretary and Treasurer Shannon Smith – Recreational Sector
	Mark Jorgensen – Community Representative
	Jim Bennett – County of San Diego
Watermaster Staff Present	James M. Markman, Legal Counsel
	Samantha Adams, Executive Director, West Yost
	Andrew Malone, Lead Technical Consultant, West Yost
	Lauren Salberg, Staff Geologist, West Yost
Others Present	Bri Fordhem, Borrego Valley Stewardship Council
	Cathy Milkey, representing Rams Hill
	Diane Johnson, BWD Board Member
	Geoff Poole, BWD General Manager
	George Peraza, DWR
	Holly Smit Kicklighter, Borrego Valley Stewardship Council
	Howard Blackson, Borrego Valley Stewardship Council
	Jessica Clabaugh, BWD Finance Officer
	Jim Dax, Board Alternate – Community Representative
	Kathy Dice, Board Alternate - BWD
	Leanne Crow, Board Alternate – County of San Diego
	Rich Pinel, Board Alternate – Recreational Sector
	Steve Anderson, BB&K, representing BWD
	Tammy Baker, BWD Board Member
	Travis Brooks, Land IQ
	Trey Driscoll, Intera, TAC Member representing BWD
	Trevor Jones, Intera

Please visit the [Watermaster's Website](#)¹ to access the Agenda Packet, recording, and presentation for the February 19, 2025 Meeting.

I. Opening Procedures

- A. Chair Duncan called the meeting to order at 3:00 PM at which time the meeting recording was started.
- B. Chair Duncan led the meeting participants in the Pledge of Allegiance.
- C. Samantha Adams, Executive Director (ED) called roll and confirmed that a quorum of four of the five members of the Board were present. Director Smith was absent during roll call due to technical issues and joined the meeting at 3:03pm.

¹ <https://borregospringswatermaster.com/past-watermaster-meetings/>

D. Approval of Agenda.

Motion: Motioned by Vice Chair Bilyk, seconded by Director Bennett to approve the Agenda. *Motion carried unanimously by voice vote (4-0-0). Director Smith was absent from the vote.*

II. Public Correspondence

- A. Correspondence Received. No correspondence was received.
- B. Public Comments. Chair Duncan called for public comments. There were no public comments.

III. Consent Calendar. Chair Duncan called for any discussion on the Consent Calendar items included in the February 19, 2025 agenda package.

Motion: Motioned by Director Bennett, seconded by Vice Chair Bilyk to approve the Consent Calendar items A and B. *Motion carried unanimously by roll-call vote (5-0-0).*

Motion: Motioned by Vice Chair Bilyk, seconded by Director Smith to receive and file the Watermaster Staff invoices for December 2024. *Motion carried unanimously by roll-call vote (5-0-0).*

IV. BORREGO VALLEY STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL PRESENTATION ON PROPOSITION 68 WHITE PAPER: TOWARDS AN INTEGRATED WATERSHED SCALE MASTER COMMUNITY PLAN AND RESILIENT COMMUNITY. Bri Fordem, Holly Smit Kicklighter, and Howard Blackson of the Borrego Valley Stewardship Council (BVSC) gave an overview of the draft White Paper developed using Proposition 68 grant funding (draft available as a Handout linked in the agenda package) and solicited feedback from the public and the Board. Public comment was made by Rich Pinel, Cathy Milkey, and Jim Dax.

Public questions and comments, including Board and staff response if any, included:

- Is the White Paper intended to be an additional source of information for the public beyond the Watermaster and its Board? Members of the public expressed confusion on the audience intended for the White Paper.
- Recommendation to highlight some of the accomplishments achieved in the Basin in addition to describing the challenges.
- Feedback that the report contains a lot of information that is not easily accessible or digestible in its current form.

The key points of discussion by the Board included:

- The draft White Paper seems like it was written prior to SGMA and the Basin's adjudication because there are several issues discussed in the White Paper that appear unresolved but have been or are currently being addressed through SGMA and the Judgment.
- The draft White Paper seems focused on the negative challenges faced by the Basin and doesn't discuss how the Watermaster and community are addressing the challenges.
- Feedback to avoid making assertions without proper citation or references to build credibility of the report.

- The finding that off-roading in the Basin may be contributing to air dust pollution, as described on page 19 of the White Paper, is something that the public may not be aware of.
- Significant editing is needed prior to finalizing and distributing the White Paper.
- The draft makes factual misstatements about water in the Basin, such as implying that the community must reduce water use by 70% (page 1 of the report). The Borrego Water District (BWD) has secured water rights to serve its customers without interruptions and without the expectation that its customers reduce water use.

Following Board discussion, members of the BVSC requested that any additional feedback on the draft report be submitted to Bri Fordhem ahead of the March 31, 2025 grant deadline.

V. Items for Board Consideration and Possible Action

A. *Biological Restoration of Fallowed Lands Project.* Travis Brooks of Land IQ gave a presentation on the multi-year work performed for the Biological Restoration of Fallowed Lands project, including methods, conclusions, and recommendations for fallowing strategies. At the conclusion of the presentation, Chair Duncan opened the floor to public comment, followed by Board discussion. Public comment was made by Leanne Crow and Rich Pinel.

Public questions and comments, including Board and staff response if any, included:

- Are the temporary fences listed on the flow chart on slide 35 of the Board presentation actually temporary (*i.e.* could they eventually be removed)?
 - Yes, these fences could be removed at some point, dependent on potential Watermaster policy.
- Are the trees that line properties in the North and Central Management Areas acting as natural wind barriers? If so, should these trees not be fallowed?
 - The majority of the trees in these areas are salt cedar trees, which have deep roots. Mr. Brooks recommends not investing in the fallowing of these trees because once irrigation ends, the trees will naturally die over time. In the interim these trees will act as a natural wind barrier.

The key points of discussion by the Board included:

- Why is mulch spreading a recommendation for areas at risk of flooding when tree fences are not recommended? Isn't there concern that streamflow could carry away the mulch?
 - The initial recommendation for the use of tree fences was modified to restrict their use on sites at risk of flooding based on comments from the County of San Diego. The tree fences represent liability risks if the tree fences were carried offsite, whereas it is unlikely that the mulch would be carried offsite. This conclusion is based on observations at the Viking Ranch site, in which flooding led to the mixing of the spread mulch with the natural soil and sands.
- Does spreading mulch (and therefore introducing carbon) assist in reducing salinity in the soil? Was this studied as part of the project?
 - Because this is a desert environment, there is little biological or chemical decomposition. Therefore, spreading mulch did not have a significant benefit of

reducing salinity in the soils. Salinity reductions are typically observed in wetter climates or in managed agricultural areas with irrigation.

- Recommendation to update the maps in the draft report to identify the study sites.
- The Co-generation plant in Coachella Valley has closed and is no longer an option for wood disposal.
- Recommendation to reference 2018 study published by Dudek which included the cost per acre to fallow land in Borrego Springs.
- Land IQ anticipates completing the field work for Task 3 by the end of February. Nearly all the sand fence treatments have been installed and all that remains is finishing installation of the treatments and installing monitoring equipment.
- Director Smith asked if Land IQ would have enough data to provide the Board with recommendations so that Board members may begin considering which fallowing methods they would recommend incorporating in the Judgment. Mr. Brooks replied that enough data has been collected on some benefits of the fallowing methods, like dust control, to make recommendations to the Board. For other metrics, more monitoring data is needed before making a recommendation. Masters' students at the University of California Irvine (UCI) will continue to monitor the study areas and collect data.
- Recommendation for Land IQ to present to the Borrego Springs Community Planning Group so that the public can review the methods and consider the potential impacts to the community (i.e. flood and/or fire risk, aesthetics).
- Comments on the presentation and draft report are due to Land IQ by March 5, 2025.

No Board action was taken.

B. Hearing to Receive Comments on the Water Year 2024 Annual Report for the Borrego Springs Subbasin. ED Adams gave an overview of the Water Year 2024 Annual Report for the Borrego Springs Subbasin that was noticed and distributed to the public on January 29, 2025 and was linked in the Agenda package. At the conclusion of the presentation, Chair Duncan opened the floor to public comment, followed by Board discussion. There were no public comments and limited Board discussion primarily identifying that the Report was thorough and in need of little additional work.

No Board action was taken.

C. WY 2025 – Q1 Watermaster Budget Status Report (as of December 31, 2024). ED Adams provided a summary of the memo included in the agenda package. At the conclusion of the presentation, Chair Duncan opened the floor to public comment, followed by Board discussion. There were no Board or public comments.

The key points of discussion by the Board included:

- The WY 2024 Annual Report is longer, in terms of number of pages, than last year's report. Was the WY 2024 Annual Report more expensive to prepare? ED Adams responded that the main driver for the increased number of pages is the time-series figures in the appendices of the Annual Report, which are produced through a cost-effective automated tool. The WY 2024 Annual Report is on-track to be completed on-budget.

No Board action was taken.

D. *Semi-Annual Report of Groundwater-Level and Quality Results for the Borrego Springs Subbasin: Fall 2024.* Lauren Salberg provided a summary of the Fall 2024 Monitoring Event, which was detailed in a report included in the Agenda package. At the conclusion of the presentation, Chair Duncan opened the floor to public comment, followed by Board discussion. There were no public comments.

The key points of discussion by the Board included:

- Recommendation to revise the time-series charts of groundwater-quality to begin in 2000 to more clearly observe recent trends.
- The effort to reevaluate the Minimum Thresholds is being performed as part of the 5-year assessment of the GMP and will be supported by the model projections of future pumping at the Sustainable Yield.

No Board action was taken.

VI. Reports.

A. Legal Counsel Report. Mr. Markman reported on the following items:

- All three motions of Party intervention to the Judgment were approved by the Judge at the February 13, 2025 hearing.
- The February 20, 2025 Status Conference has been rescheduled to August 1, 2025. A joint statement was filed with the Court documenting the Board actions taken to meet the January 1, 2025 deadlines in the Judgment. The Court approved the motions filed and continued the Status Conference to August 2025. This indicates the Judge has no concerns about progress being made by the Watermaster.

Board questions and comments included:

- Are motions ever held to remove Parties to the Judgment who have sold their BPA? No, in Mr. Markman's experience he has never seen a Party be relieved of the Judgment.

B. Technical Consultant Report. Mr. Malone reported on the items listed in the agenda package memo (see slides 79 through 82 of the [Board presentation slides](#)). There were no additional topics discussed.

Public questions and comments included:

- Thank you to the Watermaster and the public for their collaborative efforts to find and add wells to the monitoring network.
- What does well destruction entail? Mr. Malone described the process for the proper destruction of well, which is intended to prevent contamination of the aquifer.

Board questions and comments included:

- It's exciting to see the results of the conversion of inactive/abandoned wells, especially considering the delays in schedule.
- If the Board recommends changes to the fallowing standards in the GMP, do those changes need to be approved by the Court? Mr. Markman responded that yes, any changes to the fallowing standards in the GMP are considered a Judgment amendment and must be filed as a motion with the Court and are subject to Court approval.
- Is an amendment to the GMP considered a separate action from the 5-year Assessment Report? Mr. Markman responded that changes to the GMP (and therefore Judgment) can be made at any time. ED Adams described that DWR gives agencies the discretion to determine what constitutes a "change" to their GMP, but does offer some guidance on what might constitute a significant change. It is likely that changes will be recommended to the GMP and the goal is to make all the changes to the GMP at the same time as the 5-year Assessment Report because if done off-cycle an additional assessment report is required to accompany any change to a DWR-approved management plan.
- Are there budget concerns to completing the 5-year GMP Assessment Report? Watermaster staff is maximizing the use of DWR SGM funding to work on the Assessment Report, but the GMP can't be fully completed due to i) lack of DWR comments, and ii) additional data in 2025 that will need to get incorporated into the draft due in June 2026. Watermaster staff is preparing a framework document for the 5-yr GMP Assessment Report to assist the Board in making policy decisions and finalizing the report to meet the June deadline (assuming DWR comments are delivered).

C. Executive Director Reports. ED Adams reported on the items listed in the agenda package memo (see slides 83 through 84 of the [Board presentation slides](#).) There were no additional topics discussed. There were no Board or public comments.

D. Chairperson's Report. NONE

VII. Approval of Agenda Items for March 19, 2025 Board Meeting. ED Adams reviewed the potential agenda items for the next Board meetings listed in the agenda package. The Board discussed items to be included on the March 19, 2025 Board meeting agenda, in addition to items listed in the Agenda package. Discussion included:

- ED Adams updated the proposed Agenda for the March 19, 2025 meeting on the meeting screen based on discussion, noting it now includes the following items:
 - Consideration of Approval of the WY 2024 Annual Report to the DWR

- Biological Restoration Projection Final Report
- Presentation of the 5-Year GMP Assessment Framework
- Consideration of approval of April TAC Agenda
- DWR Review of 2020 GMP (if available)

Motion: Motioned by Director Jorgensen seconded by Vice Chair Bilyk, to approve the March 19, 2025 agenda as presented on slide 88 of the [Board presentation slides](#). *Motion carried unanimously by roll-call vote (5-0-0).*

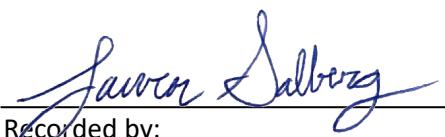
VIII. Board Member Comments. Chair Duncan called for comments.

- Director Bennett congratulated Alternative Director Crow who has accepted a new position and will no longer be serve as the County Alternate or participate in the Watermaster process.
- Director Jorgensen thanked Director Duncan for running an efficient meeting.

IX. Next Meetings of the Borrego Springs Watermaster. Chair Duncan reviewed the meetings listed in the agenda package.

X. Adjournment

A. Chair Duncan adjourned the meeting at 5:36 PM.



Recorded by:
Lauren Salberg, Staff Geologist, West Yost



Attest:
Shannon Smith, Secretary and Treasurer of the Board