45th KZGN News Talking Points Editorial

What are the potential issues concerning a new groundwater sustainability agency?

But first, a couple comments received from last editorial: Should the city waive legal costs for the Dale Howard code enforcement case?

The comments I received were more on the level that this was a long time coming, and they were glad the city prevailed to get it cleaned up. No one felt the legal fees should be waived by the city.

Now on to today’s editorial: What are the potential issues concerning a new groundwater sustainability agency?

As we now move on from the heavily disputed Kern County land use management plan, we are now trying to find out things about this new groundwater sustainability agency that needs to be operational by 2017. This is a state law passed a few months ago by Sacramento. I asked our supervisor, Mick Gleason, about this last week. He said that the county is now moving forward to the formation of this agency. They have hired a consultant to provide an implementation plan. I mentioned that this new agency brings up a lot of new questions. Mick agreed. My first real point I’d like to make is that this agency is only for the water issue in the Indian Wells Valley. So, anyone that feels that people should sit on this agency from outside of the aquifer area is wrong. The GSA should be comprised of local people, with local interests to the valley. Local people understand the uniqueness of the problem. We don’t need outsiders coming in telling us what we should or shouldn’t do. This is in effect a whole new level of government oversight of us, here in the Indian Wells Valley.

Here is a short list of questions I came up with.

1.  Who makes the appointments to the new GSA? The county?

2.  Who will be considered for the appointment?

3.  Will there be an application process?

4.  How many voting members should be on the agency? Look out for this one. We’d want to make sure there is a good representation of affected people, but not make it so big that it is a cumbersome membership. Don’t ask me what that number is yet. It’s too soon to figure that one out.

5.  Will all stakeholders in the water debate have a seat on the GSA? I believe all stakeholders should have a seat on the agency.

6.  Who are the stakeholders? Well, I could start real quick with the following: the county, the city, water district, the Navy, the Indian Wells Owners Association, the IWV Water Cooperative, Inyo County, BLM, there should be at least a lay person in a voting position, how about someone from Trona, and I’m sure there are others that will surface.

7.  Where will they meet? I believe all their meetings should be in the Indian Wells Valley somewhere. To meet anywhere outside the valley would be disrespectful of the citizens of the valley.

8.  When will they meet?

9.  Will they hire a staff? I have no doubt there will be at least some manager, secretary, some engineer, and legal counsel.

10. Who will pay for it? Good question. Someone suggested that this agency could go for grants to cover its costs. Will we once again have to pay for an unfunded state mandate? I can see that coming.

11. What will their authority be? This is a biggie. Will they over rule county supervisors? How about the Indian Wells Valley water district? Will they be able issue laws covering the city of Ridgecrest?

12. Who will they answer to?

13.  How will appointees be removed and by who? It should not take an act of God to remove a poorly performing member.

14.  Will agency members have terms of office, or indefinite terms? Long term appointees can become dictorial.

15.  Will members have residency requirements? I believe they should be residents of the valley.

16.  Will they be elected?

17.  Will they be paid?

18.  If paid, how much?

19.  Now, how about this one? Can they levy fees and fines on us? This is another biggie.

And I’m sure many more questions will come up that have to be handled.

Everyone in the valley should be very astute in monitoring how this agency develops.

It could turn into a dictorial agency if we aren’t careful.

We don’t need water dictators controlling the valley. We need an agency that cares about the people, the businesses. And the other affected agencies of the valley. We need to watch this very closely. I told Mick Gleason that the establishment of this new agency has got to be totally transparent. No back room planning. No secret deals to get appointed, if the decision is for appointing vs elections. There has got be a balance in the membership. The agency must be under the guidance of the brown act for their business. And again I say, this is a whole new level of government overseeing our daily lives. And this agency could have a real impact on our personal and business lives. I don’t know about you, but I am very apprehensive of a whole new governing agency. An agency that will have to mold the need to protect our water supply, with the needs of the people and businesses of the valley.

I hope it does well for us.

In conclusion, the GSA should be comprised of local people, with local interests to the valley. This should be a locally controlled agency. Not one that sits on the other side of the sierra’s or even worse, in Sacramento. It should be local people, invested in the valley. Local people that can understand that we are unique and individual. Local people affected by the agencies decisions.

I’m Tom Wiknich, and that’s what I think. I’d like to know what you think. If you have any comments about this editorial, or would like to discuss or recommend a topic, I’d like to hear from you. Please email them to info@kzgn.net.