

Ratepayer Gathering Notes

Wednesday, April 10, 2019

The Library – Guest: Mark Jorgensen

In attendance: Mark Jorgensen, Jack Laughlin, John Peterson, Rex Burrows, Heather Davidson, Gretchen Grawunder, Wayne Boring, Will Bonnell, Ralph Batie, Ginger Dunlap-Dietz, Gary Edwards, Jennie Edwards, Lee Scharf, Herb Stone, Jim Roller, Linda Roller, Joanne Sims, Jack Sims, Don Nicolas, Jan Nicolas, Saul Miller, Laara Maxwell, Mary Susan Leahy, Jolanda De Luca, Tom Beltran, Christin Mc Vey, Liesel Paris, Debora Stange

These notes are an incomplete recollection of the issues discussed and some reflections on the gathering.

Our four main concerns, beliefs, objectives:

- We believe that BWD/Ratepayers should be allocated an initial **minimum** of 1700 AFY; this allocation should be excluded from any reductions.
- We believe that the 20-year implementation period set out under SGMA should be shortened
- We believe that water quality is an essential concern, it should be addressed immediately, and if/when water quality issues are determined, the parties responsible are held to account for any remediation that might be necessary
- We believe that the GDEs (Groundwater Dependent Ecosystems) must be considered in the overall water allocation calculus

Future scheduled meetings:

Will soon set up an informal meeting to plan the letter-writing campaign

Wednesday, April 17 5-6:00 pm The Library Guest: **Ray Schindler – The adjudication process**

Wednesday, April 24 5-6:00 pm The Library Guest: **Jack Laughlin – Historical perspective** (John Peterson has agreed to assist Jack in this presentation)

Will schedule two meetings in May. Remember, May is the month we must submit our questions/comments to the GSA.

What a gift to have had Mark Jorgensen as our guest at this gathering. As a retired Superintendent of the ABDSP, author, storyteller, public speaker and custodian of all manner of narratives, legends and accounts about our desert, it was clear that he would bring a balance of information, history, story and personal beliefs to the gathering; he certainly did not disappoint. That Jack Laughlin and John Peterson were present to assist as well was an added bonus.

Although GDEs (Groundwater Dependent Ecosystems) were at the heart of our conversation – and we all have some level of information about the GSP and GDEs, particularly how they are

not being considered under the plan – the side stories and historical information added a dimension I did not have.

I was not aware of the fact the gauging station situated at Second Crossing is inoperative and has never operated properly. This is the only extant implement designed to estimate inflow from Coyote Creek. Therefore, the matter of the 5700 AFY set out as the sustainable yield under the Plan is certainly nothing more than an estimate. Mark recalls that at some time in the past, the estimate was closer to 4000 AFY. Under the updated March 22, 2019 GSP Public Review Summary, the figure is 5000 AFY (for the 2010-2015 baseline time period.)

The issues the GDEs face, as far as Mark is concerned, are complex and disturbing:

- They are not taken into consideration under the GSP because it estimates that the damages to the GDEs occurred prior to the baseline time period.
- The constant drawdown will further impact the remaining ecosystems, causing even more losses of ecosystems.
- Well data provided under John Peterson in the 1980s clearly established and defined the overdraft situation.
- The water drawn from the aquifer will not be replenished (which clearly addresses our concern about the remaining GDEs: as we continue to draw down the groundwater levels, these remaining ecosystems will be impacted.)
- Another way of stating the issue is that groundwater drawdown also means reduced water storage (and, of course, a reduction in water quality and probable increases in pumping costs.)

Mark stated that if this was a matter of surface water, where you could see the levels drop (as we can almost daily in the Salton Sea,) it would be considered a national emergency.

Prior to the meeting, Mark spent some time at Clark Dry Lake examining its mesquite bosque. Having conducted a transect in CDL by way of comparison with the Borrego Basin mesquite bosque. Although these are estimates, it would appear to the naked eye that perhaps over 60% of the BB bosque is dead, whereas the results of the transect at CDL indicate that 80-85% of its bosque remains healthy.

At one point there were two operating wells at CDL; there is now one whose operation is unknown. Over a period of 25 years, there has been no appreciable drop in the water table.

This, simply to point out the obvious: the death of the BB mesquite bosque is directly related to a dropping water table, as the result of agricultural development in the valley.

We cannot ever recover the bosque, but (and here I speak for the ratepayers ... these are not Mark's words, although I imagine he'd be in support of the idea) we must make a concerted effort to preserve what GDEs we have remaining: Lower Willows, Palm Canyon, and the SE portion of the bosque.

When asked what he would like to see as the resolution to this crisis, Mark's answer was short and direct:

1. Would like all ag land bought up.

2. Golf courses should greatly reduce their water use, say by 50%

Other issues addressed:

- When determining the value of ag land, its value is tied directly into the value of the crops it can produce.
- There has been a long-term and pervasive fear of ag suing the District, even when the USGS study was being conducted ... the statement seems to have continued to be that a lawsuit would cost more than buying the land.
- Time to move on and stand up to what's right, fair, honest.
- A great concern in this process is that there are no precedents, no guidance as to how to proceed.
- Perhaps the most important to consider is that the problem has been around – there has been awareness of the problem – for more than 30 years, when the dropping water levels in the basin were called out. (At that time, ag was much more aggressive and threatening when the issue was raised.)
- We should continue to work with BWD and try to bring us together, all the while standing firm on our convictions, our four beliefs.
- The need to continue as an AC group is essential. How do we get that to happen when the GSP specifically sets out to disband the AC once the GSP is approved?

Activities for upcoming gatherings and breakout groups:

1. Letter writing campaign (Interested so far: Gretchen, Joanne, Ralph [if you are interested, drop me an e-mail; we'll get organized soon])
2. Sanjiv sent me some information on Petition Sites; I'll give these a look and get back to Sanjiv and the rest of you in the hopes we can put something together. Any tech savvy folks ???
3. I'll be preparing a summary of our position (four points) to be submitted to the GSA for review and comment. Will run this by you in the next month or so for review and comments.
4. Anyone have access to an e-mail list we could use (with permission) to promote our position?
5. Any other ideas as to how to attain our goal? (Such as: tamarisk removal, is there an unknow end-use for the wood; limited replanting with native vegetation; water set-aside for GDEs; local fundraising outside BWD to purchase farmland; ...)

Please go to the BWD website (<http://www.bvgsp.org/>), click on the Ratepayer Gathering tab, and access schedules and notes from each gathering.

Please follow upcoming issues of the Borrego Sun. We will be featured in various ways. Your concerns will now be a regular part of our local paper.

Thanks again for your involvement. Come to our meetings. Voice your concerns. Help us further clarify and draft our objectives. Bring a friend to the next gathering.