

Draft Land Repurposing Program for TCWA

Introduction

Tri-County water Authority (TCWA) has prepared this draft land repurposing program as part of the SGMA implementation efforts and to take advantage of potential funding opportunities. SGMA authorizes GSAs, among other measures, to “establish a program of voluntary fallowing of agricultural lands or validate an existing fallowing program.” While developing this program, TCWA reviewed the *Advancing Strategic Land Repurposing and Groundwater Sustainability in California*¹ white paper along with other related documents.

For the purpose of this policy, TCWA defines land repurposing as any activity that public and/or private entity takes to reduce groundwater use and provide other benefits to the environment or broader community by repurposing current or former irrigated agricultural land. Any land repurposing program in TCWA would have multi benefits to work in combination with existing agriculture production.

It is the intent of this program to be consistent with the Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) and any subsequent modifications along with the Tulare and Kings County general plans. In addition, it likely that the TCWA will need to develop a water trading/credit policy prior to implementing this program.

Stakeholder Outreach

The ongoing stakeholder outreach efforts will incorporate the land repurposing program. Outreach will be conducted utilizing the GSA meetings, water district meetings, community-based organizations, resource conservation districts, agricultural groups, GSA email listservs, and social media. The outreach program will aim to engage and seek input from a wide variety of stakeholders who may be impacted by land use changes.

Repurposing Strategy

The overall objective of the program is to reduce groundwater demand to avoid undesirable results. Secondary objectives include benefits from habitat restoration, community parks and recreation, solar development, or avoiding undesirable results like subsidence near critical infrastructure. TCWA will coordinate the program at a regional scale to maximize benefits and minimize impacts.

Funding

TCWA proposes to fund this program through a variety of mechanisms including overdraft pumping penalties and grants from the proposed Multibenefit Land Repurposing Incentive Program Act. These funds will be used for planning, construction and/or monitoring of the projects. The funds could also will be used to provide matching funds for other grant opportunities.

The reduction in groundwater demand will be tracked using the BasinSafe water use accounting system. The BasinSafe system will track the water savings on a parcel level basis.

¹ Environmental Defense Fund. *Advancing Strategic Land Repurposing and Groundwater Sustainability in California*. March 2021.

Implementation

All stakeholders in the TCWA will be eligible to participate in the program. This includes public agencies, nonprofit organizations, water districts, and individual landowners.

Projects eligible for participation in the program include projects to repurpose current or former irrigated agricultural land for a new use, including:

- a) Development of land use repurposing plan to identify potential projects
- b) Restoring upland habitat
- c) Creating pollinator habitat
- d) Restoring flood plain
- e) Creating dedicated multibenefit recharge areas
- f) Dryland farming
- g) Switching from irrigated agriculture to rangeland
- h) Creating parks or community recreation areas
- i) Purchase conservation easement to permanently protect
 - a. Habitat for plant and animal species
 - b. Habitat consolidation and connectivity

In addition to reduction of groundwater demand, other measurable benefits for projects could include:

- a) Improving water supply reliability
- b) Improving or protecting water quality
- c) Improving flood protection
- d) Preserving, enhancing, or restoring wildlife habitat
- e) Improving soil health and carbon storage
- f) Enhancing recreational opportunities