



COUNTY OF HUMBOLDT

For the meeting of: 5/5/2020

File #: 20-522

To: Board of Supervisors

From: Public Works

Agenda Section: Public Hearing

SUBJECT:

Public Hearing Regarding Formation of the Humboldt County Groundwater Sustainability Agency for the Eel River Valley Groundwater Basin; and Request for Proposals for Professional Consulting Services

RECOMMENDATION(S):

That the Board of Supervisors:

1. Open the public hearing;
2. Receive a staff report;
3. Receive comments from the public;
4. Close the public hearing;
5. Adopt the attached resolution forming the Humboldt County Groundwater Sustainability Agency for the Eel River Valley Groundwater Basin;
6. Authorize Public Works to issue the attached Request for Proposals; and
7. Direct Public Works to bring the Agreement for Professional Services with the selected consulting firm back to the Board for review and approval.

SOURCE OF FUNDING:

General Fund (1100) and Department of Water Resources Sustainable Groundwater Management Planning Grant

DISCUSSION:

On Nov. 13, 2019, the California Department of Water Resources (“DWR”) issued a notification letter and staff report which disapproved the Groundwater Sustainability Plan (“GSP”) Alternative for the Eel River Valley groundwater basin which had been submitted in Dec. 2016. As a result of the disapproval of the GSP Alternative, preparation of a full GSP and formation of a Groundwater Sustainability Agency (“GSA”) are mandatory under the California Sustainable Groundwater Management Act. The full GSP must provide sufficient data and information regarding the achievement of sustainability criteria and the absence of undesirable results within the basin. The GSP must be adopted by Jan. 2022.

On Nov. 14, 2019, Public Works submitted a grant application to DWR to obtain a planning grant for developing the GSP under the Sustainable Groundwater Management Planning Grant program. Support letters were provided by the City of Fortuna, City of Rio Dell, Palmer Creek Community Services District, Humboldt County Resource Conservation District, Bear River Band of the Rohnerville Rancheria, and the United States Geological Survey. DWR notified Public Works of its intent to award grant funds and Public Works anticipates entering into a grant agreement by May 15, 2020.

On Nov. 12, 2019, the Board of Supervisors approved Resolution No. 19-111 which committed the county to work collaboratively with water users and stakeholders to form a GSA for the Eel River Valley groundwater basin. On Mar. 5, 2020, there was unanimous consent among attendees of the Eel River Valley Groundwater Working Group for the county to become the GSA for the Eel River Valley groundwater basin, and for the Board to form a Groundwater Resources Advisory Committee that would advise the Board on groundwater matters in the Eel River Valley and provide guidance and assistance to Public Works in developing the GSP.

The attached resolution authorizes formation of the GSA for the Eel River Valley groundwater basin and directs Public Works to make the required notifications. The attached resolution also directs Public Works to return at a future meeting with proposed bylaws including the structure for a Groundwater Resources Advisory Committee. Public notice regarding the public hearing on this matter were published in the Eureka Times-Standard on Apr. 21 and Apr. 28, 2020.

Professional services are needed to assist with data collection and analysis, hydrologic modeling, hydrogeological conceptual model development, water budget development, monitoring well installation, and document preparation. Public Works has prepared the attached Request for Proposals in accordance with the county's Purchasing Policy. Public Works will bring the proposed professional services agreement with the selected firm to the Board for approval.

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

The cost to form the GSA can be covered by the existing Water Management budget (1100 251). The cost to administer the GSA in Fiscal Year 2020-2021 will be incorporated into the proposed budget for that year. The total amount of the grant with DWR to develop the GSP is One Million and Nine Hundred Thousand Dollars (\$1,900,000). The grant does not require a local cost-share because the work will benefit economically disadvantaged communities. The grant will cover staff time by Public Works to lead the development of the GSP. The project will span two fiscal years (2020-2021 and 2021-2022).

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK:

This action supports your Board's Strategic Framework by providing for and maintaining infrastructure and managing our resources to ensure sustainability of services.

OTHER AGENCY INVOLVEMENT:

California Department of Water Resources, State Water Resources Control Board, City of Fortuna, City of Rio Dell, City of Ferndale, Palmer Creek Community Services District, Loleta Community

Services District, Scotia Community Services District, Hydesville County Water District, Bear River Band of the Rohnerville Rancheria, Wiyot Tribe, Humboldt County Resource Conservation District, University of California-Cooperative Extension, United States Department of Agriculture-Natural Resources Conservation Service, and United States Geological Survey.

ALTERNATIVES TO STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Board of Supervisors could elect not to form the GSA for the Eel River Valley groundwater basin. Other short-term options for forming a locally organized GSA were not identified. If a local GSA is not formed, the grant offer from DWR to develop the GSP would be withdrawn because only GSA's are eligible for the funding. The State Water Resources Control Board would have the authority to intervene and lead the development of a GSP and to charge fees to water users within the basin to offset the costs of developing the GSP.

A longer-term option for the structure of the GSA could involve forming a joint powers agreement with the cities, districts, and/or tribes within the basin. This option would need to be further developed to determine its feasibility and understand the financial implications.

ATTACHMENTS:

- 1 Resolution of the Humboldt County Board of Supervisors Authorizing Formation of the Humboldt County Groundwater Sustainability Agency for the Eel River Valley Groundwater Basin
- 2 Request for Proposals for Professional Consulting Services for the Eel River Valley Groundwater Sustainability Plan and Monitoring Well Installation Project

PREVIOUS ACTION/REFERRAL:

Board Order No.: C-12
Meeting of: Nov. 12, 2019
File No.: 19-1635