



LAKE COUNTY AGRICULTURE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Sharron Zoller, Crop Grower
David Weiss, Crop Grower
Randall Krag, Organic Farmer
Pat Scully, Crop Grower
Alicia Russell, Ag Processor
Bruce Merrilees, Crop Grower

NON VOTING MEMBERS

Jessica Pyska, County of Lake
Michael Green, County of Lake
Katherine Vanderwall, County of Lake

Meeting Date: January 17 @ 11 am

Meeting Minutes

1. **Call to Order / Sharron Zoller, Facilitator-** 11:03 am
2. **Roll call** – Sharron Zoller, David Weiss, Randall Krag, Pat Scully, Alicia Russell, Bruce Merrilees, Jessica Pyska, Katherine Vanderwall, Michael Green (Absent)
Members of the Public: Rebecca Harper, Peter Windrem, Broc Zoller
3. **Approval of Minutes from December 5, 2022-** Approved 1/17/2023
December 5, 2022 minutes were MSP: Motion by Alicia Russell, Second by Randy Krag.

4. **Clearlake Hitch Proposal-** Sharron Zoller stated that on January 10th, Supervisor Green presented to the Board of Supervisors a Proclamation of the existence of a local emergency due to persistent drought, habitat loss, and potential extinction of Clearlake Hitch. After a brief conversation at the BOS meeting, this was postponed to January 24th. Sharron stated that she spoke with Supervisor Green about revisions to the proposal and sent them out to the committee. The purpose of this meeting is to come up with a statement and recommendation to present to the BOS on January 24th. Sharron stated that she asked Supervisor Green if other county agencies were part of the conversation, and he indicated that he wasn't sure about the extent of their involvement in the conversation. Sharron stated that Ag needs a seat at the table.

Supervisor Pyska stated that we need more conversation, collaboration, and potential mitigations.

Sharron stated it appears that the proclamation and some of the letter from a couple of the state agencies is not correct with the data on the Clearlake Hitch and their spawning. The committee needs to clearly define the problem that way we can find out what are the contributing factors.

Peter Windrem stated the Clearlake Hitch population is declining, if it continues at this rate they will become extinct. There is a lot of information that has been gathered. There are impacts on the Hitch from things that are going on in the Lake. This includes several non-native fish species that were introduced by the Fish and Wildlife Department. The number of Hitch spawning in the creeks has declined dramatically over the years. The federal agencies say the drop in population is because of the reduced flow in the creeks and the focus is on Kelsey and Adobe Creek. Peter Windrem stated that Chuck Bonham the director of Fish and Wildlife and also the chair of Wildlife Conservation is convinced that the reason for the decline of the Clearlake Hitch is from pumping in Big Valley for frost protection. Peter stated that he is encouraging everybody to find the October 12th Fish and Game Commission meeting and listen to their testimony about the Clearlake Hitch. Peter stated that releasing water from the reservoirs would be the easiest fix.



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Supervisor Pyska included a link in the chat from the Big Valley Groundwater Sustainability Plan from the State Water Board. Supervisor Pyska stated that in her conversation with the State Water Board, it was mentioned there is a study that proves that the pumping of groundwater does not affect streamflow. Supervisor Pyska asked how the meeting went at the Farm Bureau with the State Water Board. Sharron responded that the data is inconclusive of what they presented. Sharron also mentioned that the State Water Board was pleased with the graphs Peter had presented because they did not have that information. The Water Resources would like to gather more information before making any more recommendations.

Rebecca Harper stated that they hosted a grower/ workshop listening meeting and shared focused areas where they think the State Water Board should be looking. They seemed to be productive and well-receptive. Pat Scully stated he wanted to thank Peter for all the work he put into putting this together. There has been a ton of information gathered throughout the years that has been disregarded in this whole process. Eliminating frost protection would pretty much eliminate a lot of agriculture in Lake County.

Supervisor Pyska questioned who was part of the Clearlake Hitch Conservation strategy. Peter Windrem stated it was US Fish and Wildlife Service. Following the petition listing the Hitch at the federal level about three years ago, Amber Aguilar started this process of developing a conservation strategy to see what needs to be done and where to save the Hitch. They met quarterly and there were a lot of stakeholders there besides Ag. This is the document that will form the basis for what the federal government will do. It is a very high probability that it will get the federal listing.

David Weiss stated that farmers can't withstand not pumping groundwater for a year to prove the point that it does not affect the waterways. The consultants that were involved with the preparation groundwater sustainability program repeatedly said they had not seen a basin as sustainable as this one in all the work they had done throughout California.

Sharron stated she wanted some clarification, there is a Clearlake Hitch Task Force Committee and there is a Clearlake Hitch Conservation Strategy are they the same groups? Peter stated no they aren't, the task force has been recently put together between Fish and Wildlife and the tribes. US Fish and Wildlife Services / Strategic Conservation Plan is at the federal level. CA Fish and Wildlife are desperate to do something for the Hitch because they have not done much except some monitoring since they were listed in 2014. The last species that went extinct in Clearlake was the Split Tail. The Wildlife Conservation Board's idea is that they start buying conservation easements, buying properties in Big Valley so they can say they tried to fix the problem.

Broc Zoller stated if you look at the studies, the Hitch are responding to the conditions in the lake and the lack of rainfall that has naturally occurred. Based on CA Fish and Wildlife visual observation they will find that the Hitch numbers will come up. They will see that spawning couldn't occur because there was nothing in the streams. Peter also stated that the lake was so low that the Hitch couldn't hide in the tules where they would have protection.

Supervisor Pyska is calling for a peer review of data because it is going to be really difficult to develop an action plan if everyone has a different data set. Peter stated that the Big Valley Sustainability Plan did solid work. There was a general discussion about stream monitoring and utilizing cannabis funds for this work. There was also discussion about Highland Springs Reservoir, the dam, and if any data was available on releasing water during dry periods to help move the Hitch downstream and into the lake.

General Discussion of the upcoming Board meeting and presentations of stakeholders including the Ag Advisory. It was stated that the committee should ask the engineer that was involved with gathering all the data for the Big Valley Sustainable Plan to do a presentation on the findings. Supervisor Pyska stated that she will ask Marina to make sure to share that data.

Sharron stated she will send out a draft of the recommendation to the group before sending it to the BOS.

Alicia Russell, Randy Krag, and Bruce Merrilees all stated they supported the direction the committee was going.

5. Committee Members Report- None

6. Public Comment- None

7. Future Agenda Topics- Cannabis Task force proposal redefining AG Exempt buildings.
Looking at the retail location within the county for a cannabis dispensary.



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8. **Adjourn-** 12:40 pm