

TUSCAN WATER DISTRICT

Update to the Vina GSA and RCRD GSA Boards of Directors

Summary of Formation and Key Activities (2024–2026)

Formation and Proposition 218 Assessment. The Tuscan Water District held its inaugural board meeting on February 21, 2024, following approval by Butte County LAFCo. The District encompasses approximately 97,000 acres, roughly 99% of which carry agricultural general plan designations. In its first year, the Board organized itself, hired legal counsel and staff, satisfied key LAFCo formation conditions—including submission of a Municipal Service Review application and establishment of electoral divisions—and initiated a Proposition 218 special benefit assessment process. On January 15, 2025, the Prop 218 election yielded strong support: 87.61% of weighted acres voted in favor, with voter turnout of 63% by acreage. The Board set the Year 1 assessment rate at \$6.45 per acre for FY 2025–26.

Financial Infrastructure and Revenue. TWD established its financial operations from scratch, opening a bank account, obtaining an EIN, and securing D&O and general liability insurance through a JPA pool. A voluntary prepayment program launched in spring 2025 collected approximately \$190,000 ahead of the county tax roll timeline. Working with the Butte County Auditor-Controller, the District placed its assessments on the secured property tax roll, with approximately \$428,000 expected in the December 2025 and April 2026 distributions. In early 2026, the Board adopted a formal Investment Policy for reserve funds and is developing a grant fund segregation resolution and reserve policy.

Interagency MOUs. In January 2025, the Board approved Memoranda of Understanding with the County of Butte GSA and with the Vina and Rock Creek GSAs—a key LAFCo formation requirement. These MOUs establish the framework for coordination on groundwater sustainability planning and implementation within the Vina Subbasin.

Groundwater Recharge. TWD has been actively monitoring recharge project concepts currently being developed using Vina GSA’s SGM Implementation Grant funds. Pilot projects in the North Vina and Central Vina have demonstrated promising percolation values during winter 2025–26 storms. TWD also commissioned an analysis of a Rock Creek/Kiefer Slough corridor multibenefit recharge project covering three sites, with hydrogeology results expected in early 2026. Additional investigations include t-TEM permeability testing at several sites throughout the Vina Subbasin, analysis of Durham Mutual Water Company infrastructure for surface water delivery, and exploration of dry well technology in coordination with Butte County. A Recharge Ad Hoc Committee was formed in early 2026 to help advance concepts toward shovel-ready status by the end of Q2 2026 in anticipation of Proposition 4 funding.

Surface Water Supply Development. A Surface Water Ad Hoc Committee was also formed in early 2026 to pursue two parallel tracks. First, the Ad Hoc plans to review and provide feedback

to staff and the Vina GSA on a soon-to-be-finalized and released feasibility analysis by Water and Land Solutions. This feasibility analysis will evaluate the potential wheeling of Western Canal or Table A water to rice properties in the southern Vina Subbasin—targeting approximately 7,500 acre-feet of conjunctive groundwater use to offset groundwater pumping. Second, the Ad Hoc is providing input and guidance to staff on an effort to help facilitate a proposed one-year pilot transfer of approximately 1,500 acre-feet of water from Paradise Irrigation District to a landowner via Butte Creek for conjunctive use – surface water replacing groundwater pumping during the irrigation season.

Proposition 4 Readiness. With approximately \$385 million in Prop 4 funding designated for SGMA implementation alone, TWD formed two ad hoc committees (as discussed above) in early 2026 to help advance competitive project applications. At the same time, the Board authorized up to \$10,000 for preliminary hydrology and flood risk reduction analysis on the Rock Creek / Keefer Slough corridor.

Vina GSA Coordination and GSP Evaluation. TWD closely monitors and reports to its Board on Vina GSA activities, including efforts related to the Subbasin's Annual Reports and the GSP five-year periodic evaluation due in 2027. Recent Annual Reports have reported groundwater elevations well above minimum thresholds and long-term storage trends showing an average increase of roughly 8,000 acre-feet per year over the past decade. Notwithstanding significantly improved groundwater conditions in the Subbasin, TWD staff has raised data and methodology questions with the Vina GSA via Butte County's Technical Advisory Committee—including questions about water use estimates, cumulative storage change modeling, and ET calculations. For the GSP Evaluation process, TWD supports topic-specific stakeholder outreach and issue-based working groups consistent with the approach used during GSP development in 2022.

Governance and Elections. TWD is preparing for its first by-division elections in November 2026 under the Uniform District Election Law. Five of nine seats (the odd seats) will be on the ballot, with the remaining four (the even seats) in 2028. An election information page has been added to the TWD website. The Board adopted a mission statement in November 2025, adopted Conflict of Interest and Sponsorship policies, and is in the process of finalizing bylaws. The District is also transitioning to more permanent staffing and office space.

Basin Conditions. Current groundwater conditions in the Vina Subbasin are favorable following two above-normal water years (2023 and 2024). Groundwater levels appear to be near historic highs, even after the broader region experienced what researchers have identified as the driest 22-year period (2000–2021) in at least 1,200 years across the American West (Williams et al., Nature Climate Change, 2022). Board members have observed well levels near full capacity after above-average pumping years, suggesting significant natural recharge from precipitation in the eastern foothills and on the valley floor. Cropping patterns in the district are believed to be at or near maximum permanent plantings, suggesting the subbasin may be near peak groundwater demand. TWD continues to advocate for proactive recharge and supply planning to prepare for future drought cycles.