

**PASO ROBLES GROUNDWATER BASIN
MULTIBENEFIT IRRIGATED LAND REPURPOSING (MILR) PROGRAM
DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION PLAN DOCUMENTATION
Stakeholder Project Scoping Questionnaire**

On July 30, 2024, the County of San Luis Obispo solicited proposals from qualified consultants to design the Paso Robles Groundwater Basin Multibenefit Irrigated Land Repurposing (MILR) Program and develop related implementing documents. Proposals were solicited via a County-Purchasing led formal Request for Proposal (RFP) on July 30, 2024, and three (3) proposals were received on September 3, 2024. A selection committee was formed consisting of Groundwater Sustainability and Planning staff, staff members of the other Paso Basin groundwater sustainability agencies (GSAs), and other Basin stakeholders. On September 18, 2024, the selection committee interviewed all three consultants, and subsequently recommended Land IQ, LLC be awarded a contract to complete the requested work. On November 12, 2024, a project “Kick-Off” meeting was held with staff from Land IQ and all five Paso Basin GSAs. During the meeting it became apparent that there was a lack of consensus among all GSAs with regard to the vision for the MILR Program or what scope of work should be performed by the consultant. In an effort to provide the consultant with more clarity, it was suggested that a series of questions be developed and distributed to GSA staff and other stakeholders with a request to provide responses to the questions and also provide comments and suggestions for consideration in developing guidance and direction for the consultant in the design of the MILR Program.

The stated purpose of the above-mentioned RFP was to *“to retain the services of a qualified firm to provide professional services as required to design the Paso Robles Groundwater Basin Multi-Benefit Irrigated Land Repurposing (MILR) Program and develop a MILR Program Implementation Plan that addresses all MILR Program elements, including without limitation: farming unit definition and eligibility criteria; program rules and regulations; enabling ordinances; California environmental Quality Act (CEQA) documentation; outreach strategies; projected program costs and funding mechanism; legal authority, and other elements as may be determined to be appropriate”.*

A list of questions is provided below:

1. As described in the RFP, the MILR Program is envisioned to provide a pathway to reduce groundwater pumping in the Paso Robles Groundwater Basin through voluntary fallowing and /or repurposing of irrigated land to other less water-intensive uses. Do you support this general concept of the MILR Program? Yes No

If not, how do you believe demand management in the Paso Subbasin should be achieved?

- Mandatory Allocation Program Other

If Other, what would you propose?

Response:

2. If you support some form of a MILR Program, check which of the following considerations should be incorporated into the program:
- I don't support the implementation of any form of MILR Program
 - MILR Program should work in concert with other SGMA efforts to achieve Basin sustainability (Balance)
 - MILR Program should concentrate on reducing groundwater usage on commercial-scale irrigated agriculture
 - MILR Program should serve as an alternative to mandatory pumping reductions
 - MILR Program should be designed to prioritize pumping reductions near communities whose drinking water wells have been impacted or are threatened.
 - MILR Program should ensure that overlying landowners that choose to repurpose irrigated lands are not adversely impacted by their decision under current or future regulations over which the County of San Luis Obispo or the other Groundwater Sustainability Agencies have control.
 - MILR Program eligible lands should be identified as Farming Units. A Farming Unit would be a collection of contiguous or semi-contiguous agricultural properties, that are managed as a single irrigated farming operation (or planned for irrigation in the future).
 - Participation in the MILR Program should trigger an exemption for the enrolled Farming Unit, including all parcels included therein, from the "look back provisions" of the County Ag Offset Ordinance and from the irrigation requirements of the Williamson Act, as may apply (which would require modifying the Ag Offset Ordinance and the Williamson Act Rules of Procedure, subject to approval by the County Board of Supervisors).
 - MILR Program should eventually allow for the sunset or repeal of the AG Offset Ordinance
3. If you support some form of a MILR Program, which of the following describes most accurately your vision of the program:
- I don't support the implementation of any form of MILR Program
 - Option 1: Creation of a fallowed land registry to track and monitor the total area of fallowed land within the Paso Basin on an annual basis. (Note: Registration of fallowed land would exempt the property from the Ag Offset "look back provisions". No formal MILR Plan would be required)
 - Option 2: Option 1 but would require that a formal MILR Plan be submitted for GSA review / approval.
 - Option 3: Option 2 but the landowner would have access to GSA funded technical assistance for MILR Plan development. – Fallowing Only
 - Option 4: Option 3 but the landowner would have access to GSA funded technical assistance for MILR Plan development – Fallowing and / or other land repurposing measures
 - Option 5: Option 4 but the landowner would have access to financial assistance for MILR Plan implementation, maintenance, and monitoring.

- Option 6: GSAs will provide financial incentives to the landowner for **temporarily** enrolling the farming unit in the MILR Program and reducing groundwater extractions in accordance with terms mutually agreeable between the landowner and the GSAs
- Option 7: GSAs will provide financial incentives to the landowner for **permanently** enrolling the farming unit in the MILR Program and reducing groundwater extractions in accordance with terms mutually agreeable between the landowner and the GSAs
- Other Option (s): Provide description below:

Response:

4. What is the best way to incentivize growers to participate in the voluntary MILR Program?

Response:

5. Are you against providing any financial incentives? If so, why?

Response:

6. Would you be against financial incentives if the program payments are calculated fairly and transparently, and account for any cost savings (e.g., the groundwater extraction fee)?

Response:

7. What will be the most challenging part/aspect of the proposed MILR Program for members of your GSA/organization to participate in and/or implement?

Response:

8. Do you think there are ways in which growers would be adversely impacted by their decision to participate in the voluntary MILR Program? Yes, if so how? No

Response:

To balance [a] managing groundwater resources for long-term viability and [b] providing a path for property owners to irrigate based on available groundwater resources, the Multi-benefit Irrigated Land Repurposing (MILR) Program must legally satisfy the following criteria prior to the sunset date of the Agricultural Offset Ordinance (e.g. required CEQA findings). The MILR Program must provide the basin equal or higher protection than the Agricultural Offset Ordinance currently provides. The following mechanism(s) should be in place to limit increased irrigation above baseline groundwater production until certain basin health metrics are met.

9. Do you support the development of the following Basin Sustainability Metrics?

- a. Targeted basin health metrics? Yes No
- b. The identification of threshold basin sustainability conditions to allow increased irrigation. Currently, all properties subject to the Ag Offset Ordinance are currently restricted from increasing on-site irrigation. Almost all if not all of the irrigated lands within the Paso Robles Subbasin (Bulletin 118) are within the Ag Offset boundary.
 Yes No

10. Do you support the development and implementation of a Basin Sustainability Monitoring System that would include any of the following elements?

- a. Establish monitoring system for basin health metrics? Yes No
- b. Track trends in targeted basin health metrics monitoring data? Yes No
- c. Track irrigation water use? Use of satellite-based Et is currently the tracking mechanism that is being developed for this purpose.
- i. Per Individual Parcels? Yes No
- ii. Per Farming Unit? Yes No
- iii. Basin-wide? Yes No
- iv. In certain areas of the basin (e.g. proximity to impacted drinking water wells)?
 Yes No
- d. Establish baseline irrigation rates, based on satellite-based Et methods and crop mapping? Yes No
- e. Establish monitoring system to track changes in baseline irrigation rates?
 Yes No

- f. Monitor irrigation trends/basin metrics after pumping fees enacted and voluntary MILR Plans approved and implemented? Yes No

11. Do you support the development and implementation of any of the following Basin Sustainability Mechanisms?

- i. Farming Unit Agreements/MILR Plans could preclude sites from irrigating until certain basin health metrics are met? Yes No
- ii. Adopt enabling ordinance(s) including provisions that give GSAs, or a new Basin governing Body (i.e. JPA), authority to enforce irrigation limits defined in an approved MILR Plan and outline enforcement procedures? Yes No
- iii. Implement a groundwater usage fee structure to further induce reduced irrigation related groundwater extractions within the Basin? Yes No
- iv. Groundwater consumptive use allocation ordinance enacted, to take effect if targeted basin health metrics are not met and pumping fees and implemented voluntary MILR Plans are not sufficient to limit irrigation related groundwater extractions above sustainable groundwater production?
 Yes No

12. Please provide any additional comments and suggestions that you believe will help the GSAs and consultants design a MILR Program that will meet the needs and goals of the agricultural community who irrigate in the Paso Basin while helping achieve a sustainable groundwater basin and meet the legal requirements of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act.

Response:

Submitter's Name:

Agency / Association Affiliation:

Email Address:

Please email your completed questionnaire to: Blaine Reely (breely@co.slo.ca.us)

THANK YOU!