

MINUTES – DECEMBER 11, 2025
BIG BEND GROUNDWATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT #5
MEETING OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The monthly board meeting of the Big Bend Groundwater Management District #5 was held at the District office in Stafford, Kansas on Thursday December 11, 2025. The board members present were Tom Taylor, Kent Moore, Darrell Wood, Gary Hornbaker, Marlyn Spare, Craig Zwick, and Joe Schlessiger. The board members not present were Fred Grunder and Kerry Froetschner. The District staffs present were Orrin Feril and Vanessa Marks. The guests present were Jeff Lanterman, Dave Romero (Zoom), Steve Silver (Zoom), Jake Dooling (Zoom), Steve Frost (Zoom), Earl Lewis (Zoom), Micah Cameron-Harp (Zoom), and Jeff Crispin (Zoom).

The December regular board meeting was called to order at 9:00 a.m. by Tom Taylor.

A discussion with Balleau GW was added to the agenda as item 3a and a review of a proposed ITI agreement extension was added to the agenda as item 5a.

Darrell Wood moved, and Craig Zwick seconded to approve the November minutes as presented.
Motion carried 7-0.

Orrin Feril provided the board and public with the December treasurer's report and highlighted the unique items for further board review. Craig Zwick moved, and Marlyn Spare seconded to accept the December treasurer's report as presented. Motion carried 7-0.

For the past several months, Balleau GW has been conducting a deeper investigation into the hydrology in the western portion of the District. Specifically, analyzing the Kansas Geological Survey's methodology for the estimated useable life map and its application in Central Kansas. Analysis looked at the aquifer thickness at predevelopment (KGS datasets) and the well logs from production wells throughout the region. It was noted that there are nearly 300 production wells within these thin zones and the water table within the majority of the areas are stable for the past 40 years, though some do indicate a minor decline of 0.10 ft/year on average. Since the decline rates are either non-existent or minor, it was recommended by Balleau GW to formally identify the areas that have the thin saturated thickness and conduct additional data collection and monitoring of those regions. The District will work closely with Balleau GW, KGS and other technical experts to identify reasonable triggers for future management in those areas. This will be implemented into the upcoming draft action plan for further refinement and discussion with the board.

The District has been reviewing the revised management program for the District for several months. Per District policy, the District actively solicited comments and feedback from the public. The District did not receive feedback. In the November board meeting, the discussion was tabled. Kent Moore moved, and Craig Zwick seconded to take the discussion on the management program off the table. Motion carried 7-0. Orrin Feril highlighted revisions in the intervening weeks since the November meeting. Notably the addition of phragmites management, updating of pertinent maps and figures, and temporary removal of the action plan section. This section was removed since it is not yet required by statute and is actively being drafted by the District. In future revisions of the management program, this section will be updated with the latest action plan. Darrell Wood moved, and Gary Hornbaker seconded to approve the management program as revised and authorized Orrin Feril to make pertinent grammatical changes that might be needed prior to submission to the Chief Engineer for approval. Motion carried 7-0.

The Kansas Department of Agriculture – Division of Conservation (KDA-DOC) has provided updated information regarding the Water Transition Assistance Program (WTAP). Specifically, regarding the maximum bid rate for retiring water rights within the target areas of the state. Steve Frost, Executive Director, provided market values from county appraisers around the Rattlesnake Creek target area (Edwards, Ford, Kiowa, Stafford counties). Based on this information and discussion amongst the board, Kent Moore moved, and Darrell Wood seconded to recommend the maximum bid rate for Rattlesnake Creek target area to be \$5,000.00 per acre-foot of historic consumptive water use. Motion carried 7-0.

In the KDA-DOC Irrigation Technology Initiative (ITI), the agreement for the evaluation of irrigation systems is set to expire on December 31, 2025. Per the terms of the agreement, amendments can be made upon the written request of either of the parties. Earlier this month, the District sent written request to KDA-DOC to extend the agreement. An amendment to the original agreement was presented to the board that would extend the agreement through June 30, 2026. Marlyn Spare moved, and Craig Zwick seconded to approve the amendment. Motion carried 6-0-1.

Marlyn Spare made the following motion at 10:25 a.m.: “I move that the board go into executive session for 30 minutes for the purpose of discussion of personnel matters of non-elected personnel exception under KOMA to conduct performance reviews with the District manager, and the open meeting will resume here in the meeting room at 10:55 a.m.” Kent Moore seconded. Motion carried 7-0. The board came out of the executive session at 10:55 a.m.

In other business, Marlyn Spare moved, and Craig Zwick seconded to follow the manager’s discretion for salary changes for District staff effective January 1, 2026. Motion carried 7-0.

Marlyn Spare moved, and Kent Moore seconded to increase the manager’s salary to \$132,000 effective January 1, 2026. Motion carried 7-0.

Marlyn Spare left the board meeting at approximately 11:00 a.m.

Vanessa Marks, CKWBA, asked if the board of directors would like to nominate a board member to represent the District on the CKWBA board. Darrell Wood moved, and Craig Zwick seconded to nominate Tom Taylor to represent the District on the CKWBA board. Motion carried 6-0.

Darrell Wood left the board meeting at approximately 11:10 a.m.

Orrin Feril discussed staff activities for the past few weeks and upcoming months. The KGMDA legislative retreat is scheduled for February 3 and 4 in Topeka. The board was encouraged to attend and if they are interested, they need to let staff know to make appropriate arrangements. Recently, the District received a letter response from KDA regarding the recent regulatory hearing on K.A.R. 5-4-1. This letter was provided to the board for reference. The GMD managers will be meeting with the Chief Engineer and the Governor’s office next week to further improve the coordination and communication between our offices. The District’s annual meeting is being scheduled for February 17, 2026, in St John, pending confirmation with the county clerk. Currently, the annual report is being revised and will be ready for the board’s review in the January meeting. In reply to the discussion in the November meeting regarding the expansion of the District’s monitoring well network, KGS has been approached with a positive response, and further details will be worked out soon.

Jeff Lanterman, KDA-DWR, noted the pilot augmentation well site (Hickel) is currently operating and has diverted approximately 601 acre-feet. There is an update meeting on the pilot augmentation project on Friday December 12 at the Stafford field office.

The next District board meeting is tentatively set for January 15, 2026, at 9:00 a.m.

With no further items to discuss, the board adjourned at 11:15 a.m.

Attest by:  Dated: 1-15-26