

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.

TUSCAN WATER DISTRICT

Groundwater Sustainability in the Vina Subbasin: Who Does What, What TWD Can Do, and How Projects Move Forward

The Vina Subbasin’s Governance Framework

Achieving groundwater sustainability in the Vina Subbasin requires coordination among agencies with distinct but complementary roles. Three governing documents help establish this framework: the Vina GSA Joint Powers Agreement (2019), LAFCO Resolution No. 18 2022/2023 (which formed the Tuscan Water District), and the Memoranda of Understanding executed January 28, 2025, between TWD and Butte County GSA, and TWD and the Vina GSA and Rock Creek Reclamation District GSA.

Together, these documents create a clear division of responsibility: the GSAs plan and regulate; TWD implements projects that advance the GSAs’ sustainability goals. This structure reflects the practical reality that the Vina GSA, by the terms of its own JPA, will not have employees (JPA Section 12.3). While the GSA retains full regulatory authority, implementing physical infrastructure—recharge basins, conveyance systems, monitoring networks—requires a dedicated operational entity. TWD was formed to fill that role.

Who Does What in the Vina Subbasin

Vina GSA / Rock Creek GSA	Tuscan Water District
Develop, adopt, and amend the Vina Subbasin GSP under SGMA.	Implement projects and management actions consistent with the GSA’s GSP.
Set sustainability criteria, monitor basin conditions, and enforce compliance.	Conduct feasibility studies, pursue funding, and build infrastructure.
Review TWD project proposals for consistency with the GSP before implementation.	Submit project proposals to the relevant GSA(s) for a consistency determination.
Retain all GSA authority; no authority has been delegated to TWD.	Serve as a GSA partner—not a GSA—and will not undertake GSA duties (MOU §2(a)).

A note on Rock Creek Reclamation District. The table above describes the general division of roles between the GSAs and TWD. The Rock Creek Reclamation District occupies a somewhat different position. RCRD was formed decades ago to provide flood control and drainage services to approximately 4,644 acres in northern Butte County. Unlike the Vina GSA — which by the terms of its JPA will not have employees — RCRD is an operational district with independent authority to develop, implement, and operate projects within its boundaries. RCRD also serves as one of the two GSAs in the Vina Subbasin. In its May 2021 letter supporting TWD's formation, RCRD clarified that while the two districts' boundaries would overlap, there would be no duplication of services, absent joint agreement, and that RCRD would retain its autonomy to develop, adopt, and implement the GSP within its boundaries. TWD's role as an implementation partner is therefore most directly relevant to the Vina GSA, which lacks independent operational capacity.

Why a Separate Implementation Entity?

Under SGMA, GSAs are responsible for developing and implementing Groundwater Sustainability Plans. In principle, a GSA could both plan and build. In practice, the Vina Subbasin’s governance structure reflects a different approach—shaped by both institutional design and stakeholder preference. The Vina GSA’s Joint Powers Agreement (Section 12.3) provides that the Agency “will not have any employees.” Member agencies may be engaged to manage the GSA’s business, and the GSA may hire consultants, but this staffing model was designed for a regulatory and planning body—not for building and operating physical water infrastructure, which requires dedicated project management, engineering oversight, and sustained operational capacity.

After SGMA passed in 2014-15, landowners and county elected officials recognized that achieving sustainability would require a focused entity with independent authority to pursue funding, conduct feasibility studies, and implement projects. The formation of TWD as a California Water District under Water Code §34000 et seq. provides that capacity—a public agency with a landowner-elected board, independent funding authority, and the legal tools to get projects built. The MOUs formalize this complementary relationship, and LAFCO Condition 18 requires that before TWD pursues any GSP implementation activity that may result in a physical change in the environment, it must first obtain a GSP consistency determination from the Vina GSA—ensuring the GSA retains clear oversight of whether TWD’s projects align with the sustainability plan.

What TWD Can and Cannot Do

LAFCO’s Conditions of Approval define TWD’s boundaries.

TWD Is Authorized To:	TWD Is Restricted From:
Conduct studies and feasibility analyses related to groundwater sustainability, recharge, conveyance, and storage.	Exporting or transferring water outside the Vina or Butte Subbasins (LAFCO Condition 17(a)).
Pursue grants and funding for project feasibility and implementation.	Operating as a retail water provider—these powers are inactive and latent (Condition 17(b)).
Enter cooperative agreements and MOUs with GSAs and other agencies.	Pursuing CEQA or implementing any project without a GSA consistency determination (Conditions 14 and 18; MOUs).
Implement projects that have received a GSA consistency determination and completed CEQA review.	Exercising power over Rock Creek Reclamation District works without written consent (Condition 16).

The GSP Consistency Determination: What It Is and What It Isn’t

LAFCO Condition 18 defines the GSA’s consistency determination as a ministerial review—not a discretionary approval. The GSA determines only whether a proposed project is (1) within the scope of a project or action identified in the GSP, or (2) consistent and compatible with the goals, objectives, purposes, and policies of the GSP. The Condition specifies that GSA staff “shall not use or exercise any personal or subjective judgment” in this determination, and that it “is not intended to confer on the GSA the discretionary authority to determine whether to approve a District project or to modify or condition a project.” The purpose is to confirm GSP consistency before TWD undertakes the effort and expense of CEQA review, implementation, and operation.

How Projects Move Forward in the Vina Subbasin

Projects follow a structured pipeline with multiple public checkpoints. All TWD activity today involves research and due diligence—not construction.

Stage	What Happens	Key Safeguard
1. Exploration	TWD investigates whether a project concept is feasible—engineering, cost, environmental factors, funding.	Discussed at open board meetings. No GSA approval required yet.
2. Proposal	If viable, TWD prepares a project description and submits it to the relevant GSA.	Becomes part of the public record.
3. GSA Review	The GSA undertakes a GSP consistency determination by reviewing the project and determining if the project is consistent with the GSA’s GSP.	GSA retains full discretion (MOU §2(b)(1&2)).
4. CEQA	Environmental review under the California Environmental Quality Act, as required by LAFCO Condition 18.	Public comment opportunity.
5. Build	Only after all prior steps are completed does construction begin.	Ongoing reporting, as may be required.

The bottom line: exploring a project is not the same as building it. No project advances to construction without a GSA consistency determination and environmental review. The GSAs retain full authority over sustainability planning, and TWD provides the operational capacity to turn those plans into reality—within the guardrails that LAFCO and the MOUs have set.

Source Documents

- Vina Groundwater Sustainability Agency — Joint Powers Agreement (executed April 9, 2019)
- Butte LAFCO Resolution No. 18 2022/2023 — Conditions of Approval for TWD Formation (recorded February 1, 2024)
- MOU: TWD, Rock Creek Reclamation District GSA, and Vina GSA (January 28, 2025)
- MOU: TWD and County of Butte GSA (January 28, 2025)

This document was prepared by TWD staff for public information purposes. It is not legal advice.



Mission Statement

(Adopted November 19, 2025)

The Tuscan Water District (TWD) is a locally governed California Water District dedicated to ensuring the long-term sustainability of groundwater resources within the Vina and Butte Subbasins. TWD's mission is to:

- Protect and enhance the beneficial use of groundwater for all landowners by implementing projects and management actions consistent with the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA);
- Represent and advocate for groundwater-dependent landowners in coordination with Butte County, the Vina, Butte, and Rock Creek Reclamation District GSAs, and other public agencies;
- Develop, fund, and operate surface-water supply, recharge, and conservation programs that improve basin conditions and preserve the region's agricultural and rural economy; and
- Defend local groundwater rights while pursuing cooperative, science-based solutions that sustain the Tuscan Aquifer for future generations.

Supporting Context

Statutory Basis: California Water Code §§ 34000 et seq.; LAFCo Certificate of Compliance (02/2024).

Core Functions: Evaluate, fund, implement, and oversee projects to achieve groundwater sustainability; serve as the implementing and funding partner to the GSAs.

Special Benefits Identified in the Engineer's Report: Local control, representation, funding advocacy, and protection of groundwater rights.