



State of Groundwater

Background

In 2014, Governor Jerry Brown signed into law a three-bill legislative package (AB 1739 (Dickinson), SB 1168 (Pavley), and SB 1319 (Pavley)) collectively known as the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA). For the first time in its history, California has a framework for sustainable groundwater management, defined as “management and use of groundwater in a manner that can be maintained during the planning and implementation horizon without causing undesirable results.” SGMA requires governments and water agencies of high and medium priority basins to halt overdraft and bring groundwater basins into balanced levels of pumping and recharge. Under SGMA, these basins should reach sustainability within 20 years of implementing their sustainability plans. For critically over-drafted basins, that will be 2040. For the remaining high and medium priority basins, 2042 is the deadline.

March 8-14, 2020, was National Groundwater Awareness Week, during which groundwater professionals across the country worked to educate the public about the importance of groundwater and how it affects lives. This recent emphasis on the national importance of groundwater creates an opportunity to highlight California’s groundwater issues and the 2020 update of Bulletin 118, an inventory and assessment of available information on the state’s groundwater supply.

According to a DWR [fact sheet](#) about Bulletin 118, “groundwater provides close to 40 percent of California’s water supply during normal years and up to 60 percent in drought years. Most of California’s groundwater is found within 515 alluvial basins distributed around the state, followed by lesser amounts in fractured bedrock and volcanic rock.”

“DWR publishes Bulletin 118 to meet requirements of the California Water Code (Section 12924) to identify California’s groundwater basins, investigate patterns of groundwater extraction and recharge within those basins, and define basins that are subject to critical conditions of overdraft. With the passage of SGMA, Bulletin 118 now serves an additional role by providing Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSAs) with important groundwater related data, including: Critical Conditions of Overdraft, Basin Boundaries, and Basin Priority. DWR will release a draft 2020 Bulletin 118 Update for public review in summer-2020. DWR will also be updating its Bulletin 118 web site to facilitate more frequent future updates and efficient access to California’s groundwater information.”

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The Commission maintains an ongoing interest in the timely and effective implementation of SGMA, which is critical to managing California's water resources sustainably. Goal 1 of the Commission's revised Strategic Plan states that the Commission will serve as a public forum for discussing water management policy to assist regions in achieving climate resiliency. Implementation of GSPs will raise concerns associated with the availability of water in disadvantaged communities, as well as economic and land use issues. All of these issues are identified as objectives for the Commission to explore and promote policies to address under Strategic Plan Goal 1.

Taryn Ravazzini, DWR's Deputy Director for Statewide Groundwater Management, and staff from DWR's Sustainable Groundwater Management Office will brief the Commission on the state of groundwater in California. They will address topics including the degree of reliance on groundwater in various regions, the condition of groundwater basins throughout the State, the update of Bulletin 118, and new technologies for developing groundwater data. They will also give the Commission an update on the status of the SGMA program.

This is an informational item.

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