



Sustainable Groundwater Management Act Implementation Update

Introduction

California's groundwater supply is a critical natural resource, providing between 40 and 60 percent of the State's total water supply in a given year. Governor Jerry Brown signed into law the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA), which created a new regulatory framework to sustainably manage groundwater during the last drought in 2014. SGMA requires planning and management of groundwater basins to avoid six undesirable conditions:

- 1) Chronic lowering of groundwater levels indicating a significant and unreasonable depletion of supply if continued over the planning and implementation horizon.
- 2) Significant and unreasonable reduction of groundwater storage.
- 3) Significant and unreasonable seawater intrusion.
- 4) Significant and unreasonable degraded water quality, including the migration of contaminant plumes that impair water supplies.
- 5) Significant and unreasonable land subsidence that substantially interferes with surface land uses.
- 6) Depletions of interconnected surface water that have significant and unreasonable adverse impacts on beneficial uses of the surface water.

The Department of Water Resources (DWR) is tasked with two key roles under SGMA: to provide regulatory oversight for groundwater sustainability planning, and to support local implementation with State assistance. DWR is also required to prioritize the State's 515 groundwater basins into one of four categories: high, medium, low or very low priority. The 94 high and medium priority groundwater basins account for 96 percent of the State's groundwater use and cover 88 percent of California's overlying population. Of these high and medium priority basins, 21 are designated as critically overdrafted and account for approximately 62 percent of the State's groundwater pumping.

SGMA requires the medium and high priority basins to form local groundwater sustainability agencies (GSAs) and develop groundwater sustainability plans (GSPs) to achieve their sustainability goals over a 20-year planning horizon. More than 250 local GSAs were formed across the State. DWR administered over \$150 million dollars in financial assistance to support local agencies in their planning efforts to develop GSPs and consider all beneficial uses and users of groundwater in a basin. The GSPs provide the local roadmap for how GSAs will continue monitoring and managing groundwater through the development of projects and

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management actions. DWR provides technical support services, such as the installation of monitoring wells, Statewide datasets, and groundwater modeling tool to support locals in furthering their understanding of groundwater conditions. Additionally, DWR provides facilitation support, guidance materials, and written translation services to support local public engagement efforts.

SGMA required the critically overdrafted basins to submit their first GSPs to DWR by January 31, 2020. DWR must complete an evaluation of the GSPs within a two-year statutory deadline. DWR is currently reviewing these first GSPs. All other high and medium priority basins are required to submit their GSPs to DWR for evaluation by January 31, 2022. GSAs are required to continue submitting annual reports and 5-year updates of their GSPs to DWR.

Background

This briefing will advance Goal One of the Commission's Strategic Plan, which calls on the Commission to "serve as a primary public forum for the discussion of improving water management policy to assist regions in achieving climate resiliency." This year is a milestone year for SGMA: DWR is currently reviewing the first GSPs and will release assessments of them this year. Given the importance of this year for the implementation of SGMA, the Commission will receive multiple briefings on the topic this year.

Meeting Overview

At the March meeting, Steven Springhorn, the Acting Deputy Director for Statewide Groundwater Management, Craig Altare, Section Chief for Groundwater Sustainability Plan Review, and Keith Wallace, Section Chief for Outreach and Engagement will provide an update on SGMA implementation, including the approach and timeline for releasing assessments of GSPs submitted in January 2020 and the State's planning, technical, and financial assistance supporting local SGMA implementation.

This is an informational item.

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