



Panel Discussion on the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act

Introduction

At this meeting, representatives from several State agencies will provide updates on the current state of Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) implementation, including the status of groundwater in California, an update on the SGMA process, an update on interagency efforts to support local SGMA implementation, and a discussion of land use issues.

Presenters from the Department of Water Resources (DWR) will report on the State of Groundwater, as documented in the State's comprehensive report, called Bulletin 118: California's Groundwater. DWR will also present an online tool that will provide public access to the most current groundwater data. DWR will provide an update on the regulatory review of local groundwater sustainability plans (GSPs) in the critically overdrafted basins and the first decisions issued on groundwater sustainability plans consistent with SGMA. This item will include a reflection on SGMA implementation, the Human Right to Water, and drought. Finally, this item will include information regarding DWR's implementation of paragraph 11 of the Governor's April 21, 2021 Emergency Drought Proclamation regarding application of groundwater management principles and "...strategies to monitor, analyze and minimize impacts to drinking water wells."

A California Natural Resources Agency presentation will provide an update on interagency efforts to carry out the Water Resilience Portfolio action 3.2, which calls on the State to "create a state interagency team to work with stakeholders to identify tools and strategies to address the economic, environmental, and social effects of changing land use and agricultural production as local water managers implement sustainable groundwater management." Implementation efforts include recent budget proposals and the work of teams focused on facilitating groundwater recharge, helping local governments plan for economic change, and supporting the engagement of disadvantaged communities in SGMA implementation.

A presentation from the California Department of Conservation will explore the challenge of irrigated farmlands that will no longer have a reliable water supply as local water managers bring groundwater basins into sustainable conditions. How these lands are used may affect public health, biodiversity, community welfare and economic vitality. The Department of Conservation and its state agency partners are assembling resources to help regions and landowners navigate the potential idling of farmland through programs that, once funded, will focus on helping regions plan for change, supporting landowners with resources to repurpose lands for less water-intensive uses, protecting air quality, enriching wildlife habitat, and leveraging broader economic development opportunities.

Background

This agenda item advances Goal One of the Commission's Strategic Plan. Goal One directs the Commission to serve as a primary public forum to discuss improving water management policy to assist regions in achieving climate resiliency by convening panel discussions or presentations and inviting public comment and discussion at Commission meetings.

Water Resilience Portfolio

In July 2020, a team of three state agencies released the Water Resilience Portfolio. The Portfolio is the Newsom Administration's water policy blueprint. It describes actions state agencies should take to support California's diverse regions as they work toward providing clean, reliable supplies of water for communities, economies, and the environment even in the face of average warmer temperatures that intensify drought and flood. The Portfolio was prepared with stakeholder and public input by the California Natural Resources Agency, California Environmental Protection Agency, and California Department of Food and Agriculture. Several actions in the Portfolio relate to implementation of SGMA.

Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA)

For decades, more water has been pumped out of some of California's groundwater basins than has been replenished. SGMA encompasses a package of laws enacted in 2014 that create a framework for local protection of groundwater. Under SGMA, local agencies must form groundwater sustainability agencies (GSAs) for high- and medium-priority basins. These agencies develop and implement groundwater sustainability plans (GSPs) to avoid undesirable results and mitigate overdraft within 20 years. Overdraft is particularly acute in the San Joaquin Valley. To bring basins into sustainable conditions, some local agencies will need to reduce demand by fallowing farmland. The Public Policy Institute of California has estimated that at least 500,000 acres of San Joaquin Valley farmland may need to be idled to meet the sustainability goals of SGMA.

DWR is tasked with two key roles under SGMA: to provide regulatory oversight for groundwater sustainability planning and to support local implementation with technical, financial, and planning assistance. 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 and has released several decisions on the first GSPs in June 2021 prior to the deadline. 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.

California's Groundwater

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. Groundwater basins serve as the state's water savings account and need to provide a reliable water source during drought periods when we have less rain and snowmelt. DWR publishes the California's Groundwater

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(Bulletin 118) every 5 years to give Californians a comprehensive look at the state of groundwater, an immensely valuable resource that supplies more than half of the state's supplies in drought years. The 2020 update (CalGW Update 2020) identifies California's groundwater basins, investigates patterns of groundwater extraction within those basins, identifies groundwater monitoring and conditions occurring in the state, and documents basin boundaries, basin priority, and basins that are subject to critical conditions of overdraft. By compiling the most relevant groundwater data, CalGW Update 2020 complements the development of the California Water Plan and supports actions from the Governor's Water Resilience Portfolio by providing information to help regions understand and secure groundwater supplies while supporting the transition to sustainable use. CalGW informs the implementation of SGMA and the Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Fund, two key priorities in the Water Resilience Portfolio, by providing detailed information on domestic well locations and groundwater conditions.

Meeting Overview

At the September meeting, the Commission will hear from the following panelists:

- Paul Gosselin, Deputy Director, Statewide Groundwater Management, Department of Water Resources
- Melissa Sparks-Kranz, Executive Policy Advisor to the Statewide Groundwater, Department of Water Resources
- Nancy Vogel, Deputy Secretary for Water, California Natural Resources Agency
- Keali'i Bright, Division Director of Land Resource Protection, California Department of Conservation

This is an informational item.

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