



Update on Implementation of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act

Background

Groundwater provides roughly one-third of California's annual water supply in normal years and is relied upon even more during times of drought. While many groundwater basins are well managed, there are many areas of the state where groundwater is not managed, resulting in problems such as significant lowering of groundwater levels, land subsidence, and declines in water quality. On September 16, 2014, Governor Brown signed a suite of three bills collectively known as the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA). The SGMA creates a framework for sustainable, local groundwater management for the first time in California history. The legislation requires local agencies to establish Groundwater Sustainability Agencies in order to develop groundwater sustainability plans for basins that are designated as high and medium priority. Improving groundwater sustainability will increase regional self-reliance and improve water supply reliability in California.

The Department of Water Resources (DWR) has many responsibilities for implementation of several elements of the legislation. DWR has released the initial basin prioritization based on the California Statewide Groundwater Elevation Monitoring (CASGEM) Program, which identified 127 high and medium priority basins. Among other things, DWR must also adopt regulations for revising basin boundaries and regulations for the development of groundwater sustainability plans, including the criteria and methodology to evaluate them. DWR will work closely with the State Water Resources Control Board, Water Commission and other stakeholders to implement the SGMA over the next 20 years. As with all DWR regulations, the Commission has a role in approving the regulations for both basin boundary adjustments and groundwater sustainability plans. The Commission must also hold a public hearing for each proposed modification to basin boundaries.

Dave Gutierrez, who is leading DWR's SGMA implementation efforts, will brief the Commission on DWR's progress so far and next steps, including a strategic plan for implementation, timeline for regulations, outreach activities, and details on the Commission's role.

Dave Bolland, Association of California Water Agencies Senior Regulatory Advocate, will discuss requirements and potential methods for the formation of Groundwater Sustainability Agencies.

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