



Sustainable Groundwater Management Act Implementation Update

Introduction

The Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) requires medium- and high-priority basins, as categorized by the SGMA regulations, 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. The GSPs provide the local roadmap for how GSAs will continue monitoring and managing groundwater through the development of projects and management actions to avoid undesirable results.

SGMA required critically overdrafted basins to submit their first GSPs to DWR by January 31, 2020. DWR completed the evaluation for 20 basins, represented by 42 GSPs since some basins have multiple plans, within the two-year statutory deadline. As of January 31, 2022, DWR received GSPs for the remaining plans for high- and medium-priority basins.

Background

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. Former Governor Jerry Brown signed into law the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act, 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.

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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. The technical assistance program provides various groundwater-related technical data, modeling, and tools to support development and implementation of GSPs for the purpose of supporting GSAs in addressing the undesirable results identified in SGMA. DWR's major regulatory oversight role is to assess GSP compliance and require modifications. GSAs must prepare and submit GSPs for review and assessment by DWR at least every five years beginning in 2020 for critically overdrafted basins and 2022 for all other high- or medium-priority basins. GSPs deemed unacceptable by DWR will result in Water Board intervention until the GSA resolves the GSP noncompliance issues. SGMA requires GSAs to achieve their sustainability goals, operating to a sustainable yield while avoiding undesirable results, within 20 years (by 2040 or 2042). DWR provides assistance throughout the implementation period to support and guide GSAs toward reaching their sustainability goals.

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.

This briefing will continue the advancement of 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."

Meeting Overview

At the February meeting, Paul Gosselin, DWR Deputy Director of Sustainable Groundwater Management, will report out on the current status of SGMA implementation.

This is an informational item.

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