



Sustainable Groundwater Management Act: Implementation Update

Introduction

Groundwater can account for up to 60 percent of the state's total water supply during dry years. The long-term sustainability of this water source is important for the state's future water supply needs. In 2014, the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) created a new regulatory framework for California to sustainably manage groundwater.

At this meeting, staff from the Department of Water Resources (DWR) will present an update on three SGMA topics: a summary of the annual groundwater conditions report, state activities to support responsible groundwater trading, and the release of [Land Subsidence Best Management Practices](#) (Subsidence BMP) document.

First, DWR staff will provide a groundwater conditions update that summarizes the [Fall 2025-California's Groundwater Conditions, Semi Annual Update](#). The presentation will highlight data collected and curated by DWR and summarize the significant amount of data collected by groundwater sustainability agencies (GSAs) and reported as part of SGMA. Topics include groundwater elevation trends, subsidence conditions, progress in recharge, and dry well occurrence.

Second, DWR staff will present an update on the state's groundwater trading efforts including information about the recently released [Interagency Groundwater Trading Workplan](#). This workplan outlines actions and timeframes to balance flexibility for GSAs to trade water within basins while creating safeguards for natural resources, small- and medium-sized farms, and disadvantaged communities.

DWR staff will also present an update on the Subsidence BMP document which was released in January after a robust public review process. The Subsidence BMP serves as a guide for groundwater managers on the basics of subsidence, how to best manage it, and available technical assistance. Staff will cover general actions for subsidence best management practices, DWR's activities to support GSAs in implementing these actions, and local agency progress in addressing land subsidence.

Background

Under SGMA, DWR plays a key role in supporting and guiding sustainable groundwater management throughout the state through technical assistance and grants, evaluating Groundwater Sustainability Plans (GSPs), and sharing data and reports.

SGMA requires local agencies to form GSAs for the medium and high priority groundwater basins. More than 250 local GSAs were formed across the state. SGMA gives local GSAs the

authority and responsibility to manage and allocate groundwater resources within a basin. GSAs develop GSPs to achieve their groundwater sustainability goals over a 20-year planning horizon. Since submittal of the GSPs to DWR, SGMA has transitioned from planning to implementation. GSAs are now managing water budgets, monitoring and evaluating their sustainable management criteria and interim milestones towards sustainability, and carrying out projects and management actions that will bring the basin into sustainability. Under SGMA, GSAs must achieve their sustainability goals within 20 years (by 2040 or 2042, depending on the basin).

Groundwater Conditions Report

While SGMA is a long-term initiative, it requires immediate action to better manage water during all water year types (e.g., wet, normal, dry years). The State produces a suite of materials that summarize groundwater conditions in the state. Every six months the State releases a report, called the Semi-Annual Conditions Report, that describes California's groundwater basins, how much groundwater is being used and recharged, and helps GSAs in making informed decisions about groundwater. Every five years, the State releases Bulletin 118, a comprehensive report of the state's groundwater resource that includes new science, data, and groundwater conditions. GSAs rely on groundwater conditions reports for implementing their responsibilities under SGMA.

Groundwater Trading

Groundwater trading is a voluntary management action that a GSA could decide to employ to aid in the management of groundwater. There is potential for groundwater trading to be used broadly by GSAs. To date, several GSAs are already developing trading programs. The decision to design and implement a local groundwater trading program rests solely with GSAs.

In 2020, the California Water Resilience Portfolio (2020) tasked State agencies to create flexibility for GSAs to trade water within basins by supporting and incentivizing transactional approaches while creating safeguards for natural resources, small- and medium-sized farms, and disadvantaged communities. In May 2022, the Commission released its [groundwater trading white paper](#), which describes efforts that the state can do to support well managed groundwater trading programs.

Land Subsidence Best Management Practices

Land subsidence, or the sinking of land, can be caused by multiple factors, including the dewatering of fine-grained sediments, including clay layers within an aquifer, due to groundwater pumping. Aside from impacting the structure of the aquifer itself, subsidence can also significantly impact infrastructure, including water conveyance facilities, pipelines, levees, building, foundations, railways, highways, and bridges. Subsidence from groundwater pumping has severely impacted land surfaces and infrastructure in parts of California.

Fortunately, subsidence can be minimized, avoided, or reversed. At the August 2025 Commission meeting, DWR staff shared a draft version of the Subsidence BMP during the 60-day public comment period. This Subsidence BMP addresses public comment and provides

Agenda Item: 11

Meeting Date: May 20, 2026

Page 3

specific information about subsidence in California and how it must be considered within the structure of the SGMA. A key to successfully addressing subsidence under SGMA involves evaluating all available information, educating the local community, coordinating with entities responsible for the operation and maintenance of infrastructure, understanding other potential impacts to surface and land uses (e.g., changes in flood risk, depth, or flow pattern), stabilizing and potentially raising groundwater levels, and adaptively managing a basin as conditions change.

This agenda item advances Goal Three of the [Commission's Strategic Plan](#), which calls on the Commission to use its public forum to explore pressing water management issues.

Meeting Overview

At the May meeting, Steven Springhorn, DWR Technical Assistance Section Lead, will present updates on groundwater conditions from around the state; Andrew Morgan, Senior Engineering Geologist, will provide an update on state actions in supporting responsible groundwater trading; and Shane Edmunds, Lead of DWR's Groundwater Sustainability Plan Review section, will present on the Subsidence BMP.

Following their remarks, the Commission will hear Tribal and public comment on the information presented. Commissioners will then have an opportunity to ask questions and make comments.

This is an informational item.

Contact

Sarah Lesmeister

Assistant Executive Officer

California Water Commission

916-450-8402