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Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA); Groundwater Sustainability Agencies and Groundwater Sustainability Plans, Part 2 of 4

For immediate release

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This is the second article in a four-part series to inform groundwater users in Colusa County about new groundwater legislation, the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA), and the local efforts that are taking place to implement these new laws.

Part 2: Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSAs), Private Pumper Advisory Committee (PPAC), and Groundwater Sustainability Plans (GSPs)

What is a Groundwater Sustainability Agency?

As discussed in a previous article, the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) requires that a local agency, or combination of local agencies, implement the legislation at the local level, with the state as a backstop if necessary. These local agencies are called Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSA). Any local public agency with water supply, water management and/or land use responsibilities is eligible to be a GSA. Eligible agencies include counties, cities, water districts, reclamation districts, public utility districts and similar.

A GSA is responsible for enforcing all of the requirements of SGMA. GSAs have certain responsibilities and authorities under SGMA. Responsibilities include developing and implementing a Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP), conducting studies, providing extensive outreach, monitoring groundwater conditions, and reporting to the state. Authorities that GSAs may use include adopting regulations, levying fees, requiring metering on wells, and regulating groundwater extractions, among others. These authorities are available to GSAs as tools to utilize, if necessary to achieve sustainability.

In Colusa County, we have 28 agencies that are eligible to be a GSA. SGMA allows the local agencies to decide the best governance structure for their basins. Agencies can be a stand-alone GSA covering just their service area, or part of a multi-agency GSA that covers an entire basin or portion of a basin. There can be one or more GSAs in a groundwater basin, but if there are multiple GSAs, they all must work together and coordinate efforts.

GSAs must be established in all of the high and medium priority groundwater basins in the state by June 30, 2017. The GSA-eligible agencies in Colusa County have participated in five governance planning meetings over the last several months. These meetings have been productive and the group continues to make progress in determining a local SGMA governance structure. These meetings are open to the

public and run by professional facilitators from the Center for Collaborative Policy, Sacramento State University.

SGMA and Private Pumpers; Colusa County Private Pumper Advisory Committee (PPAC)

Under SGMA, private landowners are not eligible to be a GSA. Counties are presumed to be the GSA over the “white areas,” or “private pumper” areas, which are areas of the county that are not covered by another GSA-eligible agency. This can be seen as problematic because landowners in the private pumper areas rely on groundwater as their sole source of irrigation, making them key players in successful SGMA implementation.

Colusa County has given our private pumpers a greater voice in SGMA planning and implementation by forming a Private Pumper Advisory Committee (PPAC). The PPAC is made up of 7 members and 3 alternates. Members of the PPAC are private pumper individuals from throughout the County, chosen by the Colusa County Groundwater Commission.

PPAC responsibilities include two main tasks; they are advisory to the County on the concerns and issues of the private pumpers, and they are also responsible to provide SGMA outreach to their neighbors. The PPAC is also very engaged in Colusa County’s governance planning.

What is a Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP)?

SGMA requires one or more Groundwater Sustainability Plans (GSP) be prepared for all high and medium priority groundwater basins in the state. Local GSAs will be responsible for developing GSPs by January 31, 2022 (January 31, 2020 for basins in overdraft). If there are multiple GSPs in a basin, they must be coordinated and must utilize the same data and methodologies.

The GSPs will be the road map to achieving sustainable groundwater management. GSPs must include, among other elements: a description of the plan area, sustainability goals for each of the six Sustainability Indicators (see below), measurable objectives and milestones, a monitoring and data management program, projects and management actions to achieve/maintain sustainability, a water budget detailing projected water supplies and demands, a description of how the Plan will affect other surrounding plans, and many more details. SGMA requires yearly reporting and every-five-year Plan evaluation to ensure that progress is being made.

The Groundwater Sustainability Plan Regulations define six “Sustainability Indicators” for undesirable results. These conditions must be avoided for a basin to be considered sustainable:

- Significant and Unreasonable reductions in Groundwater Levels
- Significant and Unreasonable reductions in Groundwater Storage
- Significant and Unreasonable Land Subsidence
- Significant and Unreasonable reductions in Groundwater Quality
- Significant and Unreasonable reductions in Groundwater-Surface Water Interaction
- Significant and Unreasonable Seawater Intrusion (we do not have to address this criteria in Colusa County)

The California Department of Water Resources (DWR) developed GSP Regulations which were adopted June 1, 2016. You can find these on their website at:

<http://www.water.ca.gov/groundwater/sgm/gsp.cfm>

Upcoming Colusa County SGMA Meetings:

August 26, 2016

Private Pumper Advisory Committee Meeting

10:00-noon

Colusa Industrial Properties Conference Room

100 Sunrise Blvd., Colusa, CA 95932

SGMA - How to Stay Informed:

- ✓ Get on the Colusa County Water Resources email notification list for updates and meeting announcements - call or email Water Resources Staff: 530.458.7709; email: mfahey@countyofcolusa.com
- ✓ Visit the Colusa County Water Resources website where you can find meeting announcements, agendas, meeting summaries and presentations as well as information on SGMA: countyofcolusa.org
- ✓ Visit DWR's Groundwater Information Center website for extensive information on SGMA: <http://www.water.ca.gov/groundwater/gwinfo/index.cfm>
- ✓ Do you have questions? Call or email Colusa County Water Resources Staff