

**Santa Clara River Valley East Subbasin  
Sustainable Groundwater Management Act  
Stakeholder Forum | Meeting Summary**

January 24, 2017

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## 1. WELCOME AND AGENDA OVERVIEW

Steve Cole, Newhall County Water District General Manager, reviewed the purpose of the meeting and thanked attendees for coming.

He explained that the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) stemmed from prolonged drought conditions in the State and over-pumping of groundwater, particularly in the Central Valley. Groundwater use in the Santa Clarita Valley has been managed effectively for a number of years. Water purveyors and large private pumpers have been following operating plans that will help inform the SGMA process.

He noted that this meeting did not pertain to the proposed creation of a new water district between Castaic Lake Water Agency (CLWA) and Newhall County Water District. The formation of a Groundwater Sustainability Agency (GSA) will occur prior to the new district formation and according to the current configuration of water agencies.

He introduced Mindy Meyer from the Center for Collaborative Policy (CCP). CCP is assisting with the GSA formation process through a grant from the California Department of Water Resources (DWR).

Ms. Meyer thanked attendees for coming and introduced CCP colleagues Dave Ceppos and Lisa Ballin. She reviewed the meeting agenda and ground rules (available on the GSA's website: <https://clwa.org/groundwater-sustainability-agency>). She asked attendees to share their expectations of the material to be covered during the meeting. Participants responded with the following concerns, question, and comments:

- What part will private well owners play in developing the Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP)? Will private well owners have to organize in order to have their voices heard?
- Private well owners do not want their wells monitored with meters and do not want to pay for water which they have already rights to use.
- Many private pumpers use groundwater for agricultural and animal uses, as well as fire protection, which requires more water than a typical household. They do not always have control over their water, which can be impacted by other users. Many have pre-1914 water rights.
- The GSA website does not provide sufficient information about SGMA.
- SGMA requires the GSA to consider the interests of all beneficial users, many of which are not represented by water agencies. How will agencies on the GSA represent people who do not elect them?
- Is this going to be a one size fits all solution or will hydrologically distinct places (such as Acton) be treated differently?
- How will de minimis pumpers' water use be measured?
- Why are the words sustainability and reliability used? State water and groundwater are not reliable or sustainable because they depend on rain, which we have not had and we cannot be sure that we will have.

- Who prepared the basin boundary map and what data was the map based on? How was my property accessed in order to draw the map without my consultation?

Ms. Meyer noted that the meeting presentation addresses the above questions regarding representation of beneficial users, opportunities for involvement, effects on private well owners and de minimis users, water rights, the source of the basin map, and sustainability/reliability. Responses to these questions are provided below in Section 3. SGMA Background, Overview, and Timeline.

With regard to information about SGMA, Ms. Meyer directed attendees to a list of web resources provided on the Frequently Asked Questions handout. This handout has been posted on the GSA website.

She also noted that the purpose of this meeting was to address the Santa Clara River Valley East Subbasin. Although areas within other basins (such as Acton) were not the subject of this meeting, the presentation on SGMA applies to all high or medium priority basins. Residents of other basins may contact Edel Vizcarra, Planning and Public Works Deputy for Los Angeles County Supervisor Barger ([evizcarra@lacbos.org](mailto:evizcarra@lacbos.org), 213-974-5555) for information about SGMA implementation in other basins within the County of Los Angeles.

## 2. INTRODUCTION OF GSA FORMATION WORK GROUP AGENCIES

The following GSA Formation Work Group representatives provided a brief overview of their agencies:

- Dirk Marks, Water Resources Manager, **CLWA**
- Mike Alvord, Assistant General Manager, **Newhall County Water District**
- Edell Vizcarra, Planning and Public Works Deputy for **Los Angeles County** Supervisor Barger
- Rob Newman, Director of Public Works, **City of Santa Clarita**
- Adam Ariki, Assistant Deputy Director, **Los Angeles County Waterworks District Number 36**
- Keith Abercrombie, Retail Manager, **Santa Clarita Water Division**
- Ken Petersen, General Manager, **Valencia Water Company**

The presentation is available on the GSA website.

## 3. SGMA BACKGROUND, OVERVIEW, AND TIMELINE

Dave Ceppos, CCP SGMA program manager, provided an overview of CCP and its role in this process. CCP, part of the California State University, Sacramento, provides impartial third-party facilitation, mediation, and collaborative services to public, private, and non-governmental organizations throughout California and the western U.S. Funded by a grant from DWR, CCP is

providing neutral facilitation and SGMA expertise to assist in the GSA formation process for the Santa Clara River Valley East Subbasin.

Mr. Ceppos provided an overview of SGMA including:

- Background and recent changes
- Legislative goals
- Implementation phases
- Formation of GSAs
- Definition of sustainability
- GSA roles and responsibilities
- Beneficial users
- DWR and State Water Resources Control Board roles
- Effects on domestic well owners, definition of de minimis users
- Development of GSPs
- Funding
- Key implementation milestone dates
- GSA formation timeline

His presentation is available on the GSA website.

Ms. Meyer reviewed the project's timeline. SGMA requires GSA formation by June 30, 2017. The GSA Formation Work Group plans to form the GSA initially via a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). The MOU will identify entities that will comprise the GSA. During February and March, the GSA Formation Work Group will develop the MOU and review GSA structure options. In April, a second stakeholder forum will be held prior to finalizing the MOU for review by agency boards/councils. A public hearing(s) will be held prior to board/council approvals. The GSA Formation Work Group intends to subsequently prepare a Joint Powers Agreement that will further specify GSA parameters including decision-making and voting.

## Questions and Comments

### Basin Boundary

- Who prepared the basin boundary map and what data was the map based on? How was private property accessed in order to draw the map without property owners' consultation?
  - Response: DWR determines the basin boundary in its Bulletin 118. The boundary is based on hydrogeological data and did not involve private property access. Further information is available at <http://www.water.ca.gov/groundwater/bulletin118/index.cfm>.
- How can residents determine if their property falls within the basin boundary?
  - Response: The GSA website provides a tool for this purpose. Those who need assistance using this tool may contact Mr. Alvord at [malvord@ncwd.org](mailto:malvord@ncwd.org) or 661-702-4429.

- Bouquet Canyon wells are supplied with water released from the Bouquet Canyon Reservoir Dam through a contract with United Water Conservation District. How does this SGMA process apply to these well owners?
  - Response: At present, the basin includes all of the area identified in DWR Bulletin 118. DWR will provide an opportunity to request a basin boundary modification in 2018. A modification request to remove an area must be supported by scientific information that indicates that area that does not overly the groundwater basin.

### Representation of Private Well Owners and Other Interests

- What part will private well owners play in developing the GSP? Will private well owners have to organize in order to have their voices heard? How can private well owners be guaranteed a seat on the table (GSA representation)? How does SGMA ensure the consideration of beneficial users not represented by water agencies or who are not on the GSA board?
  - Response: Under SGMA, the County of Los Angeles represents private well owners who do not reside within any water agencies' service area. SGMA provides discretion to eligible GSA agencies in deciding how to involve representatives of other interests. The GSA Formation Work Group will take into consideration private pumpers' and other interests' expressions of their desire to participate in developing the GSA governance structure. In addition, SGMA requires the GSA to consider the interests of all beneficial uses and users in development of the GSP.
  - Private pumpers are not required to but may organize in order to participate.
- Consider forming an advisory board that would include well owners so that they can understand what is happening and protect their interests.
- Keep well owners notified of upcoming meetings and consider their concerns during the process.

### Water Rights

- Private well owners do not want their wells monitored with meters and do not want to pay for the water which they already have rights to use. Many have pre-1914 water rights.
  - Response: SGMA does not change existing water rights but allows for the regulation of groundwater use in order to achieve sustainability.

### De Minimis Water Use

- How can de minimis users be identified if their water use cannot be measured?
  - Response: During development of the GSP, the GSA may develop methods to approximate groundwater use.

## Enforcement

- What are the consequences if people do not comply with GSP requirements?
  - Response: GSP development will include the identification of local enforcement measures. If the GSA does not comply with its GSP, the State would intervene.

## GSP

- How does SGMA assure that groundwater use by future development does not adversely impact or impeded groundwater use by individual well owners?
  - Response: During development of the GSP, the GSA must consider the interests of all beneficial users. The GSP must determine how groundwater use will be managed to prevent undesirable results. It must identify minimum thresholds and measurable objectives for sustainability. SGMA requires annual reporting to ensure that minimum thresholds are met. It also requires coordination between the GSP and land use planning.
- Is this going to be a one size fits all solution or will hydrologically distinct places be treated differently?
  - Response: SGMA allows for the identification of different management areas in the GSP based on hydrological conditions.
- Why are the words sustainability and reliability used? State water and groundwater are not reliable or sustainable because they depend on rain, which we have not had and we cannot be sure that we will have.
  - Response: The GSP must consider climate conditions, trends, and projections in managing groundwater sustainably in order to achieve long-term reliability.

## Other

- Does the County of Los Angeles assume responsibility for the GSA if the City of Santa Clarita does not?
  - Response: If eligible local agencies (agencies with water supply, water management, or land use authority) do not assert themselves as a GSA, the County would become the GSA for the basin unless it declines to do so. If the County declines, the State would act as the GSA.

## 4. PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

Prior to this meeting, CCP conducted a series of interviews with local stakeholders representing broad and diverse groundwater interests in the basin. Ms. Meyer reviewed the purpose, methodology, findings, and recommendations from these interviews. Her presentation is available on the GSA website.

## 5. PUBLIC INPUT

Participants were asked to form small groups and discuss their thoughts about the interests that should be represented. A member of each group reported his/her group's recommendations or other comments, as follows.

### Small Group Report Out

#### GSA Representation

- Include representation of individual well owners.
- All interests should not be represented by public water agencies.
- Agencies that benefit by selling water have a conflict of interest.
- GSA board members should be elected only by the people.
- Limit environmental non-governmental organizations' involvement to advisory boards.
- Require a supermajority (66 percent) for GSA board decisions.
- Form a Joint Powers Authority.
- Include disadvantaged communities, particularly those that are completely dependent on groundwater, on an advisory committee.
- Include environmental groups – they have diverse views and represent needs that often do not get a voice.
- Include climate scientists and hydrologists.
- Include the City of Santa Clarita – they have land use authority and need to be informed about groundwater issues.
- Include a representative from the lower basin so that they can be informed and to provide an interrelated understanding between the basins.

#### Other Comments and Suggestions:

- Modify the basin boundary to remove San Francisquito Canyon.
- Each agency with a service area that includes private well owners should include individual citizen well owners in their governance and decision-making.
- Form a subcommittee to lobby the legislature to amend SGMA's definition of de minimis pumpers. One rule cannot fairly apply to individual pumpers' diverse needs and land uses.
- Private well owners pay a lot more for their water than residents who receive their water from local purveyors. Private well costs include well drilling, equipment, fire hydrants, and Los Angeles County Department of Public Health requirements.

#### General Comments and Questions:

Following small group reports, the discussion was opened to additional questions. The following lists and responds to questions not addressed above:

- How can stakeholders get a copy of the 2015 benchmark report?
  - Response: This question was asked in reference to SGMA's designation of year 2015 conditions as the baseline for GSP purposes. The water agencies currently

participate in the CASGEM (California Statewide Groundwater Elevation Monitoring) program to report current groundwater conditions. In addition, the water agencies prepare an annual water report (which is available on the CLWA website) that includes groundwater production and well elevation and quality data. However, this data does not include the outer canyon areas where the majority of small private pumping takes place. Additional data collection needs will be identified and addressed during GSP development.

- Concern was expressed that forming the GSA with an MOU will not be a public process.
  - Response: During formation of the GSA, meetings are not subject to the Brown Act (which requires public and publicly noticed meetings). However, the GSA Formation Work Group plans to provide two GSA formation meetings that are open to the public. These meetings will be posted on the GSA website and notice will be sent to the interested parties list (a sign-up for this list is provided on the GSA website). In addition, a second stakeholder forum is planned and public hearing(s) will be required prior to adoption of the MOU by agency boards/councils. Although the following has not yet been confirmed, it is anticipated that once the GSA is formed by MOU, its meeting will be subject to the Brown Act. When the agency becomes a Joint Powers Authority it will be subject to the Brown Act.

Participants were also provided an opportunity to submit written comments.

## 6. CLOSING COMMENTS AND NEXT STEPS

B. J. Atkins, Newhall County Water District Vice President, noted that for many years groundwater use in California has not been regulated as it has in most other states. The advent of SGMA is a result of the drought's effects, including major subsidence that has affected the Central Valley and caused damage to the California aqueduct. This process provides an unusual opportunity for stakeholders to help form this government structure (the GSA) in a way that meets their needs allows their voices to be heard.

Ms. Meyer informed participants that future public GSA formation meetings will be published on the GSA website and notices will be sent to all those who have signed up on the website or provided their email address on the sign-in sheet for this meeting.

A second stakeholder forum will be held to present the proposed GSA structure prior to public review and approval of the MOU by agencies' boards/councils.

Mr. Cole thanked participants and encouraged them to remain engaged throughout the process.