



SGMA and the Montecito Groundwater Basin

Frequently Asked Questions

Updated 3-17-2017

Q **What is SGMA?**

SGMA is the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA), which was enacted in 2014 and became effective January 1, 2015. SGMA is important because it requires the regulation of groundwater for the first time in California's history and provides new authorities to local agencies to implement these requirements. The intent of SGMA is to strengthen local management of specified groundwater basins that are most critical to the state's water needs by regulating groundwater use.

Q **Who will implement SGMA in the Montecito Groundwater Basin?**

Montecito Water District has initiated formation of a GSA for the Montecito Groundwater Basin. Local public agencies with water supply, water management, and / or land use responsibility within a basin may form Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSAs) to manage groundwater. The State Department of Water Resources (DWR) and the State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board) are the state agencies in charge of ensuring that SGMA is implemented. The State Water Board will take over groundwater management in medium or high priority basins if local agencies are unable or unwilling to implement SGMA.

Q **What is a groundwater basin?**

A groundwater basin is an area underlain by permeable materials (e.g., sand) that is capable of storing and providing a significant supply of groundwater to wells. DWR has ranked 127 basins throughout the state as medium or high priority and, thus, subject to SGMA.

Q **Montecito Groundwater Basin (MGWB) is "Very Low" priority, why initiate a GSA?**

Priority is based on many factors, including overlying population, projected growth, public supply wells, total number of wells, reliance on groundwater as primary source and impacts on groundwater (i.e., overdraft, subsidence, etc.). For example, a basin could be in severe overdraft or have other undesirable conditions, but still be considered low priority by the state.

The state is currently conducting a re-prioritization study, the results are anticipated in June, 2017 and MGWB may be reprioritized. Even if priority remains low, participation in SGMA is important because it provides for local sustainable management of groundwater.

Q **What does sustainable management mean?**

Simply put, sustainable groundwater management means managing our water supply, while balancing the needs of our economy, environment and health and safety. Specifically, SGMA defines "sustainable groundwater management" as "...the management and use of groundwater in a manner that can be maintained during the planning and implementation horizon without causing undesirable results." Undesirable results are defined as any of the following:

- Chronic lowering of Groundwater levels
- Significant and unreasonable reduction in Groundwater Storage
- Significant and unreasonable degradation of water quality
- Land subsidence due to collapsing of aquifer pore space
- Surface water depletions that have significant and unreasonable impacts on beneficial uses
- Seawater Intrusion



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Q Why do we need to manage groundwater?

Groundwater is an essential part of the local water supply portfolio, and a critical part of drought and emergency response. Prudent groundwater management will provide a safeguard against prolonged drought and climate change and contribute to a reliable source of water supplies for future generations. Lack of proactive management could result in failure of public and/or private water wells, and jeopardize supply.

Q What does a Groundwater Sustainability Agency do?

The primary purpose of a GSA under SGMA is to develop and implement a Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) to achieve long-term groundwater sustainability. GSAs are empowered to utilize a number of new management tools to achieve the sustainability goal, such as: register and meter groundwater wells, mandate annual extraction and water level reports from individual wells, impose limits on extractions, mitigate against overdrafts, implement rules and regulations, and assess fees to support creation and implementation of a GSP.

Q What is a Groundwater Sustainability Plan?

A Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) is the state-mandated plan to sustainably manage groundwater. Each GSP will contain an assessment of each basin under past and future conditions, and will also include any necessary monitoring, management, enforcement, and other requirements to achieve sustainability

Q Who will be involved in developing the GSPs?

GSAs are ultimately responsible for developing GSPs, but SGMA is clear that GSAs must involve stakeholders in developing GSPs. The District will retain an interested parties list for the Montecito Groundwater Basin, and will continue to ensure opportunities for participation and input from stakeholders interested in this issue as GSPs are developed.

Q When do these regulations take effect?

SGMA took effect on January 1, 2015, although there are no immediate changes to groundwater use. SGMA requires that local agencies determine whether they would like to elect to become a GSA by June 30, 2017. A GSP must be adopted by 2020 for critically over-drafted basins, and 2022 for other medium and high priority basins. Finally, it provides time (20 years from the time a GSP is implemented) to take the actions necessary to achieve sustainability.

Q Is there a cost to SGMA?

There are costs to develop a GSP, and possibly, to implement the changes in water use that may be required by SGMA. Those costs will be evaluated by the GSA.

Q What is next for SGMA?

The District will be working with local agencies to confirm partnerships and governance agreements for overlapping jurisdictions in the basin. Then, with stakeholder input, the GSAs will begin work developing a GSP.