

San Antonio Creek Valley Groundwater Basin Frequently Asked Questions

Sustainable Groundwater Management Act

What is the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA)?

The Sustainable Groundwater Management Act was enacted in 2014 and became effective January 1, 2015. The objective of this state law is to ensure the long-term sustainable management of groundwater resources in California. SGMA requires agencies in designated medium- and high-priority groundwater basins to form locally-controlled Groundwater Sustainability Agencies and develop plans to manage groundwater in the basin sustainably.

Why was the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) established?

SGMA was passed to respond to impacts observed around the state related to unsustainable groundwater management, such as declining water levels in aquifers, land subsidence, and degraded water quality. This law provides local agencies with new tools and authority to manage their region's groundwater resources to avoid these negative impacts and maintain a reliable groundwater supply for our communities, agriculture, and ecosystems.

Who is required to comply with the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA)? Who does SGMA affect?

Compliance with SGMA is required in groundwater basins designated as medium- or high-priority. Locally-formed Groundwater Sustainability Agencies in these basins are responsible for developing and implementing Groundwater Sustainability Plans to comply with SGMA. Actions to manage groundwater sustainably will affect groundwater users in these basins. Domestic groundwater users who pump less than 2 acre-feet per year are exempt from reporting requirements. On average, a single-family residence uses about 0.5 acre-feet per year.

Will the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) affect existing water rights?

SGMA does not change existing groundwater rights. Groundwater rights will continue to be subject to regulation under Article 10, Section 2 of the California Constitution. SGMA does not directly impact surface water management; however, this new framework for managing groundwater acknowledges the connectivity of groundwater and surface water and directs agencies to take steps to prevent undesirable impacts to surface water from groundwater usage and management.

How is "sustainable" groundwater management defined?

SGMA defines "sustainability" as the use and management of groundwater in a way that can be maintained long-term without causing "undesirable results." Specifically, "undesirable results" include:

- Chronic lowering of groundwater levels
- Significant reduction of groundwater in storage
- Seawater seeping into a basin and contaminating freshwater
- Degraded groundwater quality
- Sinking of land caused by dropping groundwater levels, called land subsidence
- Depletion of surface water as a result of overuse of interconnected groundwater

Managing groundwater sustainably means being able to meet today's needs for drinking water, farming, and the environment, while also ensuring that future generations will be able to meet their needs without undesirable results.

Basin Questions

What is an aquifer? What is a groundwater basin?

An aquifer is an underground layer of sediment or porous rock that contains groundwater, which can be extracted using a well. A groundwater basin is an aquifer or series of stacked aquifers with reasonably well-defined boundaries and a definable bottom.

What are the boundaries of the San Antonio Creek Valley Groundwater Basin?

Our basin's boundaries are shown on this map:



Who will implement the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) in the San Antonio Creek Valley Groundwater Basin?

The San Antonio Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency (SABGSA) is a public agency formed as a joint powers authority between the San Antonio Basin Water District and the Los Alamos Community Services District to implement SGMA in the basin.

What is basin prioritization? What is the priority ranking of our basin?

Basin prioritization is the technical process completed by the State of California to classify groundwater basins based on factors such as population, groundwater pumping, number of wells, documented impacts on groundwater in the basin, and similar related characteristics. Basins are classified as high-, medium-, low-, or very low-priority. High- and medium-priority basins are required to comply with SGMA by forming a Groundwater Sustainability Agency and developing and implementing a Groundwater Sustainability Plan. San Antonio Creek Valley Groundwater Basin is ranked as a medium-priority basin.

What is the current health of our groundwater basin?

Conditions indicating chronic lowering of groundwater levels, significant reduction of groundwater in storage, and depletion of interconnected surface water have been identified in the basin. Together, groundwater users in the basin will work together to address these issues through the Groundwater Sustainability Plan.

Groundwater Sustainability Agency Questions

What is a Groundwater Sustainability Agency (GSA)?

A Groundwater Sustainability Agency is formed by one or more local agencies to implement SGMA. To be eligible, a local agency must have some responsibility for water supply, water management, or land use management within the groundwater basin.

Which agencies are members of the San Antonio Basin GSA (SABGSA)?

The San Antonio Basin GSA (SABGSA) is a public agency formed as a joint powers authority between the **San Antonio Basin Water District** and the **Los Alamos Community Services District**. The agency was formed in June 2017 to sustainably manage groundwater in the San Antonio Creek Valley Groundwater Basin. Representatives from the Santa Barbara County Water Agency and Vandenberg Air Force Base also participate in the SABGSA's Advisory Committee.

How were the board members of the San Antonio Basin GSA (SABGSA) chosen?

Board members and alternates are appointed by the two member agencies – i.e., the San Antonio Basin Water District and the Los Alamos Community Services District. Initially, the Cachuma Resource Conservation District (RCD) Board of Directors appointed seven of the GSA's board members and alternates, representing interests such as cattle, row crops, vineyard, permanent crops, and transitional land use, while the Los Alamos CSD appointed one GSA board member and alternate. The San Antonio Basin Water District took over the RCD's position as a member agency and appoints seven board members and alternates.

What does a Groundwater Sustainability Agency (GSA) do? What authorities do GSAs have?

A GSA is responsible for preparing a Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) to comply with SGMA and achieve long-term groundwater sustainability in the basin. The GSA assesses the conditions of its basin, implements actions to bring the basin into sustainability or maintain sustainability, and engages local stakeholders in the development of the GSP. GSAs are empowered to use a variety of new management tools to achieve sustainability, such as:

- Adopt rules, regulations, ordinances, and resolutions to implement SGMA
- Monitor compliance and enforcement

- Require registration of groundwater wells
- Require appropriate measuring devices and reporting of groundwater pumping
- Acquire surface water rights, groundwater, and groundwater rights
- Acquire or augment local water supplies to enhance sustainability of the groundwater basin
- Propose and collect fees
- Adopt and fund a GSP according to existing laws

What role does the Water District have in the basin?

The San Antonio Basin Water District (Water District) was formed in May 2020. Pursuant to the Joint Exercise of Powers Agreement (JPA) between the Cachuma Resource Conservation District (CRCD) and the Los Alamos Community Services District (LACSD), the Water District substituted in for the CRCD as a member agency of the San Antonio Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency (SABGSA). The Water District, through a Proposition 218 proceeding to levy an assessment on Irrigated and Non-Irrigated Agriculture, is currently the only funding source, aside from grants and in-kind contributions from the Los Alamos CSD, for the SABGSA and Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP). The Water District has a five-member board and appoints the SABGSA board members and alternate board members.

What role does the Los Alamos CSD have in the basin?

The Los Alamos CSD, which provides potable water to the community of Los Alamos, is represented on the GSA's Board of Directors and participates in GSA decision-making. Because Los Alamos CSD pumps groundwater for treatment and delivery to its customers, pumping by Los Alamos CSD may also be impacted by the GSP and implementation pursuant to SGMA.

The SABGSA was established via a Joint Exercise of Powers Agreement between the Los Alamos CSD and Cachuma Resource Conservation District in May 2017 (CRCD). Once the San Antonio Basin Water District was formed, in May 2020, the automatic substitution of the CRCD pursuant to section 6.2 of the Joint Exercise of Powers Agreement was implemented. The Los Alamos CSD has water management and land use responsibilities as defined by DWR bulletin 118 and is a member agency of the SABGSA. LACSD's role as a member agency contributes to the development of a Groundwater Sustainability Plan and management of the Basin pursuant to SGMA. The Los Alamos CSD appoints one Director and one Alternate by majority vote of the Los Alamos CSD Board to serve on the SABGSA Board of Directors to attend monthly meetings. The geographic area within the Los Alamos CSD service area is not exempt from SGMA and is subject to the GSP. However, the San Antonio Basin Water District has not levied assessments on the Santa Barbara County assessor's parcel numbers ("APNs") within the Los Alamos CSD boundary.

The Los Alamos CSD is a contributing member of the San Antonio Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency and in partnership with the San Antonio Basin Water District, the Los Alamos CSD provides the meeting location for both Agencies at our District office. Water conservation within the Los Alamos CSD boundary was adopted July 15, 2014 by the State Water Board and by the LACSD on August 27, 2014 and again on April 22, 2015. At the Los Alamos CSD's Board Meeting on January 27, 2016, the District extended these requirements indefinitely until which time the District determines the drought requirements can be lifted.

The Los Alamos CSD website along with information on its actions regarding water conservation can be found here: <http://www.losalamoscscsd.com/>

What is the state's role in this process?

The California Department of Water Resources (DWR) is the agency responsible for oversight of the GSAs and GSP development. Once GSPs are completed, they are submitted to DWR for review and evaluation to determine if they meet the requirements of SGMA and are likely to achieve the basin's sustainability goal. The GSP for the San Antonio Creek Valley Groundwater Basin is due to be submitted to DWR by January 31, 2022.

Groundwater Sustainability Plan Questions

What is a Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP)?

A GSP is a plan prepared by a GSA to sustainably manage groundwater in a basin. The plan contains an assessment of groundwater conditions in the basin, describes plans for monitoring conditions, and explains how the GSA will implement and measure specific actions to achieve or maintain sustainability within 20 years.

What sources of data were used to develop the Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP)?

Data sources include, but are not limited to, public databases, historical and recent publications, and measured data from basin stakeholders. DWR has compiled data relevant to the six sustainability indicators and made available on a web-based data visualization tool located at <https://sgma.water.ca.gov/webgis/?appid=SGMADataViewer#currentconditions>.

What are some strategies a Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) can use to achieve its goals?

GSAs have multiple tools available under state law to achieve sustainable groundwater management under their GSPs. The GSA has discretion to choose which tools will work best in the community and works with stakeholders to develop a plan that is locally appropriate. Potential strategies available to use in a GSP include:

- Metering commercial and agricultural wells to measure actual groundwater use (Note: GSAs cannot require metering of de minimis pumping for domestic purposes)
- Monitoring wells to determine whether groundwater levels are declining, stable, or recharging
- Storing water in aquifers for future use through groundwater recharge and groundwater banking projects
- Encouraging water conservation and efficiency programs to reduce groundwater use
- Substituting the use of groundwater with recycled water for irrigating agricultural land, parks, and landscaping
- Limiting groundwater pumping

Can a Groundwater Sustainability Agency (GSA) set objectives in a Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) that improve water quality in the basin or address water quality issues beyond the minimum requirements of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA)?

While a GSA is not required by SGMA to address undesirable results that occurred before January 1, 2015, a GSA has the discretion to set measurable objectives to address undesirable results from water

quality degradation that has already occurred. A GSA can choose to use the management tools available to it under state law with the objective of improving groundwater quality in the basin.

What is a Minimum Threshold (MT)? What is the MT and what happens if we hit our MT?

A minimum threshold (MT) is the numeric value for each sustainability indicator that is used to define undesirable results. For example, a particular groundwater level might be a minimum threshold if lower groundwater levels would result in a significant and unreasonable reduction of groundwater in storage or depletion of supply.

The GSP identifies management actions and projects that will be implemented to avoid an undesirable result.

In the draft GSP, the currently proposed MT for groundwater levels is 25 feet below the fall 2018 groundwater levels measured at representative monitoring sites.

Pursuant to the SGMA regulations, the GSP includes information on how minimum thresholds were developed, including the following:

- The information and methodology used to develop minimum thresholds (California Code of Regulations, title 23, § 354.28 (b)(1))
- The relationship between minimum thresholds and each sustainability indicator (§ 354.28 (b)(2))
- The effect of minimum thresholds on neighboring basins (§ 354.28 (b)(3))
- The effect of minimum thresholds on beneficial uses and users (§ 354.28 (b)(4))
- How minimum thresholds relate to relevant federal, state, or local standards (§ 354.28 (b)(5))
- The method for quantitatively measuring minimum thresholds (§ 354.28 (b)(6))

SAB GSA SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT CRITERIA

Chronic Lowering of GW Levels / Reduction of GW in Storage

MT

Minimum Threshold

Groundwater levels at 25 feet below Fall 2018 measured groundwater levels at Representative Monitoring Sites (RMSs)

MO

Measurable Objective

Groundwater levels equal to groundwater levels at RMSs measured in Spring 2015.

IM

Interim Milestone

- Implement Projects and Management Actions
- Trajectory for water levels in RMSs to reach MOs by 2042 set at 5-year intervals.

Potential Undesirable Results

- Groundwater levels drop below the minimum threshold after average and above-average precipitation periods in 50 percent of representative wells for 2 consecutive years.
- An acute or chronic, measurable impact to GDEs associated with interconnected surface water, specifically Barka Slough, caused by groundwater pumping in the Basin.
- Existing agricultural, municipal, and domestic wells are unable to produce historical average quantities of water due to chronic decline in groundwater levels (e.g., depletion of supply).
- Reduction of groundwater in storage results in an inability to produce estimated annual volume of groundwater equal to the sustainable yield for the Basin

SAB GSA SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT CRITERIA

Degraded Water Quality

MT

Minimum Threshold

- No minimum thresholds have been established for contaminants because state regulatory agencies, including the RWQCB and the DTSC, have the responsibility and authority to regulate and direct actions that address contamination.
- WQOs defined in the Central Coastal Basin Plan are the minimum thresholds for TDS, chloride, sulfate, boron, sodium, and nitrate as measured by SWRCB ILRP and DDW programs in 20 percent of wells monitored.
- In cases where the ambient (prior to January 2015) water quality exceeds the WQO, the minimum threshold concentration is 110 percent of the ambient water quality in 20 percent of the wells.

MO

Measurable Objective

- Contaminants - maintain groundwater quality equal to or below regulatory standards or, equal to or below concentrations present in groundwater when SGMA was enacted.
- Salts and Nutrients - maintain groundwater quality equal to or below Water Quality Objectives presented in the Basin Plan, or equal to or below concentrations present in groundwater when SGMA was enacted.

Potential Undesirable Results

- Concentrations of regulated contaminants in untreated groundwater from private domestic wells, agricultural wells, or municipal wells exceed regulatory thresholds as a result of pumping or GSA activities.
- Groundwater pumping or GSA activities cause concentrations of TDS, chloride, sulfate, boron, sodium, and nitrate to increase and exceed WQOs since SGMA was enacted in January 2015.

IM

Interim Milestone

- None

SAB GSA SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT CRITERIA

Land Subsidence

MT

Minimum Threshold

The rate of subsidence does not exceed 0.05 feet (0.6 inches) per year for 3 consecutive years measured at the UNAVCO CGPS Station ORES.

MO

Measurable Objective

The average rate of subsidence as measured at the UNAVCO CGPS Station ORES from 2000 to 2020 (0.04 feet per year).

IM

Interim Milestone

- None

Potential Undesirable Results

- Groundwater extraction results in subsidence that substantially interferes with surface land uses.
- Groundwater extraction results in subsidence that causes land surface deformation that impacts the use of critical infrastructure and roads.
- Groundwater extraction results in land subsidence greater than minimum thresholds at the UNAVCO CGPS Station ORES.

SAB GSA SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT CRITERIA

Depletion of Interconnected Surface Water

MT

Minimum Threshold

Average of 0.15 cfs of surface water flow measured at the Casmalia stream gage west of the Slough over 3 consecutive months from June to September.

MO

Measurable Objective

Surface water flow measured at the Casmalia stream gage equal to the geometric mean daily discharge (0.5 cfs) measured at the Casmalia stream gage between 2015 and 2018) (since enactment of SGMA through the end of the historical and current water budget).

IM

Interim Milestone

- Outlined in the next slide

Potential Undesirable Results

- Permanent loss or significant degradation of existing native riparian or aquatic habitat due to lowered groundwater levels and reduced surface water flow into Barka Slough caused by groundwater pumping.

How will this affect me?

The GSP for the San Antonio Creek Valley Groundwater Basin must be finalized and submitted to the State by January 31, 2022. The GSP identifies projects and management actions that may be implemented over the next 20 years to sustainably manage groundwater in the basin. The impacts of the GSP on entities in the basin will vary, depending on where you live and how much groundwater you use. Some proposed management actions and projects that may affect local groundwater users include groundwater pumping constraints, development of a water market for trading of water credits, implementation of fees associated with pumped volume or irrigated acreage, securing new supply sources, and groundwater recharge construction projects.

How has the GSA and preparation of the GSP been funded and who has paid?

Activities associated with forming the GSA and preparing the GSP have been paid for by contributions from local landowners and through grants from the California Department of Water Resources (DWR).

Contributions from local landowners also paid for activities associated with forming the San Antonio Basin Water District (SABWD) in May 2020. Once formed, the SABWD replaced the Cachuma Resource Conservation District (CRCD) and, through a Propositions 218 proceeding, has been collecting an assessment on Irrigated and Non-Irrigated Agriculture and a minimum fee of \$50, if the aggregate assessment of any owner of Irrigated or Non-Irrigated Agriculture results in an assessment less than \$50, which may include domestic well owners.

The current 2021-22 Assessment values are set at the maximum amount allowed under the Proposition 218 proceeding to Levy and Collect Assessments. Those values are:

- Irrigated Land - \$60.00 per acre
- Non-Irrigated Land - \$0.50 per acre
- Non-Overlying Land - \$0.00 per acre
- Minimum Assessment - \$50.00

How will the GSA and the GSP continue to be funded and who will pay?

The San Antonio Basin Water District (SABWD) will continue collecting an assessment on Irrigated and Non-Irrigated Agriculture to fund the SABWD and the GSA. The GSA will have funds available up to the amount included for their portion in the projected 5-year SABWD Budget. Initially it was projected that the SABWD and grants would be enough to fund future SABWD, SABGSA and the GSP expenses. However, it appears likely the GSA will need to consider additional funding to finance future management actions & projects. One possibility could be an extraction fee to raise funds & encourage conservation of a finite resource. Any new funding sources will have to go through the legally required public process and as always, grant funding will be sought.

When the GSA has an additional funding source in place, the SABWD may be able to reduce their assessment fees for Irrigated and Non-Irrigated Agriculture for the GSA portion of their budget; however, the SABWD Assessment will not be eliminated completely. The SABWD will continue to function as a member agency of

the GSA and will likely continue to fund a portion of the GSA expenses. It will likely take several years for new GSA financing mechanisms to be implemented.

How will project and management actions for the GSP be funded?

The San Antonio Basin GSA received a \$549,400 Proposition 1 grant for GSP development. A portion of the grant remains available. GSA operation, which are not covered by grant funds, will continue to be funded by assessments from the San Antonio Basin Water District (SABWD) up to the amount included in the projected 5-year SABWD Budget for the GSA each year.

The law also allows for the GSA to collect fees to help pay for the costs of preparing and implementing the GSP. There are costs to develop and implement a GSP and the potential changes in water use that may be required by GSP implementation. Evaluating and providing for these funding needs is among the responsibilities of the GSA. State grants are available and the GSA has been actively applying for funding during the GSP development process. Additional funding options, including fees, are being evaluated with the assistance of GSI Water Solutions, the GSP consultant. The GSA will continue to aggressively pursue Proposition 1 and other grant opportunities to offset local costs.

Fees used to fund SGMA activities can be structured in a variety of ways, including flat fees per parcel or groundwater extractor, or fees based on acreage or metered pumping. Any fee adopted will be subject to legally required public process, which will provide an opportunity to consider questions of fairness and affordability for all stakeholders along with GSA priorities and funding needs for activities such as community engagement, technical support, monitoring and administration.

What are de minimis users? How are these users affected by SGMA?

Wells pumping less than 2 acre-feet per year (i.e., an average of 1,785 gallons per day) for domestic purposes are considered to be “de minimis” and can be exempted from most SGMA requirements, including metering. Most households with a domestic well that are not watering crops or large areas of landscape are likely de minimis extractors. The GSA generally has the authority to determine the management policies that will apply to domestic well users to ensure sustainable management of the basin as a whole.

Whether or not the GSA adopts particular policies that apply to domestic well owners, the implementation of a GSP will mean changes in the management of groundwater with potential consequences for all water users in the Basin.

Who will adopt and implement management actions? How, and by whom, will decisions be made about changes to groundwater pumping?

All policies adopted and implemented by the GSA must be approved by the Board of Directors, with the benefit of legally required public process in addition to stakeholder/community engagement. SGMA gives GSAs numerous tools and authorities to manage groundwater and implement the objectives of the

GSP. The San Antonio Basin GSA Board will consider potential management actions included in the GSP as needed. The San Antonio Basin GSA, a public agency, is the local implementation authority for groundwater pumpers within its jurisdictional boundary. It is strongly encouraged for stakeholders and landowners to be involved in GSP implementation to provide input as decisions on groundwater management are made.

SGMA grants the following powers to a GSA:

- Adopt rules, regulations, ordinances, and resolutions to implement SGMA, including establishing groundwater extraction allocations
- Monitor compliance and enforcement
- Require registration of groundwater wells
- Require appropriate measurement devices and reporting of extractions
- Acquire surface or groundwater rights
- Determine sustainable yield
- Acquire or augment local water supplies to enhance the sustainability of the groundwater basin
- Propose and collect fees
- Adopt and fund a GSP according to existing laws
- Enforce the terms of the GSP

The GSP includes a monitoring program that the GSA will oversee and fund. SGMA requires that an annual report be prepared that presents the monitoring data and provides for an assessment of Basin conditions, documents activities associated with implementing the GSP, and discusses progress toward meeting the sustainability objectives presented in the GSP. The public and Board will review the annual report. The GSA Board will consider, based on conditions presented in the annual report, whether projects and/or management actions described in the GSP should be implemented.

How can I participate in the Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) development process?

Groundwater users and interested members of the public have been involved throughout the development of the GSP, and are encouraged to continue participating in the development and implementation process. To learn more, visit the GSA website at <https://sanantoniobasingsa.org/>.

What's next when the Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) is approved?

Implementation of the GSP will begin in 2022. Proposed projects and management actions in the GSP are grouped into tiers based on the planned implementation schedule. The success of the management actions will be reviewed annually, and additional actions and priority projects may be implemented as needed to avoid undesirable result