

# SUSTAINABLE GROUNDWATER MANAGEMENT ACT IN SONOMA COUNTY

Frequently Asked Questions · December 2014



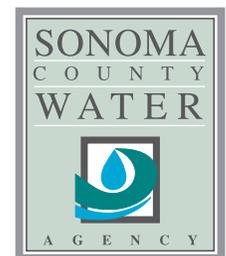
In September 2014, Governor Jerry Brown signed historic legislation requiring California’s most critical groundwater resources to be sustainably managed. With the governor’s signature, groundwater will be comprehensively managed for the first time in the state’s history.

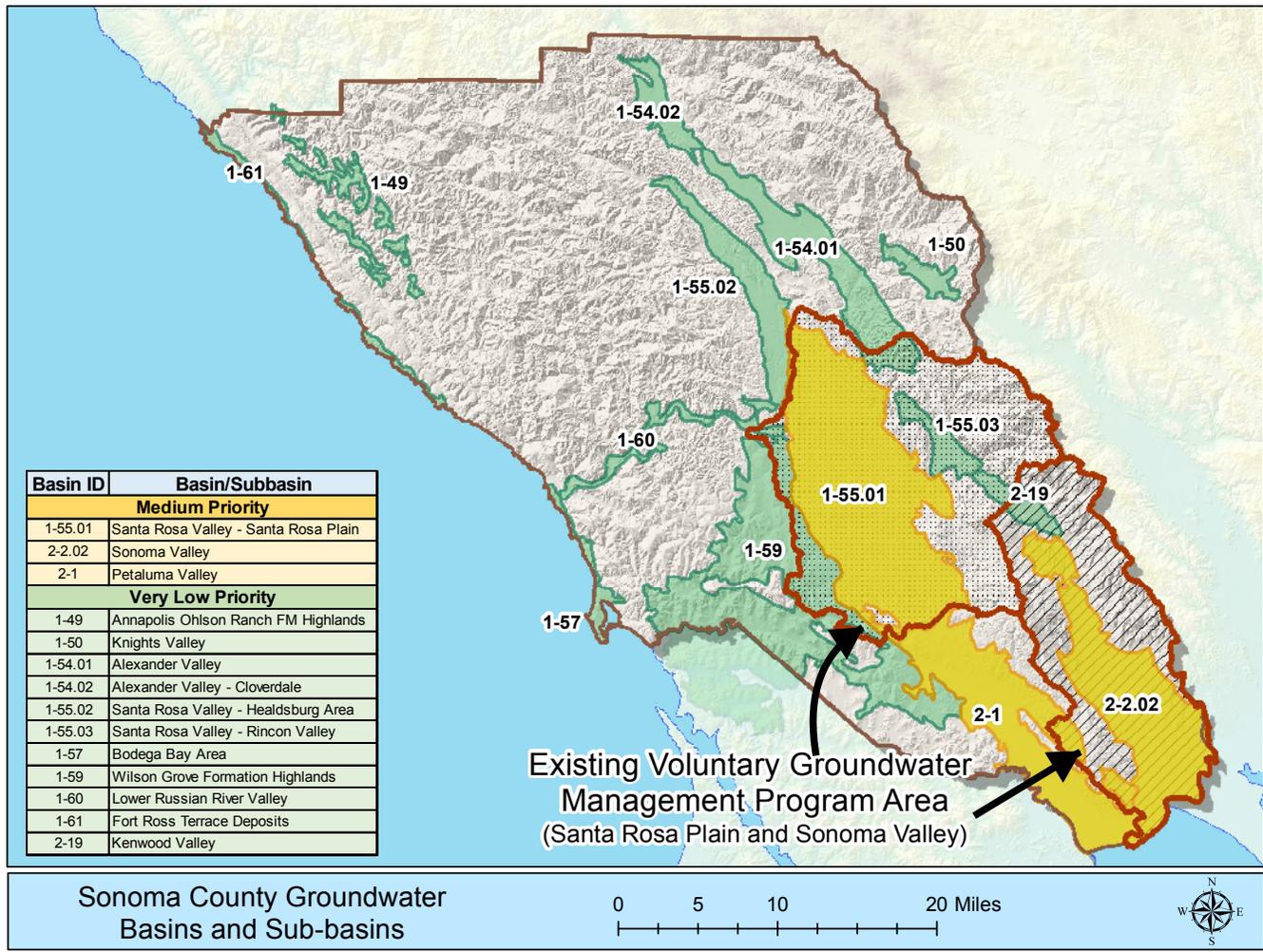
The Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) gives local agencies the powers needed to manage groundwater in a sustainable manner over a long-term horizon. The act requires that Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSAs) be established and that Groundwater Sustainability Plans (GSPs) be developed for medium- and high-priority basins.

For general information about the SGMA, go to [www.sonomacountywater.org/groundwater](http://www.sonomacountywater.org/groundwater). The frequently asked questions, below, address how the SGMA could impact Sonoma County.

**WHAT IS “SUSTAINABLE” GROUNDWATER MANAGEMENT?** The SGMA defines sustainable management as managing and using groundwater in a way that can be sustained over a long period of time. Specifically, sustainable yield is defined as the amount of groundwater that can be withdrawn annually without chronically lowering groundwater levels, causing seawater intrusion, degrading water quality, causing land subsidence or depleting interconnected surface water (for example, creeks, streams and rivers) in a manner that causes significant and unreasonable impacts.

**WHERE ARE THE GROUNDWATER BASINS IN SONOMA COUNTY?** There are 14 state-identified groundwater basins and sub-basins in Sonoma County (see map). Three of these – Santa Rosa Plain groundwater subbasin, Sonoma Valley groundwater subbasin and Petaluma Valley groundwater basin – are currently designated medium priority by the California Department of Water Resources (DWR). The SGMA requires these three basins to have a locally-adopted Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP). A GSP is not required for Sonoma County’s 11 low- and very low-priority basins and subbasins, nor does the SGMA apply outside of mapped groundwater basins. Basins are prioritized based on a number of factors, including population, amount of irrigated agriculture and reliance on groundwater. The DWR may reprioritize basins in the future, which could result in medium-priority basins moving into the high-priority category and low- or very-low priority basins moving into the medium category.





**WHO WILL MANAGE GROUNDWATER IN SONOMA COUNTY?** The new law states that the Groundwater Sustainability Agency (GSA) must be a public agency (or combination of agencies) that either manages or supplies water or that has land-use authority within the groundwater basin (primarily cities, counties and water districts). In Sonoma County, several public agencies are eligible to be part of the GSA in each basin. For example, the County of Sonoma and/or the Sonoma County Water Agency could be the GSA that encompasses any or all of the basins in the county. In addition, cities and water districts within the groundwater basin could be the GSAs. If no agencies want to manage groundwater, the County of Sonoma becomes the GSA, unless it opts out. If the county opts out, the State Water Resources Control Board will step in.

The deadline for the creation of GSAs is June 30, 2017. As a first step, in October 2014, County and Water Agency staff formed a workgroup to consider governance options and have been meeting with stakeholders to inform them of the new law's requirements and to discuss collaborative approaches. Staff will report back to the Boards in late winter/early spring 2015.

**ISN'T GROUNDWATER ALREADY MANAGED IN SONOMA VALLEY AND SANTA ROSA?**

Both Sonoma Valley and the Santa Rosa Plain groundwater basins have groundwater management plans that were collaboratively developed by diverse stakeholder groups known as Basin Advisory Panels. These voluntary, non-regulatory plans are an excellent first step, and will significantly advance the region's ability to comply with the new law by establishing a robust data collection and monitoring program, and by promoting, studying and implementing programs and projects aimed at sustaining the basins' groundwater resources and fostering stakeholder coordination. These plans, however, don't meet the more stringent requirements of the new law and

will need to be updated unless it can be demonstrated that the basin has operated within its sustainable yield over a period of at least 10 years.

For example, the current plans include actions that could result in sustainable groundwater basins, if implemented through the voluntary cooperation of well owners and agencies. In contrast, the new law requires each Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) to include actions that will be taken to meet the sustainability goal in each basin. And, for the first time, the Act provides the GSA with authority to ensure that these basins will reach groundwater sustainability within 20 years.

**WHEN WILL THE PLAN BE IN PLACE?** The SGMA provides ample time to implement the new requirements. Some key deadlines are below:

Time	Action
June 30, 2017	Formation of GSAs
January 31, 2020	Completion of plans in critically overdrafted basins (does not apply in Sonoma County basins at this time)
January 31, 2022	Completion of plans in all other basins
20 years after adoption of plan	High- and medium-priority basins achieve sustainability

**WILL STAKEHOLDERS BE INVOLVED IN IMPLEMENTING THE SGMA?** The SGMA requires that specific stakeholders and the general public be consulted in the development of the GSP. Given the critical role of local agencies, agriculture, the environmental community, and private well owners in the Basin Advisory Panels in Sonoma Valley and Santa Rosa Plain, it is anticipated that diverse stakeholders and the public at large will continue to be involved in implementing the SGMA in Sonoma County. Collaboration and stakeholder involvement will be key to the successful implementation of the SGMA.

**HOW WILL THE NEW LAW AFFECT ME?** It will be several years before local GSPs are adopted. Until then, the law will have no effect on well owners. The SGMA gives local agencies broad authority to manage groundwater, including authority to increase groundwater supply (for example, projects to increase groundwater recharge) and to manage groundwater demand through well monitoring and, if necessary, regulating groundwater extraction. Local agencies also have authority to assess fees for groundwater management. Local agencies in Sonoma County will decide which of these new authorities, if any, are needed to sustainably manage groundwater. Given that the groundwater sustainability process is only beginning, including numerous opportunities for public and well owner input, it is speculative to identify specific impacts of the new law on well owners. Once plans are adopted, the impacts could vary depending on where your well is located to the amount of water you pump annually.

**DOES THE SGMA AFFECT MY WATER RIGHTS?** Section 10720.5 of the SGMA specifies that the act and any groundwater management plans developed as a result of the act do not affect surface or groundwater rights.



**WHO WILL PAY FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SGMA AND ANY PROGRAMS/PROJECTS?** Proposition 1, approved by the voters in November 2014, provides \$100 million statewide to fund the implementation of the SGMA. Local agencies will aggressively pursue this funding and other grant opportunities. The new law also allows for the GSA(s) to collect fees to help pay for the costs of preparing and implementing GSPs.

**WILL THE SGMA LIMIT HOW MUCH WATER I CAN USE?** Locally developed GSPs will include programs and projects needed for each basin to become sustainable within 20 years. Under the SGMA, it is possible that a local plan could limit the water pumped by individual well owners. Practically, restrictions on water use would likely be limited to situations where other measures failed to improve groundwater conditions.

**HOW CAN I LEARN MORE?** For more information, go to [www.sonomacountywater.org/groundwater](http://www.sonomacountywater.org/groundwater).