San Benito County Water District

Groundwater Sustainability Plan

Project Overview

What is San Benito County Water District's Role?

San Benito County Water District (SBCWD) is the GSA for the Bolsa, Hollister, and San Juan Bautista and Tres Pinos groundwater basins (including small portions of the Hollister and San Juan Bautista basins that are in Santa Clara County, via a cooperative agreement). This consolidation would support comprehensive, more cost-effective management of these contiguous, connected basins, through a single GSA.

Since its formation in 1953, SBCWD has been a steadfast steward of groundwater resources. It actively manages groundwater basins to maintain a reliable and sustainable water supply, and to protect water quality. SBCWD serves urban, agricultural, rural, and ranchland water users, and its plans for basin sustainability must take into account urban growth projections and growth/changes in agricultural land uses.

What is the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act of 2014?

The Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) is State law requiring that groundwater basins are made sustainable — that essentially means maintaining balanced levels of pumping and recharge, and assuring reliable water quality. Everyone who uses groundwater should recognize the vast importance of basin sustainability for today, and for our children, their children, and the generations beyond.

SGMA enables eligible local agencies to form Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSAs), develop Groundwater Sustainability Plans (GSPs) for designated basins under their jurisdiction, and achieve groundwater sustainability within 20 years of GSP implementation. It provides for assistance by State agencies such as the Department of Water Resources (DWR). It also mandates State intervention if local agencies fail to meet SGMA's requirements. SGMA is required by State law, but it's also simply a good idea for water and land use planning agencies and their communities. A Groundwater Sustainability Plan:

- Offers tools for managing and sustaining our groundwater supplies
- Supports agriculture and rural communities
- Supports urban water use and helps meet the challenges of urban growth

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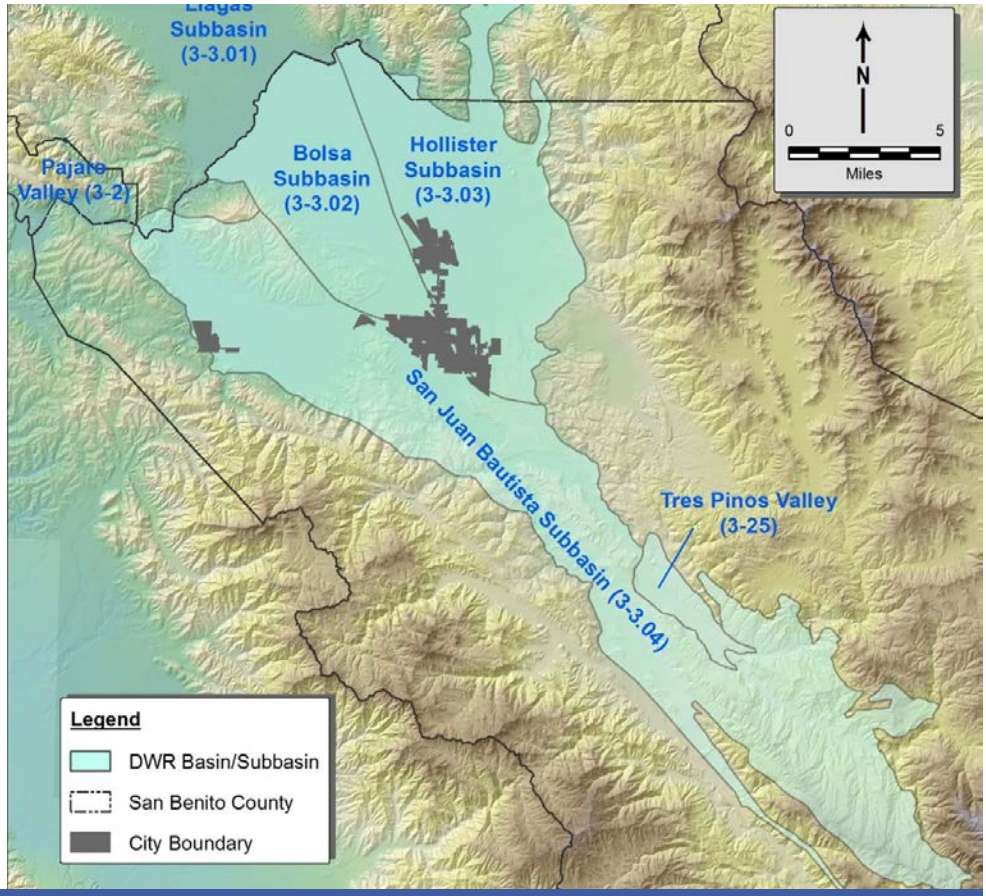

Groundwater basins (per DWR), all or partly within SBCWD jurisdiction.

What is Groundwater?

Groundwater is an important source of water stored in the earth beneath our feet, in spaces between sand, soils, and fractured rock known as an aquifer. Layers of aquifers make up a groundwater basin. Groundwater is a critical buffer against the impacts of drought and climate variability/change, and plays a vital role in maintaining our region's (and the State's) economic and environmental sustainability. Sustainable groundwater management balances groundwater resources in a manner that ensures basin resiliency, which greatly benefits both present and future generations.

What are SGMA's New, Extensive Requirements?

- An all-encompassing framework for basin sustainability
- More comprehensive and rigorous analysis, additional technical criteria and quantification of many aspects of basin sustainability and management
- Extensive and more detailed descriptions of basin setting and conditions
- More comprehensive monitoring of groundwater use, groundwater quality, and groundwater levels, including updated metering

What is the Overall Timing of this Project?

The SBCWD basins have been designated by the DWR as medium priority, recognizing that they are important sources of water supply, have been well-managed, and are not critically over-drafted. For medium-priority basins, GSP preparation must be completed by 2022, and the basins must demonstrate sustainability by 2042. As of June 2018, SBCWD has initiated the GSP preparation process. SGMA lays out a required schedule with deadlines for GSP preparation, annual reporting, and GSP updates every five years. The GSP must include an implementation plan (with descriptions, estimated costs, and scheduling) that will support groundwater sustainability into the future.

Our Local Basins — Our Local Control

There is wide agreement at the state level - groundwater management in California is best accomplished locally. SGMA supports local control of the GSA/GSP process, and the involvement of local agencies, water providers, groundwater users, and environmental, business, and agricultural interests. GSP preparation involves collaboration among local water management and land use planning agencies, and substantial outreach to stakeholders and the community including a series of workshops, distribution of informational materials, and opportunities to review and comment on draft sections of the GSP. The goal is to inform, educate, and engage all interested parties in order to create an effective, useful, and successful GSP.

"What is the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act" continued from front...

- Supports groundwater-dependent habitats and offers environmental benefits
- Helps prepare local agencies to address climate change/weather variability challenges
- Provides an opportunity for agencies to actively manage groundwater resources to best accommodate changing circumstances, conditions, populations, and land uses