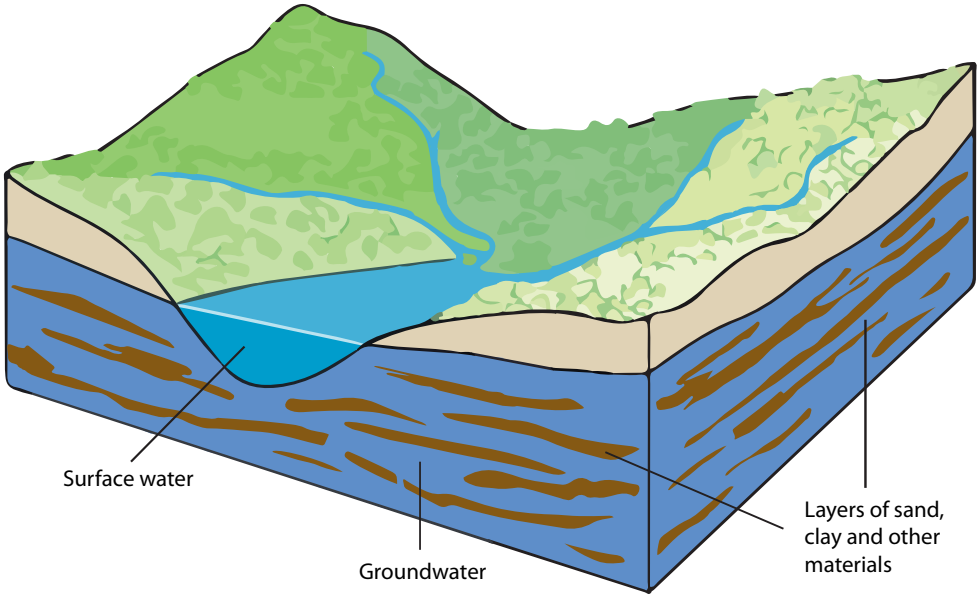
San Benito County Water District

Groundwater Sustainability Plan

Water Management

Management Partnership Assures Best Use of Water Supplies

SBCWD works closely with the City of Hollister and the Sunnyslope County Water District, which deliver water to the Hollister urban area. Their work has included: development of water treatment plants that allow direct use of CVP water for municipal uses, water conservation programs (through the Water Resources Association of San Benito County), and water recycling, which provides highly-treated wastewater for landscape and irrigation purposes. These efforts contribute to a portfolio of water supply sources that are managed together, matching each type of water supply with its appropriate uses, and providing water supply reliability, which is particularly important during times of drought.



Where Does Our Groundwater Supply Come From?

San Benito County includes all or portions of 16 groundwater basins that are important sources of agricultural and urban water supply, and support the environment. The San Benito County Water District (SBCWD) is responsible for water management throughout the county, including monitoring basin water levels and water quality, management of salts and nutrients in the water, recharge into the basins, and annual reporting on the status of groundwater.

Of the 16 basins, the most developed for water supply are the Bolsa, Hollister, San Juan Bautista, and Tres Pinos Valley groundwater basins. These four basins are largely within San Benito County, except for small areas in Santa Clara County. In 2017 SBCWD and the Santa Clara Valley Water District agreed to cooperatively prepare the required Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP).

How Surface Water is Used

SBCWD manages local surface water supplies (such as Hernandez and Paicines reservoirs), which are used for groundwater recharge (percolating water into the underground basin to maintain appropriate water levels). SBCWD also imports surface water from the Central Valley Project (CVP).

CVP water (known as "blue valve" water due to the blue pipes and valves visible along some local roads) is delivered to agricultural, municipal, and industrial customers in "Zone 6" — an area which overlies portions of the Hollister and San Juan Bautista basins.

Meeting Ongoing Groundwater Challenges through Local Management

There are multiple challenges to maintaining and ensuring groundwater sustainability, including increasing uncertainty about the future availability of imported water, particularly with climate variability and with competing demands from overdrafted basins elsewhere. In fact, the lack of imported water and the severity of the last drought resulted in some localized groundwater levels reaching lower than historical lows. This, coupled with local urban and agricultural development, suggests a risk of overdraft and illustrates the need to strengthen local management of this critical water supply and to ensure long-term sustainability.

Groundwater Storage Ensures a Reliable Water Supply

In addition to being a source of water supply, groundwater basins in San Benito County also provide water storage, which is critical in ensuring a reliable water supply through drought periods. After a documented historical high groundwater level in 1913 (prior to significant groundwater pumping), groundwater levels declined as agricultural and urban pumping increased during the early 20th century, reaching historical lows during the drought in the late 1970s. Subsequently, groundwater levels recovered and stabilized as a result of SBCWD's management of the groundwater, including recharge activities, and the increased use of CVP water in lieu of groundwater.

The Sustainable Groundwater Management Act broadens the groundwater management scope...

SGMA Requires New Tools for Long-term Groundwater Management

California's Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) of 2014 is intended to directly address this issue and assist local water managers to achieve sustainability of their groundwater basins. Since 2014, SBCWD has been actively engaged in adaptation of its groundwater management into the framework provided by SGMA.

With the reliability of CVP water becoming more problematic, and with increasing water demand, an up-to-date management plan that incorporates SGMA tools and requirements is beneficial. SGMA's rigorous, required processes will build on SBCWD's solid foundation of management practices, with additional information and analyses, review of basin conditions considering new sustainability criteria, update of basin modeling, and renewal of the planning process. SGMA also broadens the groundwater management scope to relatively extensive basin areas, requiring expansion of data collection, monitoring, and management to a wider area.