



Draft Plan Completed

Good news! After a 4-year process, the San Benito County Water District (SBCWD)/North San Benito County Groundwater Sustainability Agency (GSA), in partnership with Valley Water, completed the Draft Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) for the North San Benito Basin. This is a significant step closer to a final plan that will help guide the long-term health and continued sustainability of the North San Benito County groundwater supply. Background information and the draft GSP are online at sbcwd.com/groundwater.

Based on sustainability indicators defined in the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA), the North San Benito Basin has been managed sustainably, given the availability of imported Central Valley Project (CVP) water. Projections, taking into account existing conditions, climate change, and reasonably anticipated growth, indicate that the Basin can continue to remain sustainable, assuming reasonable availability of CVP water, with implementation of projects and management actions to avoid undesirable results (such as chronic lowering of groundwater levels, reduction of groundwater storage, and degraded water quality, among others). These projects and management actions do not include any long-term planned reductions in groundwater pumping.

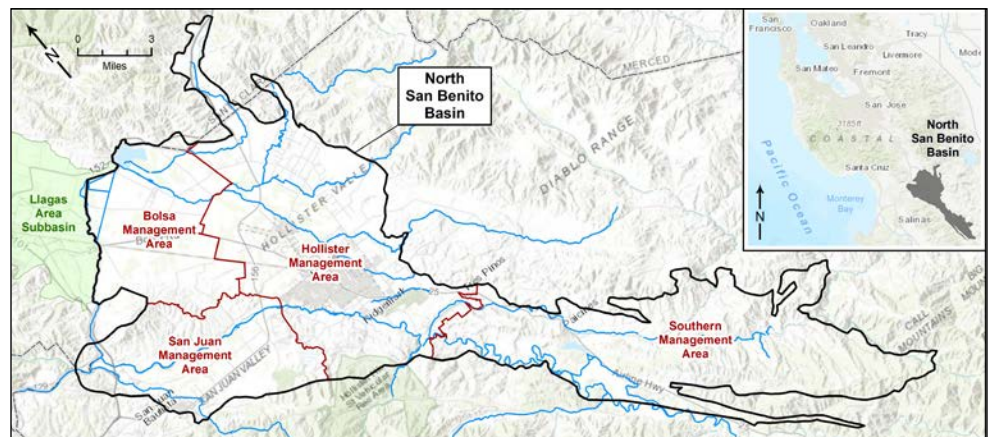
As authorized by California Water Code Section 10730(a), the GSA can collect fees to recover costs for GSP development, monitoring, and GSP Annual Reports. These fees are based on acreage, as the most appropriate way to ensure property owners are paying their fair share toward cost recovery. For more information on the Groundwater Management Fees, visit sbcwd.com/community.

The Final GSP is anticipated to be completed and submitted to the Department of Water Resources for review and approval in early 2022. Upon State approval, the GSP can be fully implemented.

Plan Area

The Plan Area includes valley areas characterized by productive agriculture, urban areas including the cities of Hollister and San Juan Bautista, rural communities, and upland areas with grazing land.

Groundwater is the main source of water in the Plan Area, supplied to municipal, agricultural, and domestic users through more than 1,000 production wells. The other major source is imported water from CVP.



Groundwater Conditions

Groundwater Levels and Storage
SBCWD manages groundwater and surface water sources together for maximum benefits. Groundwater in storage is used when surface water supplies are reduced due to drought or environmental needs in the Delta, and groundwater storage is replenished when surface water supplies are available. Aside from predictable level changes in the short term, groundwater storage has been stable for the long term, given availability of CVP supply since 1987.

After historical high groundwater (estimated) levels prior to 1913,

gradual development and increased groundwater pumping led to decreased levels from the 1940s to the 1970s, leaving the Basin in a state of overdraft. In 1987, importation of CVP water commenced, and groundwater levels began to rise in the Hollister, San Juan, and Bolsa management areas, eventually leading to recovery of groundwater levels. With groundwater level resurgence, SBCWD shifted its managed aquifer recharge program from recovery to maintenance and local sustainable management of groundwater. Because of these management activities, the Basin's

continued on back...

groundwater level has been near historic highs for the last twenty years.

Land Subsidence

Land subsidence is the uneven lowering or settlement of the ground surface due to pumping and groundwater level declines. Although subsidence has not been a known issue in the Basin, its potential was recognized in the 2003 Groundwater Management Plan, which recommended maintenance of groundwater levels above the historical low levels of about 1977 to minimize the potential for subsidence. In 2015, mapping of land surface elevation changes indicated possible local land surface subsidence in the Bolsa Management Area. But this change was relatively minor, on the order of two inches in the last 15 years, and is not expected to be a problem as long as groundwater levels are maintained at or above the historical lows.



Groundwater Quality

Groundwater quality in the Basin can be described as naturally hard (typical of similar, small Coast Range basins) and less than ideal water quality for drinking and agricultural purposes. While the groundwater is considered hard, it has been and is being used for the range of beneficial uses with reasonable accommodation by users. This GSP summarizes regional water quality monitoring networks. SBCWD currently monitors a distributed network of 18 wells for water quality and maintains a comprehensive water quality database.



Interconnected Surface Water and Groundwater Dependent Ecosystems

Locations of interconnected surface water and groundwater have been evaluated using information on stream flow, depth to groundwater, and vegetation. Groundwater Dependent Ecosystems (GDEs) have been identified with consideration of wetlands, riparian vegetation, and

animals including amphibians and steelhead trout. A series of shallow monitoring wells will be installed to monitor these areas to assist the SBCWD-GSA in protecting these ecosystems.

The Basin has been actively monitored for decades. Compliance with SGMA will require more intensive monitoring of groundwater levels, storage, land subsidence, water quality, and interconnected surface water. The GSP describes the monitoring network needed to provide the information that fulfills SGMA requirements, guides GSP implementation, and allows demonstration of continued sustainable conditions.

Potential Projects and Management Actions

The GSP notes that groundwater conditions in North San Benito are sustainable. However, long-term sustainability requires continuation of monitoring, reporting, and management actions that are adaptive to changing climatic, water supply, and water demand conditions. The GSP presents ongoing, new, and recommended projects and management actions needed to maintain sustainability.

Potential Projects are substantial efforts that involve an increase in water supply or a reduction in demand for the GSP Area. The four categories of projects are:

- Develop Surface Water Storage
- Expand Managed Aquifer Recharge
- Enhance Conjunctive Use
- Enhance Water Conservation

These projects have the potential to produce benefits by maintaining groundwater levels above minimum thresholds, thereby avoiding chronic groundwater level declines, storage depletion, and subsidence, and reducing potential impacts to groundwater-dependent ecosystems.

Potential Management Actions

provide a framework for groundwater management including establishing GSP procedures or policies, filling data gaps with scientific studies or improved monitoring, and providing for funding. The six categories of management actions are:

- Improve Monitoring Program and Data Management System
- Develop Response Plans
- Enhance Water Quality Improvement Programs
- Reduce Potential Impacts to GDEs
- Provide Long-term Basin-wide Funding Mechanism
- Provide Administration, Monitoring, and Reporting

These actions provide guidelines to address the wide range of potential undesirable results, support water quality improvement, and protect GDEs. They also support cost-effective implementation of all actions, and provide for the needed funding, administration, monitoring and reporting so that the Basin can continue to be managed in a sustainable way into the future.