



WHAT IS HAPPENING WITH GROUNDWATER IN CALIFORNIA?

Water found beneath the Earth's surface is usually referred to as "groundwater." Because groundwater is not easily visible and has historically been relatively reliable, it is often taken for granted. Groundwater basins in California are in a state of overdraft: on average, water is being pumped out of many basins faster than it is replenished. This threatens groundwater levels and water quality, putting widely-relied-upon drinking water and irrigation sources in jeopardy. Overdraft can also cause streams and rivers to go dry and cause the land surface to sink, potentially damaging roads, bridges, dams, canals, and buildings.

What is the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA)?

In response to issues related to groundwater overdraft, the California Legislature adopted the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) in 2014. SGMA requires local Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSAs) to develop and carry out Groundwater Sustainability Plans (GSPs) to protect groundwater as a resource communities can depend on for the future for drinking water, agriculture, habitat, and other needs. Whether you have a private well or receive water from a public water system, there is likely a local GSA managing groundwater in your area. To find your GSA, go to bit.ly/my-gsa.

The California Department of Water Resources (DWR) is responsible for reviewing local plans to make sure they meet the requirements of the law. If DWR determines the plan or plans for a specific basin are inadequate, meaning the plans do not do enough to protect groundwater resources, DWR refers the basin to the State Water Resources Control Board (Board) for potential state intervention.

What is the State Water Resources Control Board's role?

DWR referring a basin to the Board begins a process that could result in the Board temporarily managing that basin's groundwater use until the Board determines local GSAs have a plan in place that protects groundwater in the basin.

First, the Board considers, through an open public process, whether to place the basin on probation. If a basin is put on probation, in general groundwater pumpers in that basin will need to report how much water they use and pay fees to the Board.

If the GSAs cannot address the inadequacies in their plans within one year of the Board designating a basin probationary, the Board may consider whether to implement an interim plan for the basin. An interim plan is a temporary step in which the Board manages groundwater until the GSAs can manage groundwater sustainably themselves. Once GSAs improve their plans to adequately manage groundwater, state intervention ends.

How can I participate?

If the Board is considering probation or an interim plan for a groundwater basin, there will be opportunities for you to share your input in writing or at a public hearing.

You can also participate in planning processes with your local GSA.

Learn more:

- Find contact information for your local GSA at bit.ly/my-gsa
- Visit our website at www.waterboards.ca.gov/sgma
- Subscribe to the SGMA Groundwater Management email list to receive updates and hear about opportunities to participate: bit.ly/SGMA-updates