

**Fillmore and Piru Basins Groundwater Sustainability Agency (FPBGSA)**  
**Frequently Asked Questions**  
Board Approved April 16, 2020

- What is the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA)?
  - SGMA is a State law that requires the management of high and medium priority groundwater basins to ensure their sustainability. The law was passed by the State legislature and signed by Governor Brown in 2014 and was enacted on January 1, 2015. It provides a framework for local authority over groundwater management through the formation of Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSA). These GSAs are responsible to prepare and implement Groundwater Sustainability Plans (GSP) to achieve sustainable groundwater management in their basins over a 20-year period.
- Why was the Fillmore and Piru Basins GSA (FPBGSA or Agency) formed?
  - The Fillmore and Piru Basins are designated as high priority by the California Department of Water Resources (DWR) and therefore are subject to SGMA. The FPBGSA was formed to provide local control over SGMA compliance and the management of these basins. If a GSA was not created for these basins, the State would intervene and dictate future basin management.
- What is a high priority basin? Why are the Fillmore and Piru Basins considered high priority?
  - DWR has the responsibility to identify the priority of each basin in the state into one of four categories: high, medium, low, or very low. Prioritization is conducted for each basin using a set of variables that includes but is not limited to: current and projected basin population, groundwater elevation, groundwater connectedness to surface water, total number of wells, irrigated acreage, groundwater reliance by beneficial users, and similar.
  - The Fillmore and Piru Basins are each ranked high priority by DWR, principally because groundwater is the primary source of water for all water users. Other reasons include a lack of recent subsidence data, and declining groundwater levels during the 2012-2017 drought that contributed to lower scoring for the habitat and streamflow components of the prioritization methods.
- What is a Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP)? Why does the GSA have to prepare a GSP?
  - SGMA requires the development of a GSP for each high or medium priority groundwater basin. A GSP describes a mandatory approach to achieve long-term sustainability of a groundwater basin. Once completed, each GSP is submitted to DWR for review and is either approved, or is directed back to the GSA for further work to ensure that the basin in question is compliant with SGMA. In developing a GSP, GSAs must consider all beneficial uses and users of groundwater in the basin. Once approved by the State, a GSP guides implementation of SGMA for a 20-year period (with accommodation for periodic revisions of the GSP if warranted). The FPBGSA will prepare two GSPs, one for the Fillmore Basin and one for the Piru Basin, to achieve coordinated SGMA compliance for sustainable groundwater management.

- SGMA defines sustainable groundwater management as *“the management and use of groundwater in a manner that can be maintained during the planning and implementation horizon without causing undesirable results.”*
- SGMA identifies the following undesirable results, which are also referred to as sustainability indicators:
  - Chronic lowering of groundwater levels;
  - Reduction of groundwater storage;
  - Land subsidence that substantially interferes with surface land uses;
  - Degraded water quality, including the migration of contaminant plumes that impair water supplies;
  - Depletions of interconnected surface water and groundwater; and
  - Seawater intrusion.
- Under SGMA, beneficial users and uses include, but are not limited to:
  - Holders of overlying groundwater rights, including:
    - Agricultural users, and
    - Domestic well owners;
  - Municipal well operators;
  - Public water systems;
  - Local land use planning agencies;
  - Environmental users of groundwater;
  - Surface water users, if there is a hydrologic connection between surface and groundwater bodies;
  - The federal government, including, but not limited to, the military and managers of federal lands;
  - California Native American tribes;
  - Disadvantaged communities, including, but not limited to, those served by private domestic wells or small community water systems; and
  - Entities that are monitoring and reporting groundwater elevations in all or a part of a groundwater basin managed by the groundwater sustainability agency.
- What are the benefits of having a GSA and GSPs?
  - The formation of the FPBGSA and preparation of GSPs for the Fillmore and Piru Basins allows for local authority and control in the development and implementation of groundwater management within the Basins. It will avoid State intervention to implement SGMA. The information obtained during the GSP preparation process provides a deeper understanding of the Basins’ sustainable yield and empowers local agencies to manage and maintain the Basins. The GSPs will increase certainty about the future sustainability of local groundwater supply.
  - The GSPs will:
    - Document past and present groundwater conditions;
    - Develop a water budget;
    - Identify sustainability focused measurable objectives and minimum thresholds for each applicable sustainability indicator;
    - Identify management actions and projects to achieve and maintain sustainable groundwater conditions; and
    - Establish a monitoring program to measure the effectiveness of these actions and projects.

- What is the cost of having a GSA and GSP? What are stakeholders getting for their money?
  - The FPBGSA’s expenses include the cost of operating the agency and hiring consultants to prepare the GSP. A budget statement is presented to the FPBGSA Board of Directors at each of its monthly Board meetings, which are open to the public. The budget information is included in the full Board packets that are posted prior to each Board meeting (<https://www.fpbgsa.org/public-meetings/gsa-board-of-directors-meetings/board-packet/>).
  - The Agency has obtained a Proposition 1 grant that has significantly offset the local cost burden for GSP development.
  - During implementation of the GSP, there will be additional costs associated with implementing management actions and projects identified in the GSP.
  - As described above, the FPBGSA provides local control to determine how to manage sustainable groundwater use in the Fillmore and Piru Basins. The GSPs ensure a predictable, sustainable, and reliable source of groundwater for the future. Prudent groundwater management provides a safeguard against prolonged drought and climate change and supports our local economies and quality of life.
  - Failure to implement SGMA locally would result in State intervention and greater costs and regulation.
  
- How will SGMA affect stakeholders? Will water use be restricted or rationed? If so, by how much and when would this start? Will the cost of water increase? By how much and when?
  - SGMA provides GSAs with a number of authorities that they MAY use in order to achieve sustainable groundwater basins. Options that a GSA may use include but are not limited to:
    - Require registration and metering of groundwater extraction facilities (i.e. wells and pumps).
    - For beneficial groundwater users that extract more than two acre-feet of groundwater per year:
      - Require measurement and annual reporting of groundwater extractions.
      - Defer all costs associated with the purchase and installation of the water-measuring device to the owner operator of said groundwater extraction facility.
      - NOTE: Beneficial users that use less than two acre–feet of groundwater per year for domestic purposes only are described in SGMA as “de minimis extractors” and are not subject to the above requirements.
    - Implement rules and regulations, such as well-spacing requirements on new wells and reasonable operating regulations on existing wells including requiring extractors to operate on a rotation basis.
    - Control groundwater extractions by regulating, limiting, or suspending extractions from individual groundwater wells or extractions from groundwater wells in the aggregate, construction of new groundwater wells, enlargement of existing groundwater wells, or reactivation of abandoned groundwater wells, or otherwise establishing groundwater extraction allocations.
  - The need for management actions such as water restrictions and water costs will depend on the outcome of the analysis conducted during GSP development. The FPBGSA will seek to ensure that all beneficial users have necessary water resources and minimize regulatory costs and other burdens.

- There are a number of options to fund the management actions and projects that might be needed to achieve sustainability, including:
  - Regulatory/groundwater extraction fees;
  - Property-related fees or assessments;
  - Local taxes;
  - Local general obligation bonds;
  - Contributions from member agencies; and
  - Grants from other State and federal agencies.
  
- Will SGMA affect my water rights?
  - SGMA and any GSP or other groundwater management plan developed in compliance with SGMA are forbidden (by the enacting legislation) from altering surface or groundwater rights (Water Code Section 10720.5). SGMA simply allows these rights, like other property rights, to be regulated at the local level by GSAs.
  
- Will the GSP restrict future development within the Basins?
  - The need for and selection of management actions will depend on the outcome of the analysis conducted during GSP development. GSAs do not have authority to change land use plans, zoning, or other land use entitlements. The GSA is required to coordinate with local land use planning agencies as it develops the GSP. The GSP will inform future land use decisions.
  
- Are the measures implemented in the GSP permanent?
  - GSPs must be reviewed every five years by the implementing GSA and these reviews must be submitted to DWR to show how each basin is performing in its efforts to achieve and maintain sustainable groundwater. The need for and effectiveness of management actions and projects will be reconsidered during these reviews.
  
- What is the GSA doing to provide water? Can the GSA buy water?
  - The need for and feasibility of purchasing or providing additional water will be considered during GSP development. Under SGMA, the GSA has the authority to acquire surface water or groundwater and surface water or groundwater rights and to import surface water or groundwater.
  
- What is the water market stakeholders are hearing about?
  - A water market is a relatively new approach for managing groundwater use in California that sets groundwater pumping allocations and allows pumpers to sell unused allocations or buy additional allocations. This system provides flexibility and creates an incentive for groundwater conservation. A pilot water market program was established by the Fox Canyon Groundwater Management Agency for a portion of the Fox Canyon Groundwater Basin. This water market may serve as a model for other basins in the County and the state. This is one of many options for groundwater management that may be considered during preparation of the Fillmore and Piru Basins GSPs.

- What is the difference between the FPBGSA and the Fillmore and Piru Basins Pumpers Associations?
  - The Fillmore and Piru Basins Pumpers Associations were formed in December of 2014 to address pumpers' concerns and issues in each of the Basins. These Associations hold monthly meetings and have each held several stakeholder meetings since they formed in December of 2014.

The FPBGSA is a local agency formed in April of 2017 to implement SGMA in the Fillmore and Piru Basins. The Agency is a Joint Powers Authority comprised of the following three local public member agencies: United Water Conservation District, County of Ventura, and City of Fillmore. The Agency's Board of Directors includes a Fillmore Pumper Stakeholder Director and a Piru Basin Stakeholder Director to ensure that pumpers' interests are considered in Board decision-making. These Directors represent the Fillmore and Piru Basins Pumpers Associations and other pumpers in the area. The Board also includes an Environmental Stakeholder Director to represent the interests of environmental organizations engaged in the enhancement or protection of the environment overlying the Basins.

- How can stakeholders have a say in the GSP?
  - The FPBGSA is committed to an open and transparent GSP preparation process with ample opportunity for stakeholder input including:
    - **Monthly Board Meetings.** Meetings are held generally on the third Thursday of each month in the evening at the Fillmore City Council Chamber. Public comments are accepted at each meeting. At a number of these Board Meetings, technical specialists make presentations and the GSA Board holds open forums on various aspects of GSP development. Upcoming Board discussion topics are posted on the Agency's website (<https://www.fpbgsa.org/>) and Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/FPBGSA/>). The public is invited and encouraged to participate in these forums and provide input to the Board.
    - **Stakeholder Workshops.** The FPBGSA will hold Stakeholder Workshops throughout the GSP preparation process. These workshops will provide let the public learn about key topics and milestones, ask questions, and provide input. The preliminary schedule and SGMA topics for these workshops is:
      - SGMA 101 and Groundwater Basin Setting – April 2, 2020, Veteran's Memorial Building, 250 Central Avenue, Fillmore, 6 pm – 8 pm
      - Groundwater Modelling and Water Budgeting – June/July 2020 (Location to be determined [TBD])
      - Sustainable Management Criteria - August/September 2020 (Location(s) TBD)
      - Proposed Projects and Management Actions - October 2020 (Location(s) TBD)
      - Public Draft GSPs – June 2021 (Location(s) TBD)
    - **Website.** The FPBGSA maintains a website (<https://www.fpbgsa.org/>) that provides the public with information. It is developing a portal for submitting public comment (text and/or document upload) via the website.

- How can stakeholders stay informed of future developments in the GSP process?
  - Please sign up for the Agency's email list through the website at <https://www.fpbgsa.org/contact-us/>.
  - You may also follow the Agency's Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/FPBGSA/>.