CAFF
COMMUNITY ALLIANCE
with FAMILY FARMERS

THE FARMER'S GUIDE TO UNDERSTANDING SACRAMENTO COUNTY'S GROUNDWATER SUSTAINABILITY PLAN

April 2025

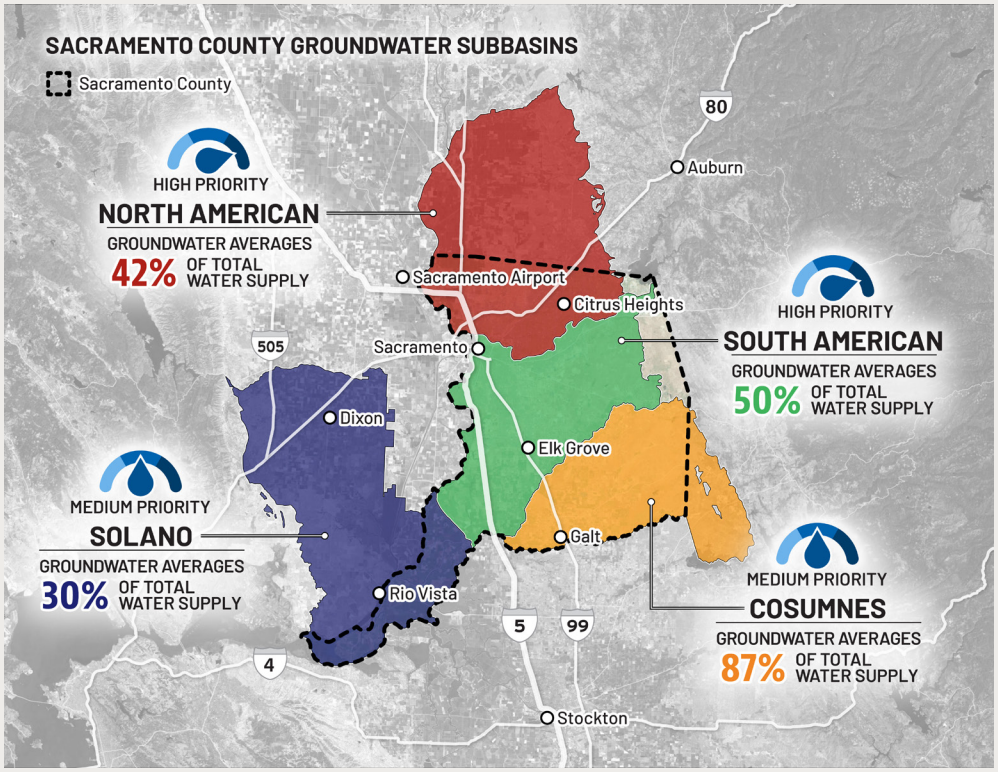
What is SGMA?

This summary is meant to help farmers understand what the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) is, how it works in Sacramento County, and what to be on the lookout for in years to come. Funded by the Department of Water Resources (DWR), Community Alliance with Family Farmers developed this summary and has staff available to answer questions about SGMA and connect farmers to other resources relating to groundwater.

SGMA is a law passed by the California legislature specifying requirements for management of groundwater across the state. Groundwater is water stored in underground aquifers, which typically accounts for 40-60% of the total annual water used in California, depending on the surface water available from snow and rain sources during a given year.

Groundwater and surface water are interconnected but are regulated separately. The use of surface water has long been regulated in California; however, prior to 2014 the use of groundwater had not been regulated at a state level. In 2014, California was in a multi-year drought. The effects of the drought, including some wells going dry and ground sinking in some areas, highlighted the need for better management of groundwater in many parts of the state. Groundwater overdraft, when more groundwater is being extracted than is being replenished on average over a period of years, causes depletion of the amount of groundwater stored in an area and associated declines in groundwater levels. SGMA was passed in 2014 to avoid groundwater overdraft and ensure sustainable management of groundwater across the state. Groundwater basins and subbasins identified by DWR as "high" or "medium" priority must implement a regionally specific Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) outlining a path for achieving or maintaining sustainable groundwater conditions.

Find your subbasin by inputting your address here: **http://tinyurl.com/sac-subbasin** which will also tell you which Groundwater Sustainability Agency (GSA) is implementing SGMA in your location. Each of the subbasins in Sacramento County is managed by multiple GSAs, with one agency as the lead. Contact information for each subbasin is at the end of this document.



↑*Figure 1 Sacramento county overlies the Cosumnes, North American, South American, and a small part of the Solano Subbasins. The North American reaches into portions of Placer and Sutter Counties. The South American lies entirely within Sacramento County and the Cosumnes Subbasin lies under Sacramento and Amador Counties.*

What is sustainable groundwater use?

Groundwater conditions vary considerably by location within the County, with the Cosumnes Subbasin experiencing the most significant issues, especially around Galt. The GSPs estimate the amount of groundwater that can be used within each of the subbasins while maintaining healthy conditions (the "sustainable yield") and although the amount of groundwater used is expected to fluctuate with weather and other factors, the goal is to avoid long term overdraft (Figure 2). All subbasins in the County must achieve a sustainable condition by 2042. Well owners can still experience local issues in a specific region, even if their overall subbasin is healthy.

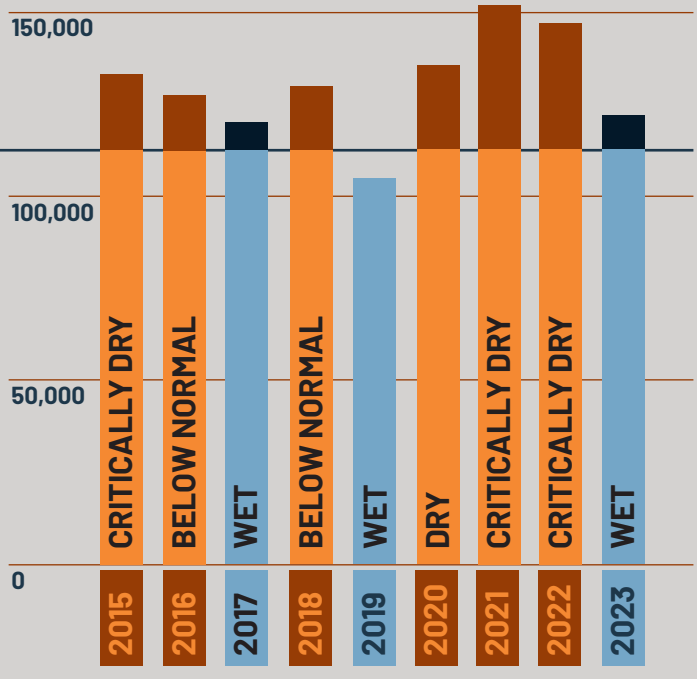
As part of the planning process, "minimum thresholds," were defined for each subbasin, which are metrics by which the sustainability of a subbasin is assessed. Minimum thresholds define the groundwater conditions that each subbasin must maintain to avoid significant adverse issues. If conditions in a subbasin are not maintained above the minimum thresholds, more severe action would need to be taken by GSAs. Data on groundwater conditions (including groundwater levels, groundwater quality, and land subsidence) are collected from monitoring sites located around the County.

Cosumnes Subbasin

Annual Groundwater Usage and Estimated Sustainable Yield

120,600 AFY

The Cosumnes Subbasin GSP estimates the sustainable yield to be 120,600 AFY. This Figure shows that groundwater use varies depending on the amount of rainfall. Groundwater use has been greater than the sustainable yield in eight of nine recent years, including in several wet years, and has exceeded recharge on average by about 10,000 acre-feet per year from 1999 through 2018.



↑ *Figure 2*

In the South American Subbasin, long term overdraft has largely been mitigated by additional access to surface water and the Harvest Water Project outside of Elk Grove, which has been providing 35,000 acre-feet/year of recycled treated water for wildlife habitat and agricultural irrigation.

In the North American Subbasin, long term overdraft slowed after initiatives like the Water Forum (waterforum.org) created agreements leading to a more collaborative approach to protecting the region's water. Conjunctive use of surface water when possible instead of groundwater pumping has also played an important role in protecting groundwater.

The Solano Subbasin is located primarily in Solano County, but a portion of it lies under Sacramento County. The Solano Subbasin has significant sources of surface water supplies available from the Solano Project (Lake Berryessa) and surface water diversions in the delta. These surface water supplies have limited the demand on groundwater resources. As a result, groundwater conditions in the Subbasin have been historically sustainable.

What well-related activities are planned?

Please report dry wells related to lowering of the groundwater table to:
https://mydrywatersupply.water.ca.gov/report

Sacramento County adopted a process in April 2022 to coordinate GSAs and new well permits, but those rules are no longer in effect. While dry wells have not been reported as a significant issue, they could become a problem in a severe drought.

It is important that all dry wells (including agricultural wells) are reported so that the extent and location of issues can be understood.

While dry wells can be the result of overdraft or well failure, they can also be caused by nearby wells drawing from the same aquifer. "Well interference" occurs when two or more wells are pumping groundwater in close proximity. The cone of depression that occurs around a well when it is pumping can interfere with the operation of a nearby well. Impacts from well interference are a site-specific issue and are distinct from effects of groundwater overdraft. You should alert your County well permitting agency and your local GSA if you think you are experiencing well interference.

What fees are being charged?

Implementing SGMA is expensive and different approaches have been adopted for raising funds to support these efforts. Grants from various sources including DWR have been very helpful during the initial stages of SGMA implementation, but other funding sources are needed and fees for landowners and irrigators are being used in some areas to support the work.

In the **South American Subbasin**, the Sacramento Central Groundwater Authority (which includes the Sacramento County GSA) charges a base rate of up to $2.75 per parcel. In addition, agricultural parcels pay $3.74 per acre-foot of groundwater used. The determination of groundwater use is based on remote sensing data and crop information and water use estimates derived from these data sources. These fees show up on the property tax statement unless the parcel is in the service area of an urban water purveyor. Also in the South American Subbasin, the Omochumne Hartnell Water District charges $10 per irrigated acre. This District may annex some of the southern portion of the Subbasin into their service area which could affect fees on farmers in this area. The Northern Delta GSA has a fee of no more than $2.75 per acre and the Sloughhouse Resource Conservation District (RCD) is not currently assessing fees for lands within the South American Subbasin, but this could change in the future.

In the **Cosumnes Subbasin**, Sloughhouse RCD charges a base rate of $35.59 per parcel where groundwater is being pumped, plus an additional fee of $10 per acre for each acre irrigated with groundwater. The Cosumnes Groundwater Authority uses public sources and crop mapping technology to determine the amount of irrigated acreage.

In the **North American Subbasin**, much of the expense of SGMA has been covered by urban water agencies, but farmers and ranchers should stay abreast of activities at their local GSA in case there are updates regarding fees and assessments.

In the Sacramento County portion of the **Solano Subbasin**, no GSA fees on landowners are currently in effect, although fees do exist in other parts of the Subbasin. The Sacramento County GSA is in the process of exploring funding mechanisms for areas within the Solano Subbasin to support their GSP implementation responsibilities.

Discussions about fees are required to be available to the public, but you have to be monitoring GSA activities to know when those discussions are taking place. These fees can change annually and are subject to increase based on inflation and the cost of SGMA implementation.

What happens if we use too much groundwater?

Declining groundwater levels
Wells can go dry as the water level drops.

Decreased groundwater storage
This can limit the ability for groundwater to meet water supply needs during droughts.

Land subsidence
In some settings, chronic overuse of groundwater (overdraft) can lead to sinking land that has the potential to negatively impact infrastructure like roads and canals.

Impacted surface water systems
In some areas groundwater is closely connected to surface water (e.g. rivers, streams, lakes, wetlands) and lowering of groundwater can increase the amount of water that seeps into groundwater or reduce the amount of groundwater that discharges into surface water, affecting wildlife and critical habitat.

Degraded water quality
Excessive groundwater use can lower levels and change the direction and velocity of groundwater flow, potentially inducing movement of natural and manmade pollutants. Lowered groundwater levels in areas adjacent to a saline water body can induce the migration of higher salinity water into fresher groundwater.

How do I get more information?

Community Alliance with Family Farmers

Stay connected with CAFF's small farmer outreach efforts. CAFF can connect small farmers with free legal advice and technical hydrological services from our partners in this project, UC Davis Water Justice Law Clinic and Dudek Consulting.
Contact: **Lan Ngo, lan@caff.org, (916) 245-6519**

Each of the subbasins in Sacramento County are managed by several GSAs and often one coordinating agency. You can find maps of GSA service areas and contact information here (**https://sgma.water.ca.gov/portal/gsa/all**). GSA meetings are public.

Cosumnes Groundwater Authority

Decisions about the Cosumnes Subbasin are coordinated by the Cosumnes Groundwater Authority. Join their listserve **(www.cosumnesgroundwater.org)** to stay in touch. Cosumnes Subbasin has 52,575 acres of agricultural land including vineyards, pasture and grain.
Contact: **Brittany Friedman, 916-526-5447, info@CosumnesGroundwater.org**

North American Subbasin

Decisions about the North American Subbasin are made by the Subbasin Coordinating Committee, with members from each of the GSAs. Regular meetings are not public, but public meetings are held annually. Join their listserve **(https://portal.nasbgroundwater.org/registration)** to stay up-to-date. The North American Subbasin lies under parts of Placer and Sutter Counties in addition to Sacramento. It encompasses more than 100,000 acres of agricultural land, with a substantial portion dedicated to rice cultivation.
Contact: **Trevor Joseph Sacramento Groundwater Authority GSA, 916-967-7692, tjoseph@rwah2o.org**

Solano Subbasin GSA

The Solano Subbasin GSA Collaborative includes the GSAs in the Subbasin and meets monthly. The Collaborative posts their meeting notes (www.solanogsp.com). Individual GSAs within the Subbasin have regular Board meetings which are open to the public. The Solano Subbasin has approximately 200,000 acres of agricultural land with major crop categories including orchards, row crops, grain and hay, and pasture lands. The Collaborative typically hosts a public Virtual Town Hall each Spring. Additionally, the GSA Collaborative shares an e-newsletter with periodic updates; you can sign-up here to learn about activities in the Subbasin.
Contact: **Guadalupe Garcia at guadalupe@aginnovations.org**

Sloughhouse Resource Conservation District

The Sloughhouse RCD operates a mobile irrigation lab that can provide on-site evaluation of your irrigation system including recommendations for optimizing water use efficiency. These services are available throughout Sacramento County with some exceptions. Contact: **https://www.sloughhousercd.org, (916) 526-5477**

State Water Efficiency and Enhancement Program

The State Water Efficiency and Enhancement Program, provides financial assistance to farmers implementing irrigation systems that reduce greenhouse gases and save water. Contact them for more information (**www.cdfa.ca.gov/oefi/sweep**)

Dudek

Jane Gray, Dudek, (805) 308-8531

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