

Overview of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act

L E G I S L A T I V E A N A L Y S T ' S O F F I C E

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Hon. Bob Wieckowski, Chair





Context for Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA)



Groundwater Is Important Component of State's Water Resources

- Provides between 30 percent and 60 percent of statewide water supply, with reliance increasing during dry years. Provides up to 100 percent of water supplies in some regions.



Severe Groundwater Depletion in Some Areas of State

- On average, California uses more groundwater each year than is replenished, causing certain underground basins to become gradually depleted, or “overdrafted.”
- Overdraft has led to serious impacts, including failed wells, deteriorated water quality, permanent collapse of underground basins, and land subsidence.



Groundwater Use Has Not Been Regulated on Statewide Basis

- Contrasts with state's approach to monitoring and enforcing surface water rights.

Overview of SGMA



SGMA Enacted in 2014

- Marks first comprehensive statewide requirement to monitor and operate groundwater basins to avoid overdraft and achieve long-term resource sustainability.
- SGMA's requirements apply to 127 out the state's 515 groundwater basins. These "high and medium priority basins" represent 96 percent of annual statewide groundwater pumping.



SGMA Requires Groundwater to Be Managed Locally

- Local public agencies must form Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSAs) that are vested with broad management authority over their basins, including (1) defining basin's sustainable yield, (2) limiting extractions, and (3) imposing fees.
- GSAs will develop enforceable Groundwater Sustainability Plans (GSPs) defining practices that will govern use of basin. Some agencies can submit alternative management plans based on existing plans they have in place.



SGMA Implementation Overseen by Two State Agencies

- ***Department of Water Resources (DWR)*** helps with initial phases of implementation. Responsibilities include defining and prioritizing basins, collecting and disseminating data, providing technical assistance, and reviewing GSPs.
- ***State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB)*** enforces the law and intervenes when local entities fail to comply. Intervention activities may include imposing reporting requirements, issuing fees, assuming basin management responsibilities (including developing and implementing usage plans), and conducting enforcement actions.



SGMA Requirements Phased in Over Several Years

Implementation Timeline for Major Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) Requirements



January 2015

DWR released initial basin prioritization. High and medium priority basins are subject to SGMA requirements.

January 2016

DWR identified final list of basins subject to critical conditions of overdraft. These basins face some expedited compliance deadlines.

June 30, 2017

Local agencies must establish groundwater sustainability agencies (GSAs). SWRCB may designate probationary basins subject to intervention for areas that fail to comply.

January 31, 2020

GSAs from basins in critical overdraft must adopt and begin to implement groundwater sustainability plans (GSPs). DWR will review plans for adequacy after adoption.

January 31, 2022

GSAs from basins not in critical overdraft must adopt and begin to implement GSPs. DWR will review plans for adequacy after adoption.

January 31, 2040

GSAs from basins in critical overdraft must achieve sustainability goals.

January 31, 2042

GSAs from basins not in critical overdraft must achieve sustainability goals.

DWR = Department of Water Resources and SWRCB = State Water Resources Control Board.



Governor's 2017-18 Budget Proposals

- \$15 Million for DWR to Support Local Agencies in Planning and Implementation**
 - \$15 million ongoing from the General Fund.
 - Activities to include assisting with formation of GSAs, reviewing alternative plans, and collecting and disseminating data.
 - Would be in addition to roughly \$15 million a year in short-term funding DWR currently receives for SGMA. That funding will phase out in the next few years.

- \$2.3 Million for SWRCB to Intervene in Noncompliant Areas**
 - \$750,000 ongoing and \$1.5 million one time, and five new permanent positions. Funding would be a loan from the Underground Storage Tank Clean-Up Fund, to be repaid through fees paid by groundwater extractors in unmanaged basins.
 - Activities to include identifying groundwater users and usage within unmanaged basins (basins without a GSA), issuing and collecting fees, and conducting enforcement efforts.
 - Would be in addition to \$1.9 million General Fund SWRCB currently receives for SGMA activities.



LAO Comments and Recommendations



Successful Implementation of SGMA Fundamental to State's Water Management

- Important part of managing overall water supply, vital to avoid further negative consequences of overdraft.



SGMA Implementation at Critical Stage

- Local agencies are in process of forming GSAs and developing GSPs. Effectiveness of these processes and plans will determine overall success of the act.



State Plays Important Role in Ultimate Success of Implementation

- State can provide data, technical assistance, and monitoring, as well as serve as a backstop to ensure compliance.



Recommendations

- Adopt Governor's proposals. State agencies can provide helpful assistance to local agencies.
- Continue to monitor successes and challenges of SGMA implementation.