

Management of Santa Cruz Mid-County Groundwater Basin

Overview

The Mid-County (Soquel Aptos) Groundwater Basin is currently in a state of overdraft with depressed groundwater levels, seawater intrusion and diminished streamflow. Local agencies have been taking steps to address the overdraft since 1995. These efforts will be bolstered by passage of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act of 2014 (SGMA), which provides local agencies the authority and the responsibility to eliminate groundwater overdraft by 2040. Under SGMA the local agencies will:

- Define the boundaries of our groundwater basin
- Form a Groundwater Sustainability Agency (GSA) to manage the basin
- Develop a Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP), which will likely involve a combination of water conservation, increased groundwater recharge and supplemental supply, with equitable allocation of costs among users based on impact on the groundwater basin.

If local agencies fail to act, the State will step in.

Basin Boundaries

A boundary modification request is being submitted to the state to define the basin boundaries of the Santa Cruz Mid-County Groundwater Basin to reflect the entire local area of concern. Public comment may be submitted until March 30, 2016. (www.midcountygroundwater.org)

About the Groundwater Sustainability Agency (GSA)

- The GSA will be responsible for developing and implementing a plan to manage use of water within the Basin.
- The GSA can be a single public agency or a Joint Powers Authority (JPA) consisting of multiple public agencies.
- Currently the Soquel-Aptos Groundwater Management Committee (SAGMC) is a JPA that is already coordinating planning efforts in the Basin.
- SAGMC includes the Soquel Creek Water District, the Central Water District, the City of Santa Cruz, the County of Santa Cruz, plus private well representatives.
- The GSA will likely look like the SAGMC, but with more powers consistent with SGMA
- The SAGMC has prepared a draft Joint Powers Agreement, which should be ready for approval by each member agency by early 2016.
- Approval of this JPA would create the new Santa Cruz Mid-County Groundwater Agency.
- The Mid-County Groundwater Agency must conduct a public hearing and solicit stakeholder comment prior to filing a notice with the state that it will be the GSA for the Mid-County Groundwater Basin.
- We anticipate that that the Mid-County Groundwater Agency will be fully established as the GSA by July 2016
- The GSA is required to monitor and report on groundwater extraction and develop and implement a groundwater sustainability plan (GSP).
- The GSA can levy assessments on water users to fund its activities, subject to the taxpayer approval process provided for in the Right to Vote on Taxes Act (Proposition 218).

About the Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP)

- The GSP must be developed by 2020 and must be fully implemented to eliminate adverse impacts of groundwater overdraft, including long term groundwater depletion, seawater intrusion, reduction in water quality, and reduction in streamflow by 2040.
- The GSP must also take into account projected impact of climate change, including sea level rise, increased irrigation demand and reduced groundwater recharge.
- Methods to achieve sustainability may include managing pumping, increasing water conservation, creating supplemental supplies, and increasing recharge.

- The GSP will also evaluate and recommend a funding mechanism to allocate the costs of achieving sustainability among basin water users based on their impact on the basin.
- The GSP will be developed by the GSA, based on technical information and input from all involved stakeholders and water users.
- Work will build on the existing Groundwater Management Plan for the Soquel-Aptos Area, developed in 1996 by Soquel Creek and Central Water Districts, which must be updated and strengthened to meet the requirements of SGMA.
- A detailed groundwater model is being developed to better characterize the effects of groundwater pumping and evaluate the expected benefits of potential management scenarios.
- Stakeholder involvement in GSP development will include water supply agencies, land use agencies, regulatory agencies, environmental concerns, private well users, and other water users in the basin.
- Ultimately the GSP must be approved by the GSA, including all member agencies, as well as the State.

What can individual basin users do right now to reduce overdraft?

- Reduce pumping by practicing water conservation and eliminating any unnecessary water extraction; request a water use audit.
- Volunteer to have your groundwater level measured or to install a water meter
- Stay engaged by signing up for emails, visiting the website, attending meetings, offering comments

For more information on SGMA requirements, background information on the issues, basin boundary maps, process for GSA formation, GSP development, and future public meetings, visit: www.midcountygroundwater.org

