

SUSTAINABILITY COMMITTEE

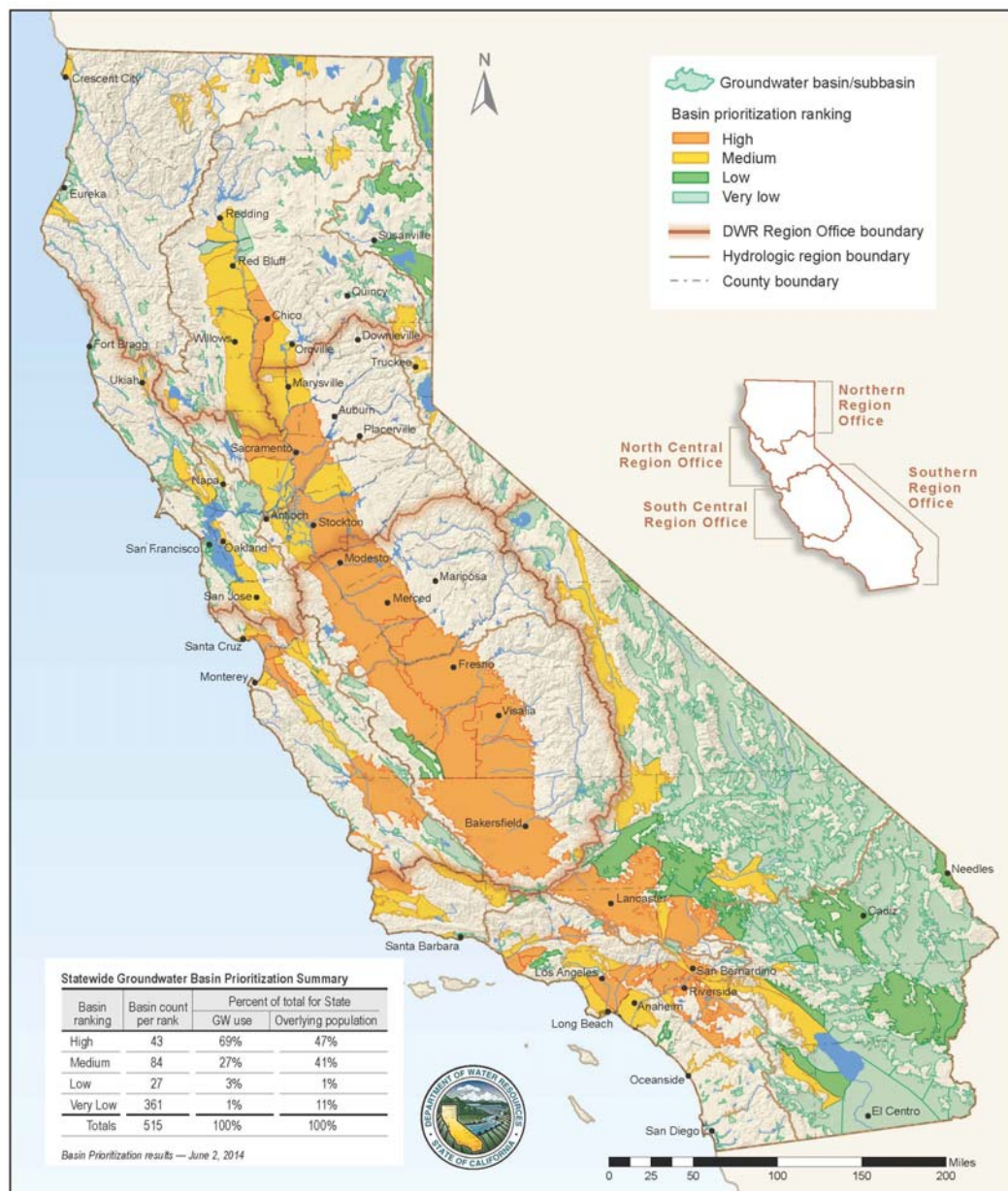
Overview of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act and How it Affects Orange County

By Crystal Benham, Leslie Dumas, P.E., D.WRE, and Nathan Chase, P.E., ENV SP | RMC Water and Environment

The Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) was passed by the California State Legislature in September 2014, establishing new requirements for groundwater management in medium- and high-priority alluvial groundwater basins. SGMA requires the development and implementation of groundwater sustainability plans (GSPs) for each of these basins. The GSPs must contain measurable objectives and actions to bring a groundwater basin into and maintain groundwater sustainability, and to avoid over-pumping along with its undesirable results (e.g., seawater intrusion, land subsidence). SGMA also requires the establishment of groundwater sustainability agencies (GSAs) to oversee development and implementation of GSPs, and provides authority to GSAs to sustainably manage groundwater. Local water authorities and counties have primary responsibility and authority with respect to the development and implementation of GSPs and GSAs; however, the State has authority to intervene if specific requirements are not met.

Implementation of SGMA will vary basin-by-basin, and will change over time as different components of the legislation come into effect. In addition, there are portions of the most recent California Water Bond (Proposition 1) that can likely be used to fund SGMA-related efforts. Availability of funding and financial resources of individual agencies will also impact the timeline of implementation for various SGMA-related efforts. Currently, there are no readily-available funding streams to assist agencies in becoming a GSA; however, as the process moves forward and GSAs are able to assess fees, additional resources may become available.

CASGEM Groundwater Basin Prioritization



SGMA Basin Prioritization is based on the CASGEM Basin Priorities

In summary, key Provisions of SGMA include the following:

- Requires formation of Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSAs)
- Mandates development and implementation of Groundwater Sustainability Plans (GSPs) for high- and medium-priority alluvial groundwater basins

- Authorizes management tools for local agencies, including the ability to curtail pumping and to assess fees
- Gives intervention authority to the State Water Resources Control Board (State Board) if certain provisions are not met
- Defines timeframes for accomplishing goals

Current Process: GSA Formation

Currently, many agencies are in the GSA formation process. Formation of GSAs must be complete by June 30, 2017. Becoming a GSA requires submitting notification materials to the California Department of Water Resources (DWR) that indicate an agency's intent to undertake groundwater management in a basin, sub-basin, or portion of a basin. Only agencies with water supply, water management, or land use responsibilities within a groundwater basin may be an exclusive GSA, and only exclusive GSAs can be approved by DWR and receive the authority to develop and implement a GSP to achieve basin sustainability. In other words, if there is overlap between GSAs, DWR approval of the GSA will be delayed until the overlap is resolved.

Key Deadlines for SGMA and Regulatory Intervention

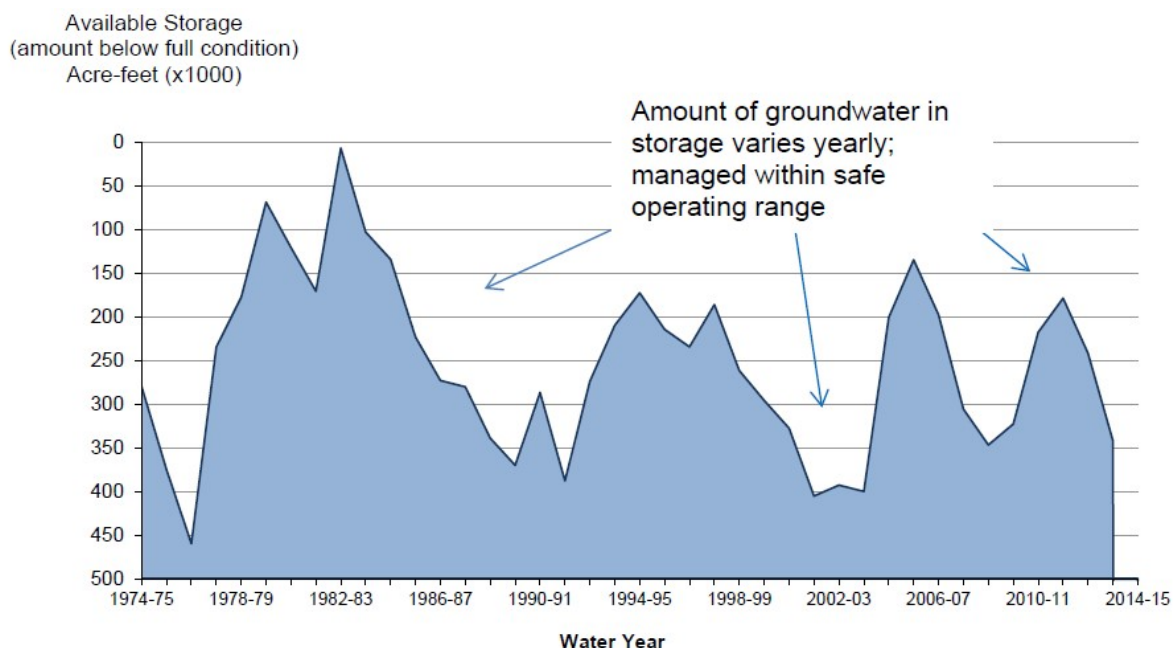
There are major deadlines associated with forming GSAs and GSPs. The State Board may intervene if local agencies do not create a GSA and/or adopt and implement an adequate GSP that meets the legislation's intent to bring the basin into and maintain groundwater sustainability and to avoid the undesirable results of overdraft within the SGMA timeframe.

SGMA Action	SGMA Deadline	Regulatory Intervention by State Board...
Formation of GSAs	June 30, 2017	...If GSA is not established
Completion of GSPs in critically over-drafted basins	January 31, 2020	...If there is no GSP or if GSP is deemed inadequate and basin is in long-term overdraft
Completion of GSPs in all other basins	January 31, 2022	...If there is no GSP or if GSP is deemed inadequate

SGMA in Orange County

The Orange County groundwater basin, designated a medium-priority basin under SGMA, has been managed by the Orange County Water District (OCWD) since 1933, and currently supplies approximately 70 percent of the water used by residents in the north and central parts of the county. Under SGMA, OCWD is designated the exclusive local agency for groundwater management within its statutory boundaries; however, the District must still comply with the planning requirements of

SGMA (i.e., prepare and implement a GSP). OCWD’s most recent update to its Groundwater Management Plan serves as an alternative to a GSP (an option allowed under SGMA), and was completed in 2015, ahead of the 2017 deadline. This plan includes substantive updates to specifically correlate long-term basin management sustainability objectives with SGMA requirements, including demonstration that the Orange County basin has been operated within its sustainable yield for a period of at least 10 years. Indeed, efforts to avoid overdraft of the basin began back in the early 1950s, when OCWD began purchasing imported water to recharge the basin to keep up with increasing water demands. The figure below shows how in the past 40 years, the basin has been managed so as to not allow the groundwater in storage to decrease to the level considered to result in permanent negative impacts; this level is defined as 500,000 acre-feet of available storage below the full condition.



Source: http://www.ocwd.com/media/3503/groundwatermanagementplan2015update_20150624.pdf

Additional agencies with groundwater management responsibilities in Orange County include the Irvine Ranch Water District, the County of Orange, and the City of La Habra. These agencies are currently pursuing a coordinated effort together with OCWD to comply with SGMA through an Alternate Plan for the Coastal Plain of Orange County Groundwater Basin.

GSA Resources

GSA Formation

Guidelines: http://www.water.ca.gov/groundwater/sgm/pdfs/GSA_Notification_Requirements_v2_2016-01-06.pdf

List of GSA Formation Notifications received by DWR:

http://www.water.ca.gov/groundwater/sgm/gsa_table.cfm#table

Sign-up for DWR's Sustainable Groundwater Management Mailing List:

<http://www.water.ca.gov/groundwater/sgm/subscribe.cfm>