

# **Santa Monica Groundwater Basin Public Outreach and Engagement Plan**



Prepared for

**Santa Monica Basin  
Groundwater Sustainability Agency**

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## **1.0 Background on the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act**

The Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA), signed into law by Governor Jerry Brown on September 16, 2014, created a new framework for groundwater management in California. The framework includes a structure and schedule to achieve sustainable groundwater management within 20 years. The California Department of Water Resources (DWR) has historically managed the state’s central repository for groundwater data. Under SGMA, DWR provides guidance, financial assistance, and technical support for compliance with state requirements. The State Water Resources Control Board provides the regulatory backstop under SGMA, taking over basin management and assessing fees if local groundwater management is not successful in complying with the requirements of SGMA.

SGMA established a new structure for local groundwater management through Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSAs). The formation of GSAs for all basins that DWR designated as high- and medium-priority groundwater basins was required by July 1, 2017. Each GSA for these high- and medium-priority basins must then develop a groundwater sustainability plan (GSP) that details how sustainable groundwater management will be achieved within 20 years of implementing the GSP. *Sustainable groundwater management* is defined by SGMA as “the management and use of groundwater in a manner that can be maintained during the planning and implementation horizon without causing undesirable results.” This avoidance of undesirable results is measured through six sustainability indicators:

1. Chronic lowering of groundwater levels indicating a significant and unreasonable depletion of supply if continued over the planning and implementation horizon,
2. Significant and unreasonable reduction of groundwater storage,
3. Significant and unreasonable seawater intrusion,
4. Significant and unreasonable degradation of water quality,
5. Significant and unreasonable land subsidence,
6. Depletion of interconnected surface water and groundwater that has significant and unreasonable adverse impacts on beneficial uses of the surface water.

The GSP is a tool used to help the GSA sustainably manage the basin. The criteria for sustainable management, including determining what is significant and unreasonable within the parameters of SGMA for the groundwater basin managed by that GSA, must be assessed, with input from stakeholders, before the GSP can be adopted.

## **2.0 SMGA Requirements for Public Outreach and Engagement**

Interested party engagement is an important component of any successful long-term planning effort and is required by SGMA and GSP regulations. Each GSA shall encourage and support active involvement of diverse social, cultural, and economic elements of the population within the groundwater basin. The GSA must also allow for voluntary participation by Native American Tribes and the federal government. The GSA must consider the interests of all beneficial uses and users of groundwater within the basin.

Engaging members of the public in groundwater sustainability planning can improve public understanding of the technical, financial and political considerations of the factors which go into a GSA's decision-making process. Participation by the public can also improve the GSA's understanding of the potential impacts of their decisions. SGMA recognized the importance of stakeholder engagement and laid out specific requirements for stakeholder engagement within each of the four phases of SGMA:

### **Phase 1: GSA Formation and Coordination**

- Establish and maintain a list of interested parties.
- Provide public notice of the GSA formation.
- Conduct a GSA formation public hearing.
- Notify DWR of the GSA formation.
- Provide a written statement to DWR as well as cities and counties within the GSA boundary describing how interested parties may participate in GSP development.

### **Phase 2: GSP Preparation and Submission**

- Submit initial notification to DWR.
- Prepare a GSP that considers beneficial uses and users of groundwater when describing undesirable results, minimum thresholds, projects, and actions.
- Ensure that the GSP includes a communication section that includes the following:
  - Explanation of the GSA's decision-making process.
  - List of public meetings at which the GSP was discussed.
  - Identification of opportunities for public engagement and a discussion of how public input and response will be used.
  - Description of how the GSA encourages the active involvement of diverse social, cultural, and economic elements of the population within the basin.
  - Description of how the GSA will inform the public about progress implementing the GSP, including the status of projects and actions.
- Public noticing and public meeting procedures prior to adopting, submitting, or amending a GSP.

### **Phase 3: GSP Review and Evaluation**

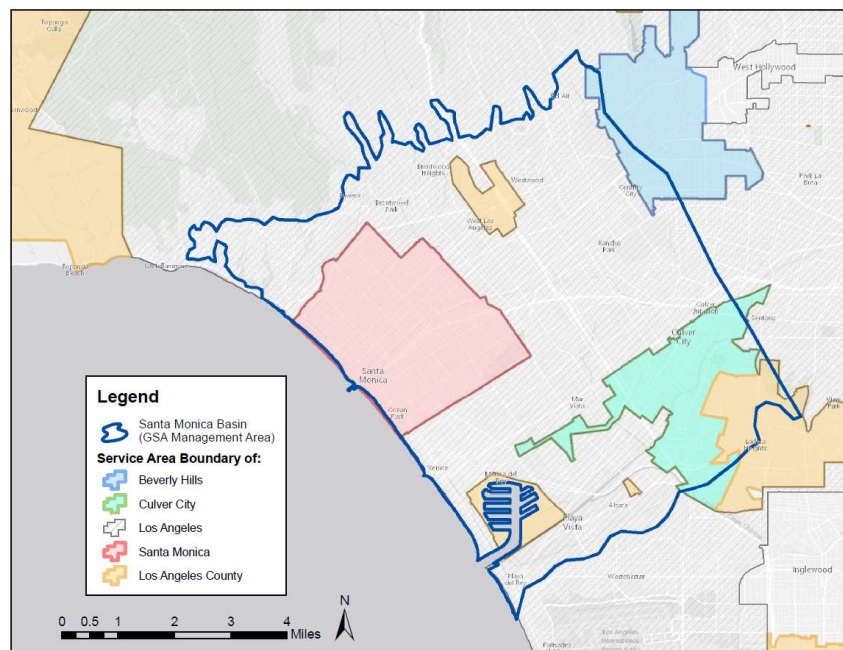
- Upon GSA approval of the GSP and submittal to DWR, the GSP will be available on the DWR website for a 60-day comment period. Any person may provide comments to the DWR on the GSP. DWR will consider the comments received prior to completing their evaluation and assessment of the GSP.

## Phase 4: Implementation and Reporting

- Ensure that the SGMA-required assessments and reevaluation of the GSP occur at least every five years, making sure to provide public notice and hold public meetings prior to amending the GSP.
- Provide the required public notice before imposing or increasing fees.

### 3.0 Santa Monica Groundwater Basin

The Santa Monica Basin, as described in DWR Bulletin 118, lies under 50.2 square miles of land in the northwestern part of the Coastal Plain of Los Angeles Groundwater Basin. It is located in western Los Angeles County. It is bounded by impermeable rocks of the Santa Monica Mountains on the north and by the Ballona escarpment on the south. The Basin extends from the Pacific Ocean on the west to the Inglewood fault on the east. Ballona Creek is the dominant hydrologic feature and drains surface waters to the Pacific Ocean. The main water-bearing formations of the Santa Monica Basin include the Ballona and Silverado aquifers underneath the clay-rich Bellflower aquiclude. The Lakewood Formation, which includes the Ballona Aquifer, is a significant aquifer formation within some areas of Los Angeles County and is present in the Arcadia and Olympic Subbasins in the northern half of the Santa Monica Basin. The Silverado Aquifer within the San Pedro Formation is the main potable production aquifer in the Santa Monica Basin.



#### **4.0 Santa Monica Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency**

The Santa Monica Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency (SMBGSA) was formed in 2017 in accordance with the California Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) of 2014. The five member agencies of the SMBGSA include the City of Santa Monica (City), the City of Beverly Hills, the City of Los Angeles, by and through its Department of Water and Power, the City of Culver City, and the County of Los Angeles. The five member agencies signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for the formation of the SMBGSA in May 2017. The First Amendment to this MOU was prepared in 2019 to document the selection of a GSP consultant, Dudek, and the revised cost-sharing agreement with the member agencies. The City and LADWP will share the costs for the GSP 50:50.

The SMBGSA is responsible for developing a groundwater sustainability plan (GSP) pursuant to SGMA, and the regulations issued in accordance therewith. This GSP will be the first comprehensive groundwater assessment and management plan specific to the Santa Monica Basin. As part of GSP development, SGMA requires the SMBGSA to understand the basin context, basin conditions, hydrogeological conceptual model, and the basin water budget, as well as provide a description of the sustainable management criteria for the basin, conduct stakeholder engagement, monitor network planning, and identify project and management plans.

The member agencies of the SMBGSA have designated the City as the coordinating entity for the SMBGSA due to the fact that the City is the sole extractor of groundwater in the basin for drinking water purposes and the City has prepared critical engineering documents for the management of the basin including a safe yield analysis. Staff recently updated the City's sustainable water master plan (SWMP) documenting the City's goal to achieve water self-sufficiency by 2023, which will lead to long-term cost benefits for ratepayers, establishment of a diverse and drought-resilient local water supply, and a reduction in the City's water supply energy footprint. Dudek will coordinate efforts with the SMBGSA to prepare and submit a final GSP by the regulatory deadline of January 31, 2022 for medium priority basins.

## 5.0 Public Outreach and Engagement Goals

Outreach and engagement for the SMBGSA began during the GSA formation process. Interested parties and groundwater pumpers within the Santa Monica Basin were contacted directly to attend an April 2017 public information session on the SMBGSA formation. The individual member agencies issued public notices on the intent to participate in the SMBGSA and held public meetings to receive comments in 2017. Further public notices were issued for the adoption of the First Amendment to the MOU in 2019 for the selection of the GSP contractor and cost allocation.

Quarterly GSP public workshops will be held starting on December 19, 2019 to engage the public and interact with the consultant and SMBGSA member agencies. The meeting locations, agenda, and minutes will be posted on the SMBGSP website:

<https://www.santamonica.gov/gsp>

The SMBGSA goal is to build and maintain a collaborative and inclusive process for interested party engagement and GSP development and to consider the interests of diverse social, cultural and economic elements of the population with the Santa Monica Basin during the development of the GSP. This includes the interests of all beneficial uses and users of groundwater. Collaborative and inclusive processes will assist in making the GSP more resilient by increasing public buy-in, promoting compliance, and enhancing the quality of information on which the GSP is based. The SMBGSA has established an open and ongoing list of interested persons to whom notices will be sent regarding meetings of the GSP development. This approach will increase the success of the GSP by fostering early public participation, development of stakeholder supported management strategies, and enhancing the data quality and basis of GSP development.

Specifically, the SMBGSA will implement the following tiered outreach strategy to actively engage a diverse group of stakeholders in the development of the GSP:

1. Facilitate engagement of a diverse group of stakeholders in the development of the GSP through the SMBGSA,

2. Provide regular updates on GSP development progress via quarterly public workshops and website,
3. Build and maintain a website where stakeholders can obtain SMBGSA information, ask questions, and provide comments,
4. Hold quarterly public workshops where members of the public can ask questions and provide comments.

This four-tiered engagement strategy is designed to give a diverse group of stakeholders multiple forums in which to participate, as appropriate, based on their level of interest, availability, and communication style. The SMBGSA will continuously evaluate stakeholder outreach and engagement goals. They may be adjusted as needed throughout the GSP development and implementation process. The roles and responsibilities of SMBGSA interested parties include attend quarterly public workshops, read updates on website, review technical information, collaborate with other interested parties, provide feedback to the SMBGSA, and provide input on the draft and final GSP.

## **6.0 Contact Us**

To receive and be informed on the most current information for the SMBGSA and GSP development, subscribe to the e-mail distribution list and review the SMBGSA website for new documents. Send an e-mail to Dr. Lisette Gold at [lisette.gold@smgov.net](mailto:lisette.gold@smgov.net). to subscribe.