

Meeting Summary

Santa Rosa Plain Groundwater Public Workshop

December 9, 6 – 8 p.m.

Finley Community Center, Santa Rosa

WELCOME

Santa Rosa Mayor John Sawyer welcomed the crowd of about 100 people to the meeting at the city's Finley Center. The mayor noted the importance of this meeting and thanked people for coming out. Sonoma County Supervisor Shirlee Zane extended her welcome and discussed the importance of groundwater management. Supervisor Zane acknowledged the current Santa Rosa Plain Groundwater Basin Advisory Panel and asked the audience to raise hands if they were well owners, farmers, environmental representatives or business owners.

PRESENTATIONS (please see pdf of the presentations for additional detail)

- Facilitator Gina Bartlett from the Consensus Building Institute outlined the purpose and structure of the workshop, noting that additional workshops were held in Petaluma Valley and Sonoma Valley.
- Sonoma County Water Agency Chief Engineer and Director of Groundwater Management Jay Jasperse reviewed the new Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA), noting that it affects three groundwater basins in Sonoma County: Petaluma Valley, Sonoma Valley and Santa Rosa Plain. The first step in SGMA is the creation of Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSAs) to manage groundwater programs in the affected basins. The workshop provided information on the Santa Rosa Plain Basin, on the requirements of SGMA, on GSA options and on opportunities for the public to access additional information.
- Marcus Trotta, hydrogeologist, Sonoma County Water Agency, described the Santa Rosa Plain groundwater basin and the existing voluntary Santa Rosa Plain Groundwater Management Program, noting that there are about 12,000 wells in the basin, with about half serving domestic purposes. The basin has complex geology and highly variable groundwater conditions. There is a small imbalance in the groundwater system, estimated at about 3,300 acre feet of water per year not being replenished. This is a relatively small percent of the overall water budget, and management activities are important to avoid potential negative impacts in the future.
- Rocky Vogler, Senior Water Resources Planner, City of Santa Rosa, described the countywide effort to comply with SGMA through development of principles, presentations to councils/boards and creation of a countywide staff working group to discuss groundwater options.
- Ann DuBay, Community & Government Affairs Manager, Sonoma County Water Agency, described the public outreach efforts underway to inform people about SGMA and GSA formation.
- Gina Bartlett discussed the Consensus Building Institute's impartial stakeholder assessment and described the local public agency staff's recommendation of a "skeleton" Groundwater Sustainability Agency structure that includes one GSA and one Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) in each of the three basins, with some coordination between the basins.

SUMMARY OF QUESTIONS/COMMENTS

About SGMA

Questions were raised regarding SGMA, regulatory authority, land-use authority, how SGMA deals with surface water flow and the length of time allowed for implementation of SGMA.

Staff response:

- SGMA is a regulatory law that is designed for local control. The GSA would likely develop a mix of solutions to reach basin sustainability, with regulations as a backstop.
- SGMA does NOT give the GSAs land-use authority. This is reserved for cities and counties. But, local agencies are very involved in SGMA implementation and committed to the coordination of land use and water supply planning. The general plans of local agencies must be reviewed by the state to ensure sustainability and, in the future, general plans will be required to be consistent with GSPs.
- The state is assessing how SGMA will address surface water flow as a measure of sustainability.
- SGMA requires that the basin reach sustainability by 2042 although this goal could be reached sooner.

Santa Rosa Plain Basin Boundaries

There were several questions regarding the boundaries of the basin, including whether the Wilson Grove formation is affected by SGMA; whether upper Mark West Creek is included in the basin; whether the basin boundaries can be redrawn; and how people can determine whether they are in or out of the boundaries.

Staff response:

- The basin boundaries, as the state defines them in Bulletin 118, don't currently include the Wilson Grove or upper Mark West Creek watersheds. The state will allow for changes to basin boundaries for (1) technical reasons or (2) jurisdictional reasons. The state requires collaboration and consensus to redraw the boundaries, and at this point it is unclear whether local jurisdictions will ask for basin boundary changes in certain areas.
- The maps that California Department of Water Resources will publish are much more clearly defined than the maps provided at the meeting, which should help people determine whether they are in or out of basins. The DWR maps are still being tested, but people can go to <http://www.water.ca.gov/groundwater/sgm/bbat.cfm> and click on Boundary Assessment Tool to open a GIS link that provides a close-up look at basin boundaries. Alternatively, people can search for "DWR basin planning tool." Because the layer lacks road/street information, it can be difficult to determine exact boundary borders.

Areas outside of Basin Boundaries

People asked several questions regarding protection of recharge areas that are outside the current basin boundaries, including whether SGMA gives authority to GSAs to protect recharge areas and whether there is funding to protect recharge areas.

Staff response: The existing Santa Rosa Plain Study identified recharge areas, and local authorities currently have the ability to protect these areas. SGMA allows for coordination of water resources and land use. SGMA doesn't specifically provide funding for protection of recharge areas, but this is something that a GSA could do.

Mutual Water Systems

Representatives of mutual water systems expressed concern regarding their inclusion in the basin and wanted to know how they could influence decision-making.

Staff response: Representatives of mutual water systems are invited to attend a meeting on January 20th at the Sonoma County Water Agency. Please contact Ann DuBay, ann.dubay@scwa.ca.gov for more information.

GSA Formation Recommendation

Staff asked the public for comments/input regarding proposed GSA structure.

Public response:

- Would like to see a GSA in each of the three basins, with Basin Advisory Panels and the GSAs sharing technical expertise and communicating regularly.
- Need to make sure that the three GSAs coordinate, through some kind of entity that can independently access plans.
- Would like to see the work of the existing Basin Advisory Panels continue in some form.
- Need to consider whether a higher-quality product would come from a centralized effort (one GSA for all three basins).
- Concern expressed regarding duplication of effort and expense if there are three GSAs. Concern was also expressed regarding the representation of the three GSAs at the state level (in competition with other basins for resources).
- Need to ensure that environmental uses of water are represented.
- Fishery agencies (CDFW and NMFS) should be involved in the GSA to avoid undesirable impacts on streamflow and vulnerable creeks. (Staff noted that SGMA requires metrics on undesirable impacts, including reduction of stream flows.)
- There should be land-use representation on each GSA, including from the county and PRMD.
- Water quality representation is important, including the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board.
- Would like the schedule of GSA formation and GSP creation to be sped-up.

Other

Questions were asked regarding whether staff had hope for the basin.

Staff response: Local agencies and stakeholders in the Santa Rosa Plain have demonstrated an ongoing ability to work together well through the completion of a Groundwater Study and Groundwater Management Plan. Since this work will provide a strong basis from which to develop the GSP, it puts the Santa Rosa Plain in a favorable position relative to many other groundwater basins across the State. There are many reasons for optimism.