

Meeting Summary

Sonoma Valley Groundwater Workshop

Thursday, November 12, 2015
Sonoma Veterans Memorial Hall

WELCOME

Sonoma County Supervisor Susan Gorin welcomed people to the workshop. She noted that the purpose of the workshop is to provide information on the new Sustainable Groundwater Management Act, to provide an opportunity for people to ask questions and for elected officials to hear people's thoughts and concerns.

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 are being held in Petaluma Valley and Santa Rosa Plain.
- 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. Tonight's workshop is focused on GSA options.
- Marcus Trotta, hydrogeologist, Sonoma County Water Agency, described the Sonoma Valley groundwater basin and the existing voluntary Sonoma Valley Groundwater Management Program, noting that there are a couple of local areas of declining groundwater levels and some salinity issues in the southern part of the valley which an existing group of local stakeholders are working on better characterizing and developing solutions to address.
- Tito Sasaki, representing North Bay Water District, described this agricultural district, which currently represents landowners in southern Petaluma and Sonoma and Napa valleys. He noted that NBWD is working with LAFCO to expand its boundaries to include additional agriculture lands in the valleys.
- Jay Jasperse 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 in the three basins, with some coordination between the basins.

SUMMARY OF QUESTIONS/COMMENTS

Sonoma Basin:

Will the boundaries of the basin be clearly defined as to who is in and who is out?

STAFF RESPONSE: Yes, the basins will be clearly defined. Staff in all three basins are reviewing Department of Water Resource's basin boundary regulations and assessing whether to recommend any basin boundary modifications.

Concerns were raised regarding the fact that the Sonoma Valley basin, as defined by California Department of Water Resources, doesn't include the entire watershed. People are wondering how recharge will occur and sustainable management is possible for the DWR-defined basin.

STAFF RESPONSE: Staff acknowledged that achieving sustainability could be challenging without considering the upper areas of the watershed. But DWR is very clear that they won't consider basin boundary adjustments to include areas of fractured volcanic rocks, which encompass much of the upper areas of the Sonoma Valley watershed. Staff noted that even though the SGMA basin might not include the upper areas, the GSA could conduct voluntary monitoring and implement projects in these areas. Additionally, the County could decide to adopt regulations or ordinances throughout the watershed that complement the future GSA's goal of sustainable groundwater management.

Shouldn't we be trying to recharge as much water as possible? What is happening with recharge project in Sonoma?

STAFF RESPONSE: Yes, recharge is critical and it's one of the strategies in the Sonoma Valley Groundwater Management Plan. We need to manage for a sustainable basin, and that could include using groundwater when it's plentiful and Russian River water when it's plentiful to let groundwater recharge. The Water Agency and City of Sonoma are planning for a pilot project to recharge a city well, which should start in 2016. Capturing stormwater and maximizing use of recycled water will help recharge the aquifer, too.

SGMA:

What does SGMA mean to private property rights?

STAFF RESPONSE: The legislation states that SGMA is not an infringement of property rights, but it does allow for management of groundwater. This could include monitoring and possibly restricting water pumped in some areas. The Groundwater Sustainability Plan that will be developed as part of SGMA will develop specific measures to ensure sustainability. This may or may not include limits on pumping.

Water Sources/Problems:

There were comments about water as a public resource and questions regarding the role of new development and wineries?

STAFF RESPONSE: The County General Plan has a Water Resource element that incorporates design features that reduce water use in new developments and that encourage water to infiltrate. The County also reviews winery applications and can set conditions regarding water use. Currently, wells for vineyards are administered through PRMD and are not subject to conditions beyond construction standards.

GSA Formation:

There were several questions regarding staffing and budgeting, including whether new staff will be needed, and estimates of costs.

STAFF RESPONSE: We are at the very beginning of this process, but are starting to develop draft budget estimates. Currently, Sonoma Valley and Santa Rosa Plain current groundwater efforts are staffed by two hydrogeologists, a part time facilitator and a part time consultant, but the new law requires a much more quantitative approach, so staffing needs will likely be different.

There were several questions regarding GSA structure, including who decides the structure, representation of rural landowners and HOAs that have water companies, and treatment of the existing Basin Advisory Panel.

STAFF RESPONSE:

- The elected boards and councils of Sonoma County Water Agency, County of Sonoma County, City of Sonoma, Valley of the Moon Water District and North Bay Water District will ultimately decide the structure of the GSA and representation.
- It is likely that stakeholders will be represented through something similar to the Basin Advisory Panel, as this is a principle for GSA formation agreed to by all GSA-eligible agencies... Rural landowners, environmental interests, etc could all be part of the advisory board.

Several people commented that the GSA be as local as possible (representing Sonoma Valley interests). Concern was raised regarding possible competition between the three basins.

STAFF RESPONSE: Staff noted that they were recommending coordination between the basins for things like grant applications and data management, to reduce competition and to increase efficiencies.