

# Sonoma Valley Groundwater Sustainability Agency Community Meeting Summary

March 29, 2022

## 1. Meeting Agenda and Purpose

Tim Parker, Facilitator, opened the meeting announcing the purpose of the gathering was two-fold: 1) introduce the Sonoma Valley Groundwater Sustainability Plan, and 2) receive feedback on the rate and fee study options. Parker then gave a brief overview of the agenda.

## 2. Welcome and Background

Ann DuBay, Sonoma Valley GSA Administrator, read welcoming remarks by Chair Susan Gorin, who was delayed because of a family obligation. (Chair Gorin welcomed the group later during the meeting). DuBay thanked everyone for joining and said that groundwater is a critical water source for Sonoma Valley and the only drinking water source for thousands of people in the valley.

In 2014, the state of California passed the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA), a statewide framework to help protect groundwater resources over the long-term. There are three basins in Sonoma County that need to comply with SGMA: Santa Rosa Plain, Petaluma Valley and Sonoma Valley, all of which must be managed locally. The Groundwater Sustainability Agencies were created in 2017.

Local management is currently identifying, monitoring, and fixing existing groundwater problems that are caused by pumping groundwater. An example of what this means, can be found in the Drought Emergency Executive Order that was issued by Governor Newsom on Monday, March 28. Order Number 9 of that emergency order requires the Groundwater Sustainability Agency to provide written approval for nearly all larger well permit applications. Effective immediately, county permitting must get the agreement from the GSA before a well permit can be issued for any wells, except public water supply wells and residential wells that pump less than two acre-feet annually.

The county, cities, towns, and special districts have supported the GSA for the first five years. In total, local agencies have paid more than \$1.7 million to support the GSA, and this has been matched by state grants and technical assistance of about \$2.2 million.

Today, we will discuss the options being considered to pay for running the Agency and implementing the Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP).

## 3. Groundwater Basin Conditions, Projects, and Budget

Marcus Trotta, Sonoma Water Principal Hydrogeologist, shared information regarding the GSP, which is available online. The GSP was adopted in December 2021, following more than 50 public meetings and input from the GSA Board and a diverse, stakeholder-based Advisory Committee.

Section 3 of the Plan describes the status of six key sustainability indicators:

1. Groundwater Quality – Highly variable throughout the Sonoma Valley subbasin, but generally acceptable for most beneficial uses. Measured by looking at three different constituents of concern that are either naturally occurring or the result of human activities: arsenic, nitrates, and salts.
2. Land Surface Subsidence – No evidence of inelastic land subsidence due to groundwater pumping.
3. Interconnected Surface Water – Data is limited on the effect of groundwater pumping on stream flows, it will be important to gain more information as we move forward.
4. Seawater Intrusion – We also have limited information regarding how and if sea water is migrating inland into the basin from the Baylands area.
5. Groundwater Storage – On average, in recent years, the amount of groundwater that's stored in the basin has been declining an average of an estimated 300 to 900 acre-feet per year.
6. Groundwater Levels – Modeling indicates that groundwater in storage in the shallow aquifer in most areas of the subbasin are quite stable. On the other hand, in the deep aquifer system, groundwater levels have shown long term declines over a couple of decades in a few areas.

Section 4 of the Plan sets thresholds and objectives for each of the six key sustainability indicators.

Section 6 includes projects and actions needed to address current and future problems such as water use efficiency and alternative water source projects for rural resident, commercial and industrial users, and agriculture. Other projects and actions include aquifer storage and recovery (ASR), storm water capture and on-farm capture and low-impact development, and policy options including discretionary review of well permits, Farm Plan Coordination, and well metering for non-residential pumpers.

#### 4. Fee and Rate Study Update and Next Steps

Jerry Bradshaw, SCI Consulting Group, gave an update on funding sources, groundwater pumping data, costs, and preliminary options and rates associated with the options.

Funding sources are broken down into three groups: 1) grants from the state, 2) GSA members (water agencies, cities, and towns), and 3) groundwater users (directly benefiting from pumping and/or spreading costs across all properties).

##### *Rate classes include:*

Municipal and other public service providers

Agriculture and other irrigation

Rural residential

Commercial

Urban wells

##### *Rate category breakdown:*

Municipal and other public systems (approximately 16% of water pumped)

Ag, turf (approximately 67% of water pumped)

Rural residential (approximately 13% of water pumped)

Commercial and Urban irrigation (approximately 4% of water pumped)

The fee based on groundwater pumped is calculated by dividing the average annual cost of implementing the GSP by the average annual amount of groundwater pumped in the basin. If the budget assumes that the GSA will receive grant funding, the fee would be \$95 per acre foot of groundwater pumped. If it's assumed that no grant funding is received, the fee would be \$160 per acre-foot. The fee study assumes that rural residents (with no commercial water use) use 0.5 acre-feet of water annually. So, rural residents would pay \$48-\$80 annually.

Alternative funding options include:

- A wellhead fee, which would be between \$220 to \$370 per parcel annually, and has the disadvantage of not distinguishing between commercial wells and residential wells;
- A parcel tax, which would be levied on all parcels in the basin (not just groundwater users). The parcel tax would be \$50-90 per parcel, but is required to be placed on the ballot and receive 2/3 voter approval;
- A benefit assessment approach, which would be a \$70 to \$115 per acre-foot fee on all property owners in the basin, based on the benefit received from groundwater as a resource.

Next steps include discussing community feedback with the GSA Board in April and asking the Board to narrow the available options; one additional community meeting; a meeting with the Advisory Committee; and potentially approving rates and fee in May or June.

## 5. Closing Remarks

Susan Gorin, Chair thanked everyone for joining. If you are interested in reading the GSP which has been submitted to the state, it is on our website. We look forward to seeing you in May.

For more information on the GSA and its Groundwater Sustainability Plan required by the Sustainable Management Groundwater Act, please visit <https://sonomavalleygroundwater.org/>.

For more information on the Sonoma Valley Groundwater Sustainability Plan, please visit <https://sonomavalleygroundwater.org/gsp/>.

Attachments:

1. Questions and Answers
2. List of Attendees

# Sonoma Valley 03.29.22 Community Meeting

## Questions and Answers

1. Richard Idell

How many people are attending this webinar?

It looks like a little over 50 are currently logged in.

2. Charles Williamson

Can you please direct me to an accounting for the \$3.9 MM expended thus far? Good to know how the funds were expended before going forward with new fees.

The budgets and audits are available on the GSA website, at

<https://sonomavalleygroundwater.org/finances/>.

3. Beth Bruzzone

Will all of Sonoma County have GSA's?

There are 13 groundwater basins in Sonoma County. They don't cover all the county area. Only basins that are considered medium-, high- or critically over-drafted are currently subject to SGMA and have GSAs. California Department of Water Resources reviews basins every few years to determine if conditions have changed.

4. Chris Galapp

Does the Santa Rosa Basin have a similar plan?

Yes, the Santa Rosa Plain groundwater sustainability plan can be found at

<https://santarosaplaingroundwater.org/gsp/>.

5. Melanie Saweliew

Will graywater systems and composting toilets be considered for county and state approval/regulation as part of the efficiency plans?

Yes, we haven't fully scoped out all the different types of water conservation. The county has some information on the types of programs we plan to do. The GSA plans to do a study of what types of conservation and water use efficiency would be most effective within the basin in terms of existing groundwater uses, and what types of incentives would give the biggest "bang for the buck" and likely be the most implementable. The county has not permitted the installation and use of composting toilets, we are in discussions.

6. Beth Bruzzone

Will springs be part of the monitoring program, those that are tanked or collected, or is there another program to monitor surface water collection?

We don't currently have springs within the monitoring program, but that is something that could be considered going forward.

7. Chris Galapp

Thank you-- will there be a similar presentation for the Santa Rosa basin? This is very helpful.

The Santa Rosa Plain meeting was last week. I'm sorry you didn't hear about it! The materials are posted here: <https://santarosaplainingroundwater.org/meeting/rate-and-fee-study-community-meeting/>.

8. Chris Gralapp

I am in Bennett Valley, and wells are going dry here – I am deeply interested in how to preserve our ground water – I also want to know about aquifers, how they recharge, and how they relate to surface water and rainfall.

The Bennett Valley area is part of the Santa Rosa Plain basin. There is a LOT of information in Section 3 of the Groundwater Sustainability Plan, and in some of the appendices for that section.

9. Fred Allebach

How many acre feet per year could voluntary conservation save?

It would depend upon how extensive it's rolled out and utilized by the community. The Plan did look at some different levels of conservation to estimate that figure and I believe for the purposes of the GSP we assume that we could achieve a 20% reduction in rural domestic water use and a 10% reduction in consumptive use for agriculture; that resulted in a total savings of about 650 acre-feet per year.

10. Charles Williamson

Are the El Verano and SE Sonoma groundwater depressions for the deep aquifer the result of commercial and residential withdrawal or are there other variables that contribute?

There is a combination of different types of uses. Both of those areas have high concentrations of rural residential wells, there are commercial uses, particularly on the southeast of the city. In both areas there's quite a bit of agricultural irrigation, as well as golf course irrigation in the El Verano area.

11. Devon Wright

Do we intend to mandate or incentivize water tracking like flow meters or smart irrigation controllers on wells or irrigation systems? to help water metering? or to help residents & farmers manager their water better?

Good question! The GSA Board will discuss mandating or incentivizing flow meters, etc. This is a policy and budget decision that they will consider.

12. Kristin Thigpen

Are the unincorporated County properties or Ag and Open Space properties being considered for recharge opportunities?

Yes, that is something that has been looked at. The GSA also has been speaking with county parks to see what types of projects and water saving opportunities may exist there. When analyzing potential superficial recharge using local surface water, the Plan primarily looked at agricultural lands that are near streams. The GSA as well as Sonoma Water has also been in discussions with Open Space for oppportunities. The geology in the basin is complex and there is lots of clay; finding the right locations for recharge is a challenge.

13. Charles Wixson

Is the state offering monetary support to assist in carrying out some of the projects to improve sustainability, or just demanding that we take care of ourselves? Second question: having seen thousands if not tens of thousands of vineyards be planted south and east of the town of Sonoma, it's not surprising to me that this area is in poor condition. Does the county have any plans to limit vineyard planning in this area? I am watching as a vanity vineyard is being planted on three acres next door right now.

The GSA has already received \$2 million in grant funding from the state to develop a plan, as well as construct some monitoring wells within the basin and do some other activities to close some of our data gaps. There are additional funding opportunities coming up through the sustainable groundwater management program from the state of California that we're looking at for helping to fund some of the implementation costs. The GSA Board is considering as to what level they should make assumptions for incorporating grant funding into their future budgets. In addition to those direct funding applications from the sustainable groundwater management program at the state, there are also other opportunities for funding from the state through the drought relief funding; I mentioned the funding that the Valley of the Moon Water District recently received for their aquifer storage and recovery program. We are focused on leveraging the maximum monetary support possible.

14. Linda Hale

Two questions: How will development in Sonoma Valley affect land use patterns and water resources? The proposed development of the SDC comes to mind. How will the 20-year drought predicted for Sonoma Valley affect wells? We have been part of the well monitoring and this the first time that our well reading decreased. What are the criteria for permitting new wells under the current moratorium just announced by Governor Newsom?

The Groundwater Sustainability Plan includes a computer water budget that accounts for future development and climate change. As noted, without projects and management actions, groundwater levels will continue to decline, and storage will be lost. The Governor's drought proclamation requires the GSA to approve all well permits (except residential wells and public water supply wells). The GSA has already been communicating with Permit Sonoma about this and will be discussing with the Board and Advisory Committee at upcoming meetings.

15. Mark Jonas

What is the age of groundwater in the deep aquifer?

There have been some studies on water samples from wells and the deep aquifer system. The age of groundwater can be thousands of years old; it gives an indication that the deep aquifer can take a long time to recharge directly.

16. Brad Kurtz

Is there somewhere to find a more detailed map of the basin? It appears we are near the border and it is difficult to tell.

You can enter your address into the basin map tool on the website, but it's not super detailed. The GSA is working to get a much more detailed map published. We hope to have it live in May.

17. Charles Williamson

"What is the proposed residential monitoring program? Will it remain a volunteer basis?"

Our existing groundwater level monitoring program has been in place for over 10 years now.

Prior to the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act in this groundwater basin, Sonoma Water and other local agencies helped fund a study by the US geological survey and a voluntary groundwater management plan; they laid a lot of the groundwork which was included in the Groundwater Sustainability Plan, including a voluntary groundwater level monitoring program which has included up to about 100 private wells. That program is being transitioned to the GSA and we're in the process of refining it while looking for other opportunities to expand. There'll be more information forthcoming.

18. Devon Wright

If a company that provides smart valves + flow meters wanted to be considered as an approved vendor for these kinds of incentives, who would be the best contact to speak with?

There is a contact us link on the website that you can use -- we will be sure to get the information to Marcus Trotta.

19. Devon Wright

Is this slide deck available anywhere?

It will be posted on the website, here: <https://sonomavalleygroundwater.org/meeting/rate-and-fee-study-community-meeting/>.

20. Devon Wright

(Full disclosure, I'm building a company in this space. and would love to help in any way I can to provide visibility & control to our county)

Thank you!

21. Mark Jonas

Does the plan include injection of POTW discharge water into the Deeper Aquifer treated to a lesser quality for agriculture specific use?

Not currently. We are only considering using drinking water, via the Sonoma Aqueduct.

22. Claudia Lewis

With respect to vineyards, how many gallons a day does a 50-acre vineyard require? How much is 30 acre-feet per year in gallons per day?

30 acre -feet is about 27,000 gallons a day.

23. Fred Allebach

If rural residential uses an average of .5 acre-feet per year (AFY), why does SGMA allow two AFY de minimis? To save groundwater, why not have de minimis be .5 AFY?

The de minimis standard is included in the legislation and was likely a negotiated number and probably reflects the varied water use throughout the state.

24. Mark Jonas

Does the pumping estimate include winery processing, which can use more water than just by using just crop type for your estimate?

Yes, for some wineries which are also considered public water supply system this is reported to the state and used directly. For others, the assumptions for use based on County estimates found here are included <https://permitsonoma.org/policiesandprocedures/8-2-1watersupplyuseandconservationassessmentguidelines>.

25. Beth Bruzzone

Please explain more about how the acre-feet per application is determined. My pastureland uses markedly less water than indicated. The formula mentioned is out of sync with what most beef cattle ranchers operate.

The value for pastureland was based on a study done by the UC Cooperative Extension for the Santa Rosa Plain GSA in 2019 - see Appendix 7 of this report.

[http://santarosaplaingroundwater.org/wp-content/uploads/06.13.2019\\_Santa-Rosa-Plain-GSA-Rate-Study-Report-June-11-2019.2\\_ada-2.pdf](http://santarosaplaingroundwater.org/wp-content/uploads/06.13.2019_Santa-Rosa-Plain-GSA-Rate-Study-Report-June-11-2019.2_ada-2.pdf).

26. Linda Hale

How long would a fee be assessed?

The fee would probably go on in some form for as long as the Groundwater Sustainability Agency needs to function, I don't think we have an end in sight on that. The fee that we're looking at right now, would be for a five-year duration. At the end of the five years the agency would take another look at what its next five-year budget looks like. Costs could go up or down and fees would be adjusted accordingly.

27. Charles Williamson

Compliments on a well-crafted, clear explanation of the basis for the fees. As a residential owner of numerous wells, I applaud the effort to achieve a better understanding of the groundwater basin and management of the resource. A residential fee of approximately \$100 is reasonable in my view. I would encourage more data on groundwater level monitoring in more wells to improve the groundwater model and an approval of multi years for fees rather than annually.

Thank you for attending and the nice comment. We appreciate your suggestion regarding monitoring and implementing the fee on a multi-year basis.

28. Beth Bruzzone

Will there be credits for ground water recharge and a credit to those of us that do not benefit from the Warm Spring Dam project, but have been paying for the project on our property tax bills?

Regarding the Warm Springs Dam charge, even those of us who live outside of cities benefit from Lake Sonoma, in terms of fewer floods, a stronger economy and -- best of all -- more resilient groundwater basins. Without Lake Sonoma, the cities and towns would be pumping a LOT more groundwater! There are models that could be considered, for landowners to receive a credit.

29. Steve Rogers

How do you get a copy of the presentation?

The presentation will be posted on the GSA website at:

<https://sonomavalleygroundwater.org/meeting/rate-and-fee-study-community-meeting/>.

30. Charles Wixson

If fees are based on acre-feet, is that based on your estimated usage, or does it require metering?

85% of all groundwater pumping is estimated since we don't have actual pumping data and we aren't likely to get it. At this point, no one's suggesting we meter all the wells because that's a huge endeavor and would take a long time and be expensive. The model is intended to be a tool for how to spread the costs as equitably as possible. There will likely be a process for one to appeal the estimate if actual data is different.

31. Charles Wixson

Has cloud seeding ever been considered to help with ground water?

I don't think it has been considered in our area, but it has been attempted in other basins in the state. It is not included in our Implementation Plan of the GSP at this point.

32. Chris Galapp

Was the Santa Rosa Plain event recorded? May I view it?

Send me an email at [ann.dubay@scwa.ca.gov](mailto:ann.dubay@scwa.ca.gov) and I'll send you a link.

33. John O'Connor

Any ideas for surface storage? How many creeks serve Sonoma Creek, e.g.?

Capture of surface water in storage and in ponds, is one of the methods used for irrigation, so that can help reduce the need for groundwater pumping.

34. Bernita McTernan

If I understood the voting percent, how was 63% weight for ag vote determined?

Benefit assessments are a quirky voting method as set up in the state Constitution. For example, a 50-acre vineyard has more voting power than a 100-acre pasture. In aggregate, 63% of all the groundwater in the basin is agricultural, but it's on a vote-by-vote basis so, it's the ag users who are using the most water, that would have more voting power.

35. Arlene Dixon

In calculating Rural Residential Fees is parcel size and persons living on the parcel a factor in the calculation?

Yes, the calculation does vary based on the number of residences on a single parcel.

36. Vickie Mulas

Is there consideration for the benefit municipalities receive by not having to use their emergency wells, thanks to well owners paying for the warm springs project, without benefit of water themselves?

In terms of the municipalities in the Sonoma Valley, Valley of the Moon Water District and the City of Sonoma have access to groundwater through their well fields and imported Russian River water. During years where there is less Russian river water available and they are utilizing their well fields, having something that accounts for those uses, could be considered as part of the fee study.

37. Fred Allebach

The GSP says that rural residential groundwater use is @ 28% of basin groundwater use, Jerry Bradshaw said it is 13%, why the discrepancy?

We will have to look at this and get back to you.

38. Beth Bruzzone

Thank you for answering all my questions.

You're welcome! Thank you for hanging in here for a long meeting.

# Sonoma Valley 03.29.22 Community Meeting

## Attendee List

### Panelists/Staff

Sonoma County Supervisor and GSA Board Chair, Susan Gorin  
Andrea Rodriguez  
Ann DuBay  
Jay Jasperse  
Jerry Bradshaw - SCI Consulting  
Juan Mora  
Marcus Trotta  
Ryan Aston  
Tim Parker  
Valerie Flores - SCI Consulting

### Attendees

Alan Freeman  
Alexis Ramey  
Andy Rodgers  
Arlene Dixon  
Bernita McTernan  
**Beth Bruzzone (Alternate, GSA Board)**  
Bob Anderson  
Brad Kurtz  
Brian Kearney  
Cathy Capriola  
Charles Williamson  
Charles Wixson  
Chase Hunter  
Chere Secrist  
Chris Gralapp  
Chris McNairy  
Claudia Lewis  
Cynthia Deleon  
David Herrema  
David Morrison  
DC Juricich  
Devon Wright  
Don Tiefenbrunn  
Dorena Martinelli  
Douglas Thornley  
Emilia Wisniewski  
Frank Windes  
**Fred Allebach (Chair, GSA Advisory Committee)**  
Gayle Schildt  
George McKinney  
Glenda Klaucke  
**Greg Carr (GSA Advisory Committee)**  
**Jane Whitsett (GSA Advisory Committee)**

Jean Savala  
Joey Giordano  
John Gurney  
John O'Connor  
Joshua Britton  
Judith Marshall  
**Ken Johnson (GSA Advisory Committee)**  
Kristin Thigpen  
Linda Hale  
Lisa Mertens  
Lois Abbott  
Mark Jonas  
Maud Hallin  
Melanie Saweliew  
**Michael Sangiacomo (GSA Board)**  
Monica Simmons  
Nancy Lilly  
Nancy Russell  
Nell Praetzel  
**Norman Gilroy (GSA Advisory Committee)**  
Pat Stornetta  
**Attendees Cont.**  
Pat Young  
Patricia Poncia  
Richard Idell  
Robert Chaber  
Rue Furch  
Scott Miller  
**Steve Rogers (GSA Board)**  
Steven Lee  
Tobi Brown  
**Vickie Mulas (GSA Board)**  
Zoe Anne Brandberg