



SANTA ROSA PLAIN • PETALUMA VALLEY • SONOMA VALLEY

## GROUNDWATER SUSTAINABILITY AGENCIES

### PRESS RELEASE

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### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## Groundwater Sustainability Fees Approved in Three Local Basins

**Santa Rosa, CA**— Groundwater Sustainability Fees were recently unanimously approved by the boards of the Petaluma Valley, Santa Rosa Plain and Sonoma Valley groundwater sustainability agencies (GSAs). The annual fees will pay for programs, projects and policy actions to ensure that groundwater in the three basins is available into the future.

A contribution from Sonoma County will allow non-municipal groundwater users to pay a fee that will be the same in all three basins: \$40 per acre foot of groundwater pumped annually (an acre foot equals approximately 326,000 gallons). For rural residents, who use wells for a single home, garden and landscaping, the fee will be \$20 annually. Without the county contribution, which was approved during recent budget hearings, ratepayers in Sonoma Valley would have paid \$73 per acre foot of groundwater pumped annually and in Petaluma Valley, \$147 per acre foot. The Santa Rosa Plain fee of \$40 per acre foot was not affected by the county contribution.

“I am thankful that the Board of Supervisors supported my request to provide two-year funding for the Petaluma Valley and Sonoma Valley GSAs. The county contribution will allow the fee level to be the same in the three Sonoma County GSAs and will avoid penalizing people who happen to live in the two smaller basins,” said Sonoma County Supervisor David Rabbitt, who chairs the Petaluma Valley GSA.

The fees are needed to allow the GSAs to implement recently adopted Groundwater Sustainability Plans. These state-mandated plans were developed for each of the three basins. The plans must be fully implemented in 20 years to prevent or correct declining groundwater levels and to avoid other problems related to over pumping, including land subsidence, seawater intrusion, losses in groundwater storage, declining water quality and impacts on surface water.

“While no one is excited about paying fees, the funds collected will be invested in applying for grants and planning projects and programs that benefit the basin stakeholders and avoid problems that would be much more expensive to fix in the future,” said Cotati Vice-Mayor Susan Harvey, who chairs the Santa Rosa Plain GSA.

“In Sonoma Valley, the fees will be critical to help pay for programs and projects needed to reverse declining groundwater levels and to provide matching funds for state grants,” said Sonoma County Supervisor Susan Gorin, who is the chair of the Sonoma Valley GSA.

The fees apply to groundwater users whose property lies within one of the three basins, including rural residents, agriculture, businesses, golf courses, mutual water companies, schools, churches, parks and other groundwater users. Cities and water districts will pay fees, and urban water users will not be directly charged.

The fees are based on rate and fee studies that were conducted in each of the basins. The studies began in fall 2021 and identified multiple funding options, including charges on parcels, wells, and groundwater use. Input was received through a series of 15 meetings with the GSA Boards, nine meetings with stakeholder-based Advisory Committees and eight community meetings.

The fees are based on the annual amount of groundwater used per parcel, measured in acre feet (one acre-foot is equal to 325,851 gallons). Cities, water districts and other public water suppliers report groundwater usage to the state, and the fees charged to these entities will be based on reported use. All other groundwater users will pay fees on estimated annual groundwater usage, based on land use designation, crop mapping, assessor use codes and studies, reports and surveys. To calculate the annual amount to be paid, the estimated use is multiplied by the fee rate.

For example, rural residents are estimated to use 0.5 acre feet of groundwater annually in their home and for gardening and landscaping, which is multiplied by the rate (\$40 per acre foot) for an annual fee of \$20. Vineyards are estimated to use 0.6 acre fee per each acre of vines, so a grape grower with 10 acres of irrigated vines would pay  $0.6 \times 10 \times \$40 = \$240$  annually. Additional examples and groundwater extraction estimates can be found in the rate and fee studies, at the web locations below.

In addition to the adoption of the fee resolutions and fee studies, the Boards adopted groundwater user ordinances that include a groundwater user registration program. The Groundwater User Information Data Exchange (GUIDE) has been implemented in Santa Rosa Plain (which adopted its original ordinance in 2019) and will be rolled out in the other basins in August and September. Finally, the Boards authorized agreements with the Sonoma County Assessor’s Office that will allow the fees to be collected on the annual property tax bills.

<https://petalumavalleygroundwater.org/fee/>  
<https://sonomavalleygroundwater.org/fee/>  
<https://santarosaplaingroundwater.org/finances/fee/>

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