

**Appendix 1-E**  
**Community Engagement Plan for Development and**  
**Adoption of a Groundwater Sustainability Plan**  
**Sonoma Valley Groundwater Sustainability Agency**

# Community Engagement Plan

for Development and Adoption of a Groundwater Sustainability Plan

Sonoma Valley Groundwater Sustainability Agency

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## Purpose, Outcomes & Goals

The purpose of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA), signed by Governor Brown in 2014, is to ensure local sustainable groundwater management in medium- and high-priority groundwater basins statewide. **California's Department of Water Resources has determined that Sonoma County has three medium priority basins that are subject to SGMA Implementation:**

- Petaluma Valley basin
- Santa Rosa Plain subbasin
- Sonoma Valley subbasin

This draft Community Engagement Plan applies only to the Sonoma Valley Groundwater Sustainability Agency, although many outreach activities will be coordinated with the other basins.

**SGMA Milestones:** The Sonoma Valley basin achieved the first milestone in SGMA by creating a Groundwater Sustainability Agency (GSA) by June 30, 2017. The second major milestone in the SGMA is the adoption of a Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) by January 30, 2022. The GSP is prescribed by SGMA and contains required elements. The third milestone is achieving sustainability by 2042.

Several key steps must be taken to ensure that Milestone Two (adoption of the GSP) is achieved, including:

- Adoption and implementation of a financing plan that will allow the Sonoma Valley GSA to be financially independent;
- Development, drafting and vetting of specific elements within the GSP;
- Compilation, vetting and final drafting of the GSP as a whole.

**Outcomes:** The desired outcome for this communication and outreach plan is to achieve GSP adoption with input from and in consideration of Sonoma County's diverse people, economy and ecosystems. As the GSA gets closer to completion of the GSP, a new community engagement plan will be developed to address implementation issues.

**Plan Goals:** SGMA requires the GSA to consider the interests of all beneficial uses and users of groundwater, and encourage involvement of diverse social, cultural, and economic elements of the population within the Basin during GSP preparation and implementation.

The goals of the Community Engagement Plan are to:

- Enhance understanding and inform the public about water and groundwater resources in the Sonoma Valley and the purpose and need for the GSP.

- Engage a diverse group of interested parties and stakeholders and promote informed community feedback throughout the GSP preparation and implementation process.
- Coordinate communication and involvement between the GSA (Board, Advisory Committee and staff), and other local agencies (including other GSAs), elected and appointed officials, and the general public.
- Utilize the GSA Advisory Committee to facilitate a comprehensive public engagement process.
- Employ a variety of outreach methods that make public participation easy and accessible. Hold meetings at times and venues that encourage broad participation.
- Respond to public concerns and provide accurate and up-to-date information.
- Manage the community engagement program in a manner that provides maximum value to the public and an efficient use of GSA and local agency resources.

**Time Period:** The Plan is intended to cover communication and outreach for January 2018-January 2022, when the GSP is due to be submitted to California Department of Water Resources. Because this is a multi-year project and plan, the key activities needed to achieve these goals will be broken down into annual work plans.

**Interested Parties and other stakeholders:** SGMA lists interested parties who the GSA must consider when developing and implementing the GSP, including:

- Agricultural users of water
- Domestic well owners
- Municipal well operators
- Public water systems
- Land use planning agencies
- Environmental users of groundwater
- Surface water users
- The federal government
- California Native American tribes
- Disadvantaged communities (including those served by private domestic wells or small community water systems).

See Appendix A for a list of the interested parties in Sonoma Valley. Representatives of most of the interested parties are included on the GSA Board or Advisory Committee.

Other stakeholders can also be impacted by decisions made by the GSA, including businesses, schools, land stewardship organizations, and state government agencies. See Appendix B for a listing of additional stakeholders that will be considered during development of the GSP.

## **Outreach Roles**

The **GSA Board**, which is comprised of elected and appointed officials, will make the ultimate decision on financing options and on the GSP. As required by the Joint Powers Authority agreement that created the GSA, the Board will consider the recommendations of the Advisory Committee.

With regards to outreach, the Board is responsible for:

- Adopting and overseeing implementation of the Community Engagement Plan;
- Receiving public comments made in writing, and verbally at Board meetings and public hearings;
- Considering the recommendations of the Advisory Committee.

In addition, the Board may choose to play a more active role in outreach through communication with the public, stakeholder groups, and the entities it represents.

The **Advisory Committee**, which is comprised of members appointed by the GSA Board and entities that comprise the GSA, will become familiar with financing options and issues related to the GSP. The Advisory Committee is charged with actively engaging with the public for input and feedback. This charge will be carried out through various mediums and a variety of activities, but generally includes:

- Advising staff in the drafting of the Community Engagement Plan;
- Actively seeking input from the represented stakeholder groups on issues before the GSA;
- Sharing input and feedback with the full Advisory Committee meeting; and
- Making recommendations to the Board.

The Sonoma Valley GSA Board, the Sonoma Valley GSA Advisory Committee, and staff are committed to keeping the **public informed**, providing the public with **balanced and objective information** to assist the public in understanding SGMA, available options and recommendations, and creating an open process for public input on the development and implementation of the GSP. When evaluating the options and making decisions, the Board, Advisory Committee and staff will **solicit public input** through a variety of methods, including public workshops, written and verbal comments, meetings with stakeholder organizations and community events (see Attachment A for Year One examples). Input can be made during public comment periods at Advisory Committee and Board meetings, and in writing. Comments made in writing can be submitted to [dmuelrath@vomwd.org](mailto:dmuelrath@vomwd.org)

True engagement requires policymakers and the public to not only talk, but to also listen. The Sonoma Valley GSA asks all participants – whatever their role – to follow these rules of engagement:

- Be a good listener. Listen to what is being said, find out why it is being said.
- Be respectful to all participants.

## **Community Engagement Plan**

To truly engage the public in development of a GSP that is science-based, complex and technical, the GSA will strive to meet these overall objectives:

- Educate the public in compelling ways. Communicate what may often be complex concepts in simple and compelling ways with graphics and examples.
- Manage expectations. Avoid “anything goes” meetings that might pursue unrealistic and unpractical approaches.

- Show how the input received has been incorporated into the plan or process. Demonstrating to the public how their ideas have been reflected in the plan or planning process is an important piece to the puzzle.
- Remain focused on results. Understand objectives of each public meeting and facilitate the achievement of those objectives.

The Community Engagement Plan is comprised of two categories of activities: ongoing and project- or program-specific.

**Ongoing activities** are the “housekeeping” tasks of the GSA outreach, including website maintenance and updates, monthly blogs to the interested parties list, updating fact sheets and FAQs, posting Board and AC meetings and materials, and issuing press releases about meetings.

**Project or program-specific engagement activities** are developed to meet the outreach goals of each project or program.

**In Year One (July 1, 2017- June 30, 2018)**, the GSA Board must hire legal counsel (completed); hire rate/fee consultants (completed); apply for Proposition 1 GSP funding grant (underway); adopt various documents including bylaws and a Community Engagement Plan; initiate the first steps in developing the GSP; determine whether to request basin boundary modifications; and determine a short-term mechanism for funding the GSA. The initiation of the GSP and the rate/fee study are projects that require robust community engagement, using the tools described in the Communication Forums and Tools section, below. Attachment A provides a detailed table of Year One engagement activities, including timeframes and key roles.

**In Years Two through Five (July 1, 2018-January 31, 2022)**, program specific engagement activities will be focused on development of GSP plan elements. The GSP will be prepared iteratively and in a logical progression, building on previously developed technical and policy information. Throughout the process of preparing the GSP, background materials along with draft text, figures and tables for each section will be provided to the GSA member agency staff, Advisory Committee, the GSA Board and the public in advance of meetings for input and comment. The Advisory Committee, public and Board will have opportunities to comment on each element before the element is ultimately adopted by the Board.

It is anticipated that the GSP will be developed in six phases:

1. Preparation and submittal of initial notification of GSP preparation (Year One)
2. Definition of plan area and basin setting (Year Two)
3. Development of sustainable management criteria, including the sustainability goal, undesirable results, minimum thresholds, measurable objectives, and interim milestones. (Years Two and Three)
4. Design of monitoring program and data management system. (Year Three)
5. Identification and evaluation of proposed projects and management actions (Years Four and Five)
6. Development of GSP implementation costs, detailed schedule, and reporting (Year Five)

Each phase requires robust outreach with the goal of educating and engaging the General public, stakeholders, the Advisory Committee and Board on the technical and policy aspects of

the GSP plan elements. Each phase will include a mix of communication tools, to be used in a variety of forums. Public hearings will be held at the end of each phase.

Every March, staff will work with the Advisory Committee to develop an Activities Plan for the upcoming fiscal year (beginning on July 1), incorporating tools and techniques that worked well in previous years and modifying or eliminating tools that failed to engage people.

## **Communication Forums & Tools**

**Governance Agencies Briefings:** Board members will brief their councils or boards regularly on GSA activities and will work with GSA staff to provide additional briefings on sensitive or important topics.

In Year One, the goal is to brief member agencies about the initiation of the GSP and the rate/fee study in January and about proposed rate/fee options in April. The purpose of the briefings is to inform boards and councils about the purpose of the GSP and the rate/fee study; the necessity and timing of the rate/fee study; and to get feedback on proposed rate/fee options.

**Stakeholder Briefings:** Advisory Committee members will meet with and communicate regularly with organizations comprised of the stakeholder groups they represent. To avoid overlap and mixed messages, all briefings will be coordinated with outreach staff. Many stakeholder groups were interviewed in 2015, during SGMA initial stakeholder outreach. The Stakeholder Assessment can be found online at [www.sonomacountygroundwater.org](http://www.sonomacountygroundwater.org).

### **Engaging Disadvantaged Communities – Community Events and Existing Venues**

Disadvantaged communities (DACs) are specifically called out in SGMA as an interested party. Eighty-one percent of the area in the Sonoma Valley Basin is designated an Economically Distressed Area, and eight percent of the area in the Basin (Temelec, Agua Caliente and The Springs areas) is categorized as a Disadvantaged Community. A large percent of the people living in the DAC areas of Sonoma Valley are Spanish speaking, and many are relatively recent immigrants.

Previous assessments of engaging Sonoma County’s Spanish speaking community recommend using “food, faith and festivals” as opportunities to educate and interact with people on critical issues. Connecting with communities through existing organizations, like La Luz, and through community events, churches and schools, provides an opportunity share information and solicit feedback on rate/fee options and GSP elements.

### **Public Meetings/Hearing**

Public meetings or hearings are formal opportunities for people to provide official comments on programs, plans and proposals. SGMA requires that a public meeting be held prior to the adoption of a fee and public hearings for the adoptions of GSP elements and the final plan. There are also constitutional requirements for public hearings for some fee/rate options. Public meetings and hearings are an important forum for people to share viewpoints and concerns, but often occur at the end of a process, when only one option is under consideration. The GSA will

hold required public meetings and hearings but will also use less formal public workshops (described below) to solicit feedback and information early in the process.

### **Public Workshops**

Public educational workshops provide less formal, opportunities for people to learn about groundwater, SGMA, financing options, and GSP elements. Workshops can be organized in a variety of ways, including open houses, world cafes and traditional presentations with facilitated question and answer sessions. In order to solicit feedback from people who may not be comfortable speaking in public, workshops can include small group breakout discussions, “dot” voting, comment cards and other techniques. Whatever format of workshop is used, it will be designed to maximize opportunities for public input.

A workshop will be held in the spring of Year One (2018) to describe and solicit feedback on fee/rate options. Workshops will also be held as GSP elements are being developed.

### **Public Notices**

In addition to the public notice required for fee adoption, SGMA requires that prior to initiating the development of a GSP, the GSA must provide a written statement describing the manner in which interested parties may participate in the development and implementation of the GSP. The statement must be provided to all the cities within the basin and to the County of Sonoma. As outlined in this Community Engagement Plan, there will be a variety of opportunities for people to participate in the development and implementation of the GSP, including workshops, public hearings, providing comments at Board and Advisory Committee meetings and through written comments. In early 2018, staff and legal counsel will develop a written statement for public participation.

### **Specific tools will be used to inform and engage people, including:**

#### **Interested Persons List**

SGMA mandates the creation of an interested persons list. SGMA does not specify the type of list (email versus hard copy). The first preference is an email list, to get information out quickly and to reduce costs. A secondary list will be developed for people who don't use email. Board members and the agencies they represent, Advisory Committee members and staff can contribute names of organizations, agencies, and individuals to the list. Whenever new inquiries are made they will be added to the list. The Sonoma Groundwater Basin Advisory Panel lists will also be utilized.

The list is broad and includes anyone who would like to stay informed about SGMA activities and anyone the Board and Advisory Committee thinks should be informed about GSP process and the outcome of the planning effort. Outreach staff will send out monthly updates to the Interested Persons list. This list will also be used for dissemination of information on public workshops, public meetings, etc.

## **Informational Materials**

Developing a variety of informational materials is critical to successful education and necessary to circulate consistent, accurate information. Outreach staff, with the input of the administrator, plan manager and the Advisory Committee, will develop a range of materials, including at least the following:

### *Periodic Updates*

- **Talking Points:** Clear, concise messages to be used by Board and Advisory Committee members and staff when communicating with media, organizations and stakeholders.
- **Milestone Fact Sheets:** For initiating the GSP, the rate/fee study and completion of elements of the GSP.
- **Newsletter Articles:** A short paragraph (50-100 words) that Advisory Committee members can insert into organizational newsletters. These brief articles can also be published in the Sonoma County Water Agency's e-newsletter, which has a broad distribution.
- **Newspaper editorials:** Authored by Outreach staff and Board or Advisory Committee (after review and approval of the full Advisory Committee) members for submittal to local news sources.
- **Briefing Packets:** For milestone briefings to the public and stakeholders. Packets will include standard talking points, PowerPoint presentations, and other materials to assist in educational outreach and for soliciting feedback.

### *Background/Baseline Information*

- **General Fact Sheet:** A general Fact Sheet describing the GSA governance structure.
- **Basin Conditions:** Very brief description of the Sonoma Valley basin (one page, two sides).
- **Existing Educational Materials:** Such as the Sonoma Valley Groundwater fact sheets and primers.

## **Website**

The project website, [www.sonomacountygroundwater.org](http://www.sonomacountygroundwater.org), will be a tool for distributing and archiving meeting and communication materials as well as a repository for any studies. Outreach staff anticipates updating the website monthly, and more often if needed. The website includes the following information:

- Home page: summary and "what's new" information
- Groundwater basics
- Sonoma Valley Information:
  - Board members, meeting schedule, agendas, and meeting materials.
  - Advisory Committee members, meeting schedule, agendas, and meeting materials

## **Social Media**

Existing Facebook, Twitter, Next Door and other emerging social media technologies will be leveraged to provide updates on milestone progress to interested parties.



**Media Plan**

Outreach staff will work with the administrator to develop press releases at each milestone and for meetings. The press releases will be distributed to local and regional media and Legislative and Congressional representatives. In addition, whenever possible, staff will work with KSVY to film meetings, to ensure the greatest number of people can view the meetings.