



What is the Ag Offset Ordinance?

The Ag Offset Ordinance, Section 22.30.204 of the County Code, requires new and expanded irrigated crop production overlying the Paso Robles Groundwater Basin (Paso Basin) (excluding the Atascadero Sub-basin) to obtain clearance from the Department of Planning and Building, verifying that water demand for the proposed irrigated crop production is equal to or less than the crop production it is replacing, such that an offset at a 1:1 ratio is achieved, based on standardized, crop-specific applied water duty factors.

How does the Ag Offset Ordinance relate to the Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP)?

The GSP will establish a new set of management actions for the Paso Basin implemented by the Groundwater Sustainability Agencies, rather than by the Department of Planning and Building, which will replace the Ag Offset Ordinance.

What are the proposed amendments to the Ag Offset Ordinance?

On June 18, 2019, the Board directed staff to amend the Ag Offset Ordinance in two phases.

Phase I:

- Extend the expiration date 5 years.
The current ordinance expires when the Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) for the Paso Basin is adopted, which is scheduled for January 2020. This amendment keeps the Ag Offset Ordinance in place during the “gap” between GSP adoption and when management actions are implemented. The general schedule for GSP activities anticipates a start-up phase of 5 years to establish the necessary management actions.

- Include a process to issue water duty factors for unlisted crops.
This amendment establishes a 3-way review process with the Department of Agriculture/Weights and Measures, the Department of Planning and Building, and the Department of Public Works for issuing water duty factors for crops not listed in the ordinance.

- Outline a methodology for determining historic on-site water use.
This amendment clarifies which type of data needs to be provided as sufficient evidence of existing crop production on-site.

Ag Offset Amendments Fact Sheet

- Include a water duty factor for hemp.
The water duty factor for outdoor CBD hemp grown over the Paso Basin is listed as 1.5 af/ac/yr based on a study by the University of California San Luis Obispo County Cooperative Extension.
- Eliminate off-site offsets.
This amendment removes the option to transfer of water credits between properties within the Paso Basin.

Phase II:

- Expand the definition of de minimus to 25 af/ac/yr of water demand.
The current ordinance allows de minimus plantings of up to 5 af/ac/yr of water demand. Expanding this amount will require CEQA review.
- Re-evaluate the 5 year look-back period.
The current ordinance evaluates existing crop production based on what has been growing during the 5 years preceding the application date. The Board directed staff to expand this look-back period beyond 5 years, which will require CEQA review.

What is the timeline for the Ag Offset Ordinance amendments?

Phase I:

September 12, 2019 - Planning Commission

November 5, 2019 - Board of Supervisors

Phase II:

TBD based on CEQA review.

Where do I find more information?

Visit www.slocountywwcp.org/prgwb-new-ag.

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