



Atascadero Groundwater Basin

SGMA Frequently Asked Questions

What is SGMA?

The [Sustainable Groundwater Management Act](#) (SGMA) established a new structure for managing California's groundwater resources at a local level by local agencies. By June 30, 2017, SGMA requires the formation of locally controlled Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSAs) to manage groundwater resources. A GSA is responsible for developing and implementing a Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) to establish and meet the sustainability goals of the basin and ensure that it is operated within its long-term sustainable yield.

Who is subject to SGMA regulations?

Property owners that overlie a medium or high priority groundwater basin as defined in the California Department of Water Resources' (DWR) Bulletin 118 report are subject to the new SGMA regulations and must be part of a GSA.

If a GSA is not formed over portions of a basin by June 30, 2017, then the State Water Resources Control Board has the authority to take over management of the basin.

What is a basin?

The DWR defines a groundwater basin as an alluvial aquifer (water-bearing rocks or sediments) with reasonably well-defined boundaries in a lateral direction (the sides) and a definable bottom. Lateral boundaries are physical geologic features that significantly impede groundwater flow, such as bedrock or a fault. The definable bottom of the aquifer is typically bedrock. Large groundwater basins are often subdivided into smaller units called "subbasins" based on geologic barriers (such as faults), hydrologic features (such as rivers or ridges), or institutional boundaries (such as counties).

What does it mean for a basin to be sustainable?

"Sustainability" generally means the management and use of groundwater in a basin that can be maintained without causing undesirable results such as:

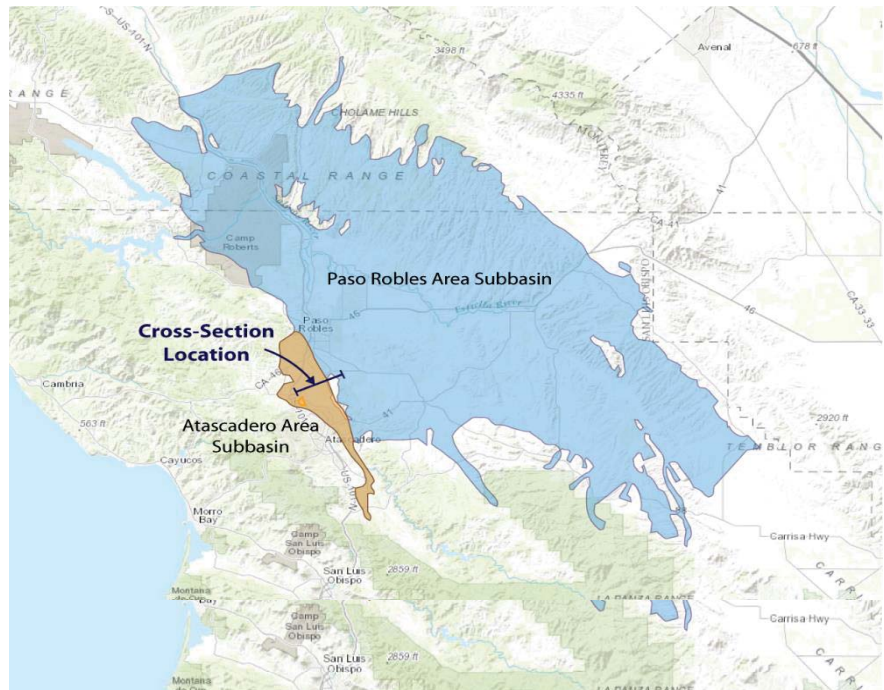
- Chronic lowering of groundwater levels (long-term overdraft)
- Significant reductions in groundwater storage
- Seawater intrusion
- Degradation of groundwater quality
- Land subsidence
- Depletion surface water

What is a GSA versus a GSP?

A Groundwater Sustainability Agency (GSA) refers to a local agency, or combination of local agencies, overlying a groundwater basin that is responsible for achieving groundwater sustainability. A Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) is developed by a GSA to establish sustainability goals and management strategies for achieving groundwater sustainability.

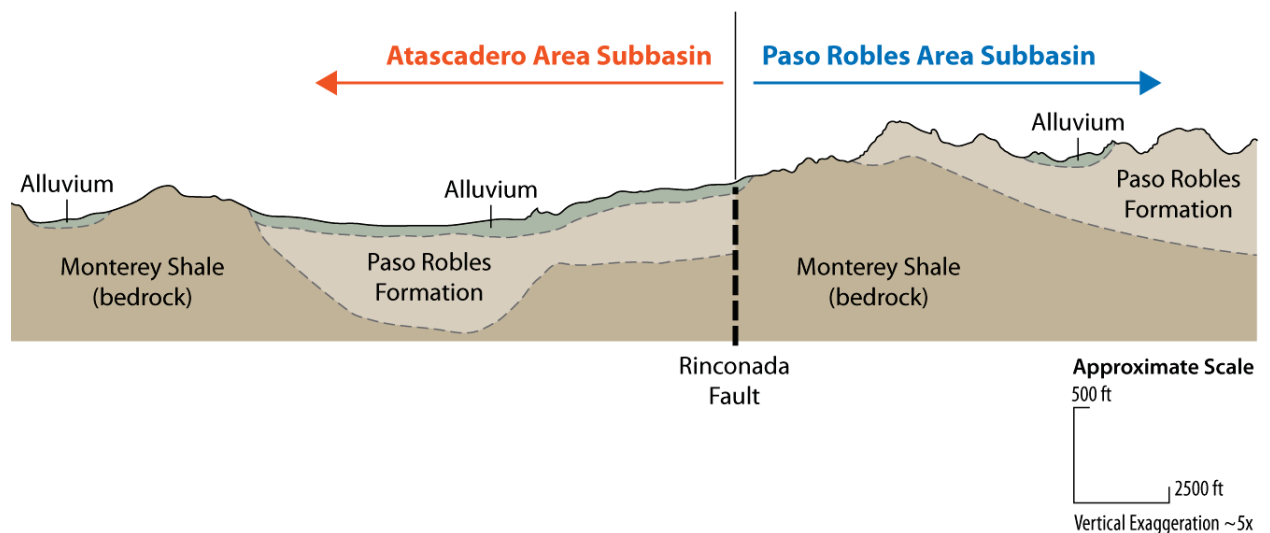
What is the Atascadero Area Subbasin?

The California Department of Water Resources (DWR) defines the extent of groundwater basins in Bulletin 118, which DWR can modify when new scientific information is available to define them. The Atascadero Area Subbasin was subdivided from the Paso Robles Area Subbasin in 2016 based on information that showed the Rinconada Fault is a significant barrier to groundwater flow. The figure shows the extent of Atascadero Area Subbasin



Newly-Defined Atascadero Area Subbasin

and the Paso Robles Area Subbasin. The Paso Robles Formation makes up most of the water-bearing sediments for both subbasins and the lateral (outer) extents are primarily defined by the contact with the Monterey Shale (bedrock). The boundary between the Paso Robles Subbasin and the Atascadero Subbasin is defined by the Rinconada Fault (see the cross-section).



What is the difference between Paso Robles Formation and Paso Robles Basin?

Paso Robles Formation. The geologic formation made up of the gravel, sand, silt, and clay that holds the groundwater that may be extracted by a well in and around the Paso Robles area.

Paso Robles Basin (a.k.a. Paso Robles Area Subbasin). This is the groundwater basin as defined by DWR's Bulletin 118. Its lateral extent can be shown on a map and includes the land areas overlying the groundwater basin. Land (and wells) within these boundaries are subject to SGMA.

What is a de minimis user?

A "de minimis" user is a person who extracts 2 acre-feet per year or less of groundwater for domestic purposes. These users are subject to SGMA, but it is up to the GSAs to decide how they are incorporated into a GSA and how their use is addressed in a GSP. GSAs cannot require de minimis users to be metered.

What is the difference between surface water and groundwater

Surface waters generally refer to waters falling upon and naturally spreading over lands in streams, lakes, and ponds. The water may come from seasonal rain, melting snow, swamps or springs, or from a combination of these sources. Under California water rights law, surface water also includes "subterranean streams," which is the water contained in the sediments near a stream or lake.

Groundwater (referred to as "*percolating groundwater*" in water rights law) is water contained in rocks or sediments not flowing in a known and definite channel (i.e., "subterranean streams"). Percolating groundwater is generally considered disconnected from a surface water body. Groundwater is stored in and seeps through the cracks and spaces in soil, sediment, and rock. It is typically extracted using pumps installed in a groundwater well.

Several recent studies have confirmed, the Atascadero Basin is hydrogeologically distinct from the Paso Basin.

The San Luis Obispo County Board of Supervisors has distinguished the Atascadero Basin in its Resource Capacity Study¹ and excluded the Atascadero Basin from the urgency ordinance it adopted in August 2013.

The Atascadero Basin is defined as the area west of the Rinconada Fault. The Fault forms a barrier between the percolating waters of the Atascadero Basin and the Paso Robles Basin by juxtaposing less permeable Monterey Formation rocks with Paso Robles Formation sediments. Water moves across the fault in the shallow, alluvial deposits of the Salinas River.

¹Paso Robles Groundwater Basin Resource Capacity Study, 2011:
<http://www.slocounty.ca.gov/Assets/PL/PR+Groundwater/rcs.pdf>

For further information, please visit

<http://www.atascaderobasin.com>