

# SECURING SUSTAINABLE GROUNDWATER

in the SLO Basin



A QUARTERLY UPDATE OF THE SLO BASIN GROUNDWATER SUSTAINABILITY PLAN DEVELOPMENT  
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## Building a Sustainable Groundwater Future in the SLO Basin

During a normal year, nearly 40 percent of California's agricultural and urban water demand is met by the use of groundwater, which has resulted in declining groundwater levels in some groundwater basins throughout California. In an effort to ensure the sustainable use of California's groundwater and a water-secure future for the State, the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) was signed into law in 2014. The California Department of Water Resources (DWR) prioritized 515 groundwater basins in California into one of four categories; high, medium, low or very low priority based on a set of criteria.

SGMA is a State law that requires local governments and water agencies that overlie high and medium priority basins to form Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSAs) for the purpose of sustainably managing the groundwater basins. Locally, the San Luis Obispo Valley Groundwater Basin (SLO Basin) has been identified as a high priority basin by the State. Therefore, to meet SGMA requirements, the County of San Luis Obispo (County) and the City of San Luis Obispo (City) each formed a GSA. These two GSAs are the governmental entities tasked with developing and implementing the SLO Basin's Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP).

Although the GSAs were formed by the two local public agencies, representatives of the Golden State Water Company, Edna Ranch Mutual Water Company, Varian Ranch Mutual Water Company, and Edna Valley

Growers Mutual Water Company were engaged in developing a governance structure. In addition to the formation of the two GSAs, a Groundwater Sustainability Commission (GSC) — an advisory body to the GSAs — was established through a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the GSAs and the above participating parties, and the terms under which the City GSA and County GSA will jointly develop a single GSP in coordination with the GSC.

GSP development recently began and will continue through January 2022. All interested stakeholders and members of the public are encouraged to participate to help guide the GSP development process. Visit [SLOWaterBasin.com](http://SLOWaterBasin.com) for details on how you can participate in this important process.

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### Why am I receiving this?

- » You live or work in the SLO Basin
- » You may be affected by the SLO Basin's groundwater use
- » You subscribed to receive updates about SGMA or GSP development

Through the duration of the SLO Basin GSP development, this newsletter will be distributed quarterly to all subscribers of the [SLOWaterBasin.com](http://SLOWaterBasin.com) Portal and made available at GSC meetings and stakeholder workshops. To stop receiving these newsletters, go to [SLOWaterBasin.com](http://SLOWaterBasin.com), scroll to the bottom of the page and click "unsubscribe."



## April 10, 2019 GSC Meeting Summary

On April 9, 2019 the County Board of Supervisors approved a contract with Water System Consulting (WSC) to develop a GSP for the SLO Basin. Following this selection, the GSC held a kick-off meeting on April 10, 2019 to initiate the development of a GSP.

### SGMA Efforts to Date

At this meeting, the GSC received a summary update of SGMA efforts in the SLO Basin, including the formation of the City and County GSAs and the development of the GSC structure. Some salient points discussed were:

1. The GSC is made up of representatives from the GSAs and participating partners that act as an advisory body to the GSAs regarding the development of a GSP.
2. The GSP must be completed by January 31, 2022 and be compliant with the Final GSP Emergency Regulations approved by the California Water Commission.
3. The GSP must outline a clear, scientifically supported and sustainable path to address declining groundwater conditions and other undesirable results within the SLO Basin.

### Stakeholder Involvement

The participation of stakeholders plays an important role in the GSP development. Rather than establishing a Stakeholder Advisory Committee (SAC) to oversee stakeholder engagement, the GSC approved an alternative approach based on recommendations from a SAC formation working group. Quarterly GSC meetings and stakeholder workshops will be used as an open forum for all interested stakeholders to participate. The GSC believe this approach will be more effective and inclusive than the use of a SAC.

### GSP Timeline and Team

WSC provided an overview of the GSP development process, responsibilities of each team

*April 10 GSC Meeting Summary, continued*

member and a timeline. WSC has partnered with GSI Water Solutions, Inc. (GSI), Cleath-Harris Geologists, (CHG), GEI Consultants Inc. (GEI), and Stillwater Sciences (Stillwater) to bring

the right combination of technical and stakeholder facilitation expertise to develop a compliant and defensible GSP that will deliver the greatest value to the SLO Basin partners.

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## June 12, 2019 GSC Meeting Summary

### Groundwater Communication Portal Preview

The Groundwater Communication Portal (Portal) at SLOWaterBasin.com was previewed by the consulting team. The Portal will be the online communication hub for public participation in the GSP development process, including reviewing and submitting public comments on GSP chapters/sections.

The best way to stay apprised of project news and opportunities to participate and engage is to register on the Portal as an “interested party.” Go to SLOWaterBasin.com and click on “Register as Interested Party.” Once registered, you will receive email updates regarding upcoming opportunities to participate in GSC meetings, workshops and/or to provide public comments on draft documents. All draft chapters/sections of the GSP and other informational materials will be posted to the Portal. Interested parties can provide their input to the document, and all comments will also be posted for viewing.

### Communication and Engagement Plan Draft

SGMA requires GSAs to develop a Communication and Engagement Plan (C&E Plan) outlining how they will consider the diverse perspectives of affected stakeholders and groundwater users in the GSP development process. The consulting team presented a draft C&E Plan and explained how public GSC meetings, workshops, and the Portal will be used to engage interested parties. The C&E Plan is now available for comment on the Portal. The comment period will close on August 31, 2019.

### Integrated Groundwater/Surface Water Flow Model

The consulting team evaluated and considered four integrated groundwater-surface water flow models based on a set of selection criteria and selected the United States Geological Survey’s GSFLOW as the most appropriate flow model for the SLO Basin. A model is a tool that can be used to estimate how potential changes in climate, projects, and/or management actions may impact the basin’s surface water and groundwater conditions.

# Project Milestones and Opportunities to Participate

The GSP will be developed in phases through the end of 2021 to meet the required completion deadline of January 31, 2022. There will be ample opportunity for the public to participate in the plan development process, including participation in quarterly public GSC meetings, interactive workshops, and review and comment for each GSP chapter/section.



## Workshop #1: SGMA and Groundwater 101 / WORKSHOP

**AUG. 14, 2019 • 6pm-8pm** — The first stakeholder workshop will provide participants with an overview of the SGMA in easy-to-understand terms, including an overview of the SGMA policy and why sustainable management of the SLO Basin has been made a State priority. Presenters will describe what groundwater is and will show the current state of the SLO Basin's groundwater levels and conditions. Expect an accessible presentation that will give a solid grounding in the policy, the region's approach to developing a GSP, and how the plan may affect you.

**WHERE:** Library Community Room, 995 Palm Street, San Luis Obispo, CA

**WHO SHOULD ATTEND:** Stakeholders interested in, or affected by, the management of groundwater resources in the SLO Basin. Registration is preferred but not required at [SLOWaterBasin.com](http://SLOWaterBasin.com).



## C&E Plan / REVIEW AND COMMENT

**DEADLINE AUG. 31, 2019** — The GSAs are required to develop a C&E Plan that indicates how it will create an inclusive process to engage all affected stakeholders in the GSP development. The C&E Plan has been drafted and approved by the GSC, and it is open for public comment through the Portal until August 31, 2019. To review or comment on the C&E Plan, go to [SLOWaterBasin.com](http://SLOWaterBasin.com) and download the document from the homepage.



## Next GSC Meeting / MEETING

**SEP. 11, 2019 • 3:30pm-5:30pm** — The public is invited to join the next quarterly GSC meeting. An agenda for this meeting will be posted on the Portal as soon as it becomes available.

**WHERE:** Ludwick Community Center, 864 Santa Rosa Street, San Luis Obispo, CA.

**WHO SHOULD ATTEND:** Stakeholders interested in, or affected by, the management of groundwater resources in the SLO Basin. Registration is preferred but not required at [SLOWaterBasin.com](http://SLOWaterBasin.com).

## Future GSC Chapter/Section Review Opportunities

### Chapters 1-3: Administrative Information

Chapters 1 through 3 describe the GSA's authorities as it relates to SGMA and the purpose of the Groundwater Sustainability Plan.

**GSC MEETING:** 9/11/2019

**WORKSHOP:** SGMA and Groundwater 101 • 08/14/2019

**REVIEW AND COMMENT:** Approx. 09/2019-10/2019

### Chapters 4-6: Basin Setting

Chapters 4 through 6 document the existing basin setting information and provide the foundation for a technically defensible GSP. The three basin setting chapters include the hydrogeologic conceptual model, groundwater conditions, and water budget.

**GSC MEETINGS:** 12/11/2019; 03/11/2020

**WORKSHOP:** Approx. 02/2020

**REVIEW AND COMMENT:** Approx. 12/2019 and 03/2020

### Chapters 7-8: Sustainable Management Criteria and Monitoring Network

Chapters 7 and 8 identify the undesirable results of five sustainability indicators relevant to the SLO Basin. These results include: 1) further groundwater level decline, 2) reduction in groundwater storage, 3) depletion of interconnected surface water bodies, 4) water quality degradation, and 5) land subsidence. Within these chapters, the undesirable results for each sustainability indicator will be defined.

**GSC MEETINGS:** 06/10/2020; 09/09/2020

**WORKSHOP:** Approx. 05/2020

**REVIEW AND COMMENT:** Approx. 09/2020

### Chapters 9-10: Plan to Sustainability

Chapters 9 and 10 identify projects, management actions, and the implementation plan that will bring groundwater use into balance and meet the sustainable management criteria identified in Chapters 7 and 8.

**GSC MEETINGS:** 12/09/2020; 03/09/2021

**WORKSHOP:** Approx. 02/2021

**REVIEW AND COMMENT:** Approx. 03/2021

## GSP DEVELOPMENT TIMELINE



## Key Terms

**Groundwater Sustainability Agency (GSA)** — One or more local agencies may establish a GSA. It is the GSA's responsibility to develop and implement a groundwater sustainability plan that considers all beneficial uses and users of groundwater in the basin. Two GSAs (i.e., the City and County of San Luis Obispo) have been formed for the SLO Basin to cover the whole basin area.

**Groundwater Sustainability Commission (GSC)** — The Groundwater Sustainability Commission is an advisory body that is established by the City and County GSAs to advise the GSAs in connection with preparation of the GSP for the SLO Basin. The GSC is currently comprised of the following individuals and related agencies: Bob Schiebelhut, Chairperson, Edna Valley Growers Mutual Water Company; Mark Zimmer, Vice Chairperson, Golden State Water Company; Dennis Fernandez, Member, Edna Ranch Mutual Water Company/Varian Ranch Mutual Water Company; Andy Pease, Member, City of San Luis Obispo; Adam Hill, Member, County of San Luis Obispo.

**Groundwater Sustainability Portal (Portal)** — Located at [SLOWaterBasin.com](http://SLOWaterBasin.com), the Portal is the central online communication hub for public participation and information sharing on the GSP project. Any interested party can subscribe to receive project updates and/or to review and submit public comment on GSP chapters/sections through the Portal.

**GSC Meetings** — Quarterly public meetings held by the Groundwater Sustainability Commission. The general public is encouraged to attend to learn about project progress, ask questions, and/or provide and share input. For a full calendar of meetings visit the Portal at [SLOWaterBasin.com](http://SLOWaterBasin.com) and click on "calendar."

**Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP)** — A management plan developed by the GSAs to provide a framework for managing the groundwater basin sustainably to meet the requirements of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA).

**San Luis Obispo Valley Groundwater Basin (SLO Basin)** — A groundwater basin area within the San Luis Valley and Edna Valley that has been designated as a high priority basin by the State Department of Water Resources (DWR).

**Stakeholder Communication and Engagement Plan (C&E Plan)** — Groundwater is best managed at the local level. GSAs are required to develop and implement a C&E Plan to ensure the timely, forthright, and consistent communication among all beneficial users of groundwater and stakeholders affected by the GSP.

**Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA)** — SGMA is a package of three bills (AB 1739, SB 1168, and SB 1319) that provide local agencies with a framework for managing groundwater basins in a sustainable manner. Recognizing that groundwater is most effectively managed at the local level, the SGMA requires local agencies to achieve sustainability within 20 years.

**Stakeholder Workshops** — Four public workshops are anticipated to be held at specific milestones in the GSP development process to allow for inclusive and meaningful opportunities for affected stakeholders to participate and contribute in the plan design. Find details on scheduled workshops at [SLOWaterBasin.com](http://SLOWaterBasin.com), click on "calendar."

## Questions and Accommodation Requests

If you have any questions, if you wish to receive materials about the GSP development by mail, or if you'd like to request accommodations to attend an upcoming event or workshop, including translation services, contact Dick Tzou at [dtzou@co.slo.ca.us](mailto:dtzou@co.slo.ca.us) or 805-781-4473.

## You can also contact us by mail:

County of San Luis Obispo Public Works Department  
County Government Center, Room 206  
San Luis Obispo, CA 93408

Si necesita solicitar alojamiento para asistir a un próximo evento, incluidos los servicios de traducción, comuníquese con Dick Tzou a [dtzou@co.slo.ca.us](mailto:dtzou@co.slo.ca.us) o al 805-781-4473.