

Communication and Engagement Plan

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BOARD: Santa Margarita Groundwater Agency Board of Directors

C&E Plan: Communication and Engagement Plan

COUNTY: County of Santa Cruz

DWR: California Department of Water Resources

GSA: Groundwater Sustainability Agency

GSP: Groundwater Sustainability Plan

MHA: Mount Hermon Association

SCWD: City of Santa Cruz Water Department

SGMA: Sustainable Groundwater Management Act

SLVWD: San Lorenzo Valley Water District

SMGB: Santa Margarita Groundwater Basin

SMGWA: Santa Margarita Basin Groundwater Agency

SVWD: Scotts Valley Water District

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BACKGROUND

Groundwater is a critical and integral component of California's overall water supply, serving residents, businesses, farms, industries and the environment. For many areas of the state, including the San Lorenzo Valley and Scotts Valley areas of the Central Coast, groundwater is a primary water source. Yet unlike surface water, groundwater has historically not been regulated on a statewide basis. This contributes to serious impacts to water supply and quality including declines in groundwater levels and storage, irreversible land subsidence and impacts to natural ecosystems.

The Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA), passed in September 2014, establishes a path for the sustainable management of groundwater through the formation of locally organized Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSAs), which are public agencies. As part of SGMA, the California Department of Water Resources (DWR) designated groundwater basins as low, medium or high priority. The goal of SGMA is to develop and implement basin-specific GSPs that outline plans to achieve long-term groundwater sustainability over a 20-year period.

Santa Margarita Basin Groundwater Agency (SMGWA) is a GSA formed as a Joint Powers Authority (consistent with California Government Code 6500 – Joint Exercise of Powers Act) in June 2017. It has three member-agencies: Scotts Valley Water District (SVWD), San Lorenzo Valley Water District (SLVWD), and the County of Santa Cruz (County) and is governed by the Board of Directors (Board) comprising of two representatives from each member agency, one representative from City of Scotts Valley, one from City of Santa Cruz, one from Mount Hermon Association (MHA) and two private well owner representatives. The Board holds monthly meetings that, consistent with requirements for all California public agencies through the Brown Act, are open to the public.

SMGWA is developing a Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) to ensure a sustainable water supply supporting environmental and human needs, in compliance with SGMA. Under the requirements of SGMA, GSPs developed by GSAs are required to consider the interests of beneficial uses and users of groundwater, and of land uses and property interests potentially affected by using groundwater in the basin. For the Santa Margarita Groundwater Basin (SMGB), beneficial users also include customers of the City of Santa Cruz Water Department (SCWD) outside of the Basin, who indirectly use basin groundwater that supports flow in the San Lorenzo River that is a significant source of water for the SCWD. The GSP regulations require GSAs document the opportunities for public engagement and active involvement of diverse social, cultural, environmental and economic elements of the population within the basin in a communication section of the GSP.

Groundwater is an essential source of drinking water for most residents living in the Santa Margarita Groundwater Basin (SMGB) boundary. Groundwater is also an important source of stream baseflow for the San Lorenzo River and many of its tributaries, especially in the summer months. Rainfall is the only source of recharge to the SMGB. Municipal pumpers — SVWD, SLVWD and MHA — as well as businesses, small water systems, residents using private wells to pump water for domestic purposes, and groundwater-dependent ecosystems, share the groundwater resource. To that end and beyond the requirements of SGMA, the member agencies of SMGWA recognize that sustainable groundwater management is essential for ensuring a reliable and resilient water supply and will continue to work collectively on the implementation of SGMA.

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PURPOSE

This Stakeholder Communication and Engagement Plan (C&E Plan) will assist SMGWA in its efforts to deliver general and strategic communications to engage the public, including beneficial users, regarding the development of the SMGWA's GSP with a particular focus on fulfilling and exceeding the requirements of § 354.10. Notice and Communication of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act of 2014 (SGMA) (as amended 2015). This is a work plan to ensure opportunities for public participation are included in the GSP process.

The C&E Plan provides SMGWA board members and staff a guide to ensure consistent messaging about SGMA requirements and other related information. It establishes a roadmap for GSP development that identifies how and when beneficial users and other stakeholders can provide timely and meaningful input into GSA decision-making. The C&E Plan also ensures beneficial users and other stakeholders in the SMGB are informed of milestones and offered opportunities to participate in GSP development.

SGMA Requirements for Stakeholder Engagement:

- Consider the interests of all beneficial uses of water and users of groundwater (Section 10723.2)
- Encourage the active involvement of diverse social, cultural and economic elements of the population within the groundwater basin (Section 10727.8)
- Establish and maintain a list of persons interested in receiving notices regarding plan preparation, meeting announcements and availability of draft plans, maps and other relevant documents (Section 10723.4)
- Make available to the public and DWR a written statement describing the manner in which interested parties may participate in the development and implementation of the GSP (Section 10723.2)

Goals and Outcomes

The C&E Plan is an evolving document that will be updated and refined as GSP planning and development progresses. The C&E Plan supports the following goals:

1. Provide opportunities to educate stakeholders about SGMA and its requirements, and how those requirements could affect them.
2. Articulate strategies and channels to obtain ongoing stakeholder input to inform GSP development.
3. Increase awareness and understanding among stakeholders of the challenges and opportunities that SMGWA faces to achieve and maintain groundwater sustainability and other related issues facing the SMGB.

4. Increase engagement among stakeholders in support of the GSP.

Communication and Outreach Objectives

The following are the communications and outreach objectives that the C&E Plan supports:

- Expand Audience Reach
 - Maintain a robust stakeholder list of interested individuals, groups and/or organizations.
 - Secure a balanced level of participants who represent the interests of beneficial uses and users of groundwater.
- Increase Engagement
 - Keep interested list of stakeholders informed and aware of opportunities for involvement through email communications and/or their preferred communications.
 - Publish meeting agendas, minutes and summaries on the SMGWA website (www.smgwa.org).
 - Inform and obtain comments from the general public through public meetings held on monthly basis.
 - Facilitate productive dialogues among participants throughout the planning process.
 - Seek the input of interest groups during the implementation of the GSP and any future planning efforts.
- Increase GSP Awareness
 - Provide timely and accurate public reporting of planning milestones through the distribution of outreach materials and posting of materials on the SGMWA website for the GSP.
 - Secure quality media coverage that is accurate, complete and fair.
 - Utilize social media to engage with the general public.
- Track Efforts
 - Maintain an active communications tracking tool to capture stakeholder engagement and public outreach activities and to demonstrate the reporting of GSP outreach activities.

Target Audiences and Stakeholders

SMGB stakeholders are other agencies and interested parties including all beneficial users of groundwater or representatives of someone who is. Under the requirements of SGMA, all beneficial uses and users of groundwater must be considered in the development of GSPs, and GSAs must encourage the active involvement of diverse

social, cultural and economic elements of the population.

There are a variety of audiences targeted within the SMGB whose SGMA knowledge varies from high to little or none. Given this variance, the efforts will be broad and all-inclusive. Target audiences include:

- SGMWA Board of Directors
- SMGWA member agencies, including management, staff and customers
- Elected officials, and local and state agencies within the SMGB
- Beneficial uses and users of groundwater including private pumpers and environmental uses such as fish habitat
- Diverse social, cultural and economic segments of the population within the SMGB including Disadvantaged Communities
- Public

The SGMA mandates that beneficial users participate in development of the GSP. The SMGB's beneficial users rely on effective management of groundwater sustainability indicators to achieve and maintain sustainable groundwater conditions that support each of their uses.

See "SMGWA Community Group Draft List" for specific groups and their contact information (see Appendix).

ENGAGEMENT AND PUBLIC OUTREACH

Stakeholder involvement and public outreach is critical to the GSP development because it helps promote the plan development based on input and broad support. The following activities summarize involvement opportunities and outreach methods to inform target audiences and stakeholders. It is important to note that levels of interest will evolve and shift according to the GSP's development stage.

Stakeholder Database

A stakeholder database of persons and organizations of interest will be created and maintained. The database will include stakeholders that represent the region's broad interests, perspectives and geography. It will be developed by leveraging existing stakeholder lists and databases and by conducting research of potential stakeholders that may be interested in one or all of the following categories: municipal users and groundwater users including private pumpers, community/neighborhood, agricultural, environmental, industrial, institutional, business, Native American Tribes (Amah Mutsun Tribal Band), disadvantaged communities, state lands and agencies, and integrated water management.

See "SMGWA Community Group Draft List" for specific groups and their contact information (see Appendix).

Key Messages and Talking Points

The C&E Plan is intended to be transparent and direct about how the GSP will impact SMGB users.

- SMGWA represents the groundwater interests of all beneficial uses/users of the basin equitably and transparently to ensure that the Basin achieves and maintains sustainable groundwater conditions.
- SMGWA is committed to working with stakeholders using an open and transparent communication and engagement process.
- As the overall GSP will be more comprehensive with an engaged group of stakeholders providing useful information, SMGWA will create as many opportunities as possible to educate stakeholders and solicit their feedback on the GSP process.

These messages are being used as the basis for specific talking points/Q&A to support effective engagement with audiences. The SMGWA Guiding Principles also are used to support communication with audiences (see Appendix).

Strategies for Engagement

SMGWA utilizes a variety of tactics to achieve broad, enduring and productive involvement with stakeholders during the development of the GSP. Below are activities that SMGWA uses to engage the public:

- Develop and maintain a list of interested parties
- Public informational sessions
 - “Understanding Our Water” three-part education series
 - “Undesirable Results – the SGMA Road to What Should be Avoided” workshop
 - “State of Surface Water in the Santa Margarita Basin” workshop
 - “The Path to Groundwater Sustainability: Goals and Challenges” discussion
- SMGB basin tours
- Summaries of informational interviews conducted by Sacramento State, Consensus and Collaboration Program (as a third-party neutral consultant to SMGWA)
- Board meetings
 - Regular public notices and updates; Brown Act compliance
 - Signs to notify residents of upcoming meetings
 - Publish meeting summaries monthly (beginning March 2020)
- Online communications
 - SMGWA website: maintain with current information
 - SMGWA Facebook page: maintain and grow social media presence
 - Direct email via Mailchimp
- Mailings to private well owners and additional SMGB residents
- Media coverage
 - Op-eds in the local newspapers
 - Press releases
 - Radio interviews
- Tabling at outreach events including “Connecting the Drops”
- Co-promotional opportunities with member agencies including email newsletters, social media, board meetings and mailings to customers
- Engagement of an intern to focus on youth outreach
- Talks and presentations to various stakeholder groups and associations
- Educational materials (see Appendix)

Implementation Timeline and Tactics

- C&E Plan and GSP milestone requirements by phase
 - Prior to initiating plan development: Share how interested parties may contact the GSA and participate in development and implementation of the plan submitted to DWR. (Sec. 353.6)
 - Prior to GSP development: Establish and maintain an interested persons list. (Sec. 10723.4)
 - Prior to and with GSP submission:
 - Record statements of issues and interests of beneficial users of basin groundwater including types of parties representing the interests and consultation process
 - Lists of public meetings
 - Inventory of comments and summary of responses
 - Communication section in GSP (Sec. 354.10) that includes: agency decision-making process, identification of public engagement opportunities and response process, description of process for inclusion, and method for public information related to progress in implementing the plan (status, projects, actions)
 - See additional milestones in Appendix
- Supporting tactics to be used to communicate messages and supporting resources available:
 - SGMWA website, updated regularly to reflect meetings and workshops
 - Direct email via Mailchimp, sent approximately monthly to announce board meetings, special workshops and other opportunities for engagement such as the SMGB tours
 - Outreach to local media to secure coverage of announcements and events, radio interviews, op-ed placement
 - Workshops, information sessions and other community meetings
 - Social media, specifically Facebook, updated regularly to share information and support other outreach efforts

Evaluation and Assessment

- What worked well?
- What didn't go as planned?
- Are stakeholders educated about the GSP development process and their own role?
- Is the timeline for implementation of the GSP clear?
- Has the GSA received positive press coverage?
- Do diverse stakeholders feel included?
- Has there been behavior changes related to the program goals? Or improved trust/relationships among participants?
- Community meeting recaps and next steps
- Lessons learned
- Budget analysis

APPENDICES

Samples of outreach materials and results, such as:

- Guiding Principles
- Screenshots of website, social media and email newsletters
- Board meeting summaries
- PDF docs to represent poster boards and other signage
- Op-eds, news articles and other media coverage
- Basin tour materials
- Roadmap
- Stakeholder engagement by phase graphic