



SUSTAINABLE GROUNDWATER MANAGEMENT ACT

State and Regional Water Boards Basics

This fact sheet provides a summary of programs of the State and Regional Water Boards related to groundwater. This fact sheet, and others, are available at the State Water Board's [Groundwater Management Program webpage \(www.waterboards.ca.gov/gmp\)](http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/gmp).

Groundwater is a limited natural resource that Californians use for many purposes. In the state's high- and medium- priority groundwater basins, the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) requires local groundwater sustainability agencies (GSAs) to develop and implement groundwater sustainability plans (plans) so that these uses can continue in the future.

How Do the Water Boards Protect Groundwater?

Groundwater is one of California's greatest natural resources, making up a significant portion of the state's water supply and serving as a buffer against the impacts of drought and climate change. Many communities throughout the state, particularly those in rural areas, are reliant on groundwater as their sole source of drinking water. Groundwater is also an important source for agriculture, industry, and manufacturing. In addition, groundwater replenishes surface water streams, lakes, creeks, rivers, and wetlands that support wildlife, including many endangered and threatened species. The State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board) and nine Regional Water Quality Control Boards (Regional Water Boards [collectively, the Water Boards]) protect groundwater through a number of programs. The State Water Board protects groundwater through its programs in the divisions of Drinking Water, Water Quality, Financial Assistance, and Water Rights, as well as through the Groundwater Management Program (<https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/gmp>). The nine Regional Water Boards develop water quality standards, issue and enforce waste discharge requirements, and monitor water quality in their respective regions.

The Water Boards protect groundwater through activities that: (1) identify and update beneficial uses and water quality objectives; (2) prevent future groundwater impacts through planning, management, education, monitoring, and funding; and (3) regulate activities that can impact the beneficial uses of groundwater. [More information on how the Water Boards protect groundwater \(https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/publications_forms/publications/general/docs/citizenguide.pdf#page=33\)](https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/publications_forms/publications/general/docs/citizenguide.pdf#page=33)



Understanding the Water Boards' programs can help in the implementation of SGMA. For example, the State Water Board's water rights enforcement staff can help address illegal diversions that might make plans less effective. As another example, understanding the scope and intent of programs such as the Irrigated Lands Regulatory Program (ILRP) and CV-SALTS may be important for identifying groundwater quality issues that are and are not currently being addressed by the State Water Board or Regional Water Boards.

The information in this document is advisory only. Please contact SGMA staff if you have Water Boards-related questions – we can direct you to the right people.

SGMA@waterboards.ca.gov.

Our Legal Authorities and Problems We Address

Water Boards' Water Quality Authorities

Under the federal Clean Water Act and the state's Porter-Cologne Water Quality Control Act, the State Water Board and Regional Water Boards have regulatory responsibility for protecting water quality statewide. Water quality standards applicable to groundwater can be found in the Water Quality Control Plans (Basin Plans) adopted by each Regional Board. Other state laws also address groundwater quality impacts related to surface impoundments of hazardous substances (Health and Safety Code, § 25208 et seq.), underground storage of hazardous substances (Health and Safety Code, § 25280 et seq.), and petroleum underground storage tank cleanup (Health and Safety Code, § 25299.10 et seq.). The Regional Water Boards administer ILRP which focuses on water quality impacts from agriculture and may be important for on-farm groundwater recharge projects. The Central Valley Regional Board also administers the CV-SALTS Program which concentrates on salinity and nitrate impacts to surface water and groundwater in the central valley. [More information on water quality \(www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/water_quality/\)](http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/water_quality/).

Water Board's Water Rights Authorities

The State Water Board administers California's permit and license system for appropriate surface water rights initiated after 1914. The State Water Board also has authority to prevent the waste, unreasonable use, or unreasonable method of diversion of water; and protect public trust resources impacted by water diversion, regardless of the type of water right involved or whether the water is surface water or groundwater. Many of these actions may affect or enhance groundwater conditions. Note that surface water diverted into a groundwater basin, either for storage and subsequent beneficial use or for *in situ* uses such as prevention of seawater intrusion, is subject to regulation by the State Water Board; there are resources available on the Board's website regarding how these permitting processes can be coordinated with SGMA. [More information on water rights \(www.waterboards.ca.gov/waterrights/\)](http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/waterrights/).

State Water Board's Drinking Water Authorities

The State Water Board implements the federal Safe Drinking Water Act and the California Safe Drinking Water Act to protect Californians and ensure public water systems serve safe

drinking water. Under these laws, the State Water Board develops maximum contaminant levels, issues and enforces drinking water permits for public water systems and oversees the state's certified environmental laboratory accreditation program. The State Water Board also supports, and can sometimes require, water supply partnerships, including local resource sharing, physical consolidation, managerial consolidation, and full regionalization of public water systems. [More information on drinking water programs \(www.waterboards.ca.gov/drinking_water/programs/\)](http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/drinking_water/programs/).

The Water Boards' Recycled Water Authorities

The State Water Board supports the safe use of recycled water in a manner that is protective of public health and the environment through the Policy for Water Quality Control for Recycled Water. The policy provides goals for recycled water use in California, guidance for use of recycled water that considers protection of water quality, criteria for streamlined permitting of recycled water projects, and requirements for preparing salt and nutrient management plans where appropriate.

The Regional Water Boards also issue requirements for recycled water use through waste discharge requirements, water reclamation requirements, and other actions.

[More information on water recycling policy \(www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/water_recycling_policy/\)](http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/water_recycling_policy/).

State Water Board's Commitment to Human Right to Water

The human right to water is recognized by Water Code section 106.3. In 2016, the State Water Board adopted a resolution identifying the human right to water as a top priority. Under the resolution, State Water Board staff are working with stakeholders to develop new systems or enhance existing systems to collect data and identify and track communities that do not have, or are at risk of not having, safe, clean, affordable, and accessible water for drinking, cooking, and sanitary purposes. [More information on human right to water \(www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/hr2w/\)](http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/hr2w/).

State Water Board's Planning for Instream Needs

The State Water Board conducts planning efforts to support flows for instream beneficial uses and to address declines of native aquatic species and the ecosystems they depend upon. The State Water Board's Bay-Delta Plan is being updated with instream flow requirements for the San Joaquin River, the Sacramento River and its tributaries, and the Delta. [More information on the Bay-Delta Plan \(www.waterboards.ca.gov/waterrights/water_issues/programs/bay_delta/\)](http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/waterrights/water_issues/programs/bay_delta/).

In addition, as directed by the California Water Action Plan, the State Water Board is actively engaged in coordinated efforts to enhance flows in five priority stream systems: Shasta River, South Fork Eel River, Mark West Creek, Mill Creek, and Ventura River. [More information on instream flows](#)

www.waterboards.ca.gov/waterrights/water_issues/programs/instream_flows/cwap_enhancing/).

How the State Water Board and Regional Water Boards Operate

The State Water Board and Regional Water Boards are headed by members appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Senate for staggered, four-year terms. The Water Boards operate under unique procedures and must comply with legal requirements including the Open Meeting Act, the Administrative Procedures Act, and rules against *ex parte* contacts in pending adjudicatory proceedings. [More details \(www.waterboards.ca.gov/board_info/\)](http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/board_info/). To learn more about how the public may work with the Water Boards, see our [Citizen's Guide \(www.waterboards.ca.gov/publications_forms/publications/general/docs/citizenguide.pdf\)](http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/publications_forms/publications/general/docs/citizenguide.pdf).

State Water Board Financing Opportunities

The State Water Board administers myriad water-related financing programs. The largest recurring budget item within the State Water Board's budget is a reimbursement program for leaking petroleum underground storage tanks. In addition, the State Water Board administers two revolving funds that finance drinking water and water quality projects around the state. To address pressing pollution matters, the State Water Board also administers a cleanup and abatement account that can finance some pollution abatement actions where other funds are not available. Finally, the State Water Board administers a number of bond funds that provide grants for various clean water and drinking water projects. [More information on State Water Board's financing programs \(www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/grants_loans/\)](http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/grants_loans/).

A fact sheet is available on the State Water Board's SGMA website summarizes funding programs that may be relevant to GSAs.

State Water Board Data and Additional Resources

The Water Boards maintain a variety of databases that relate to water quality, drinking water, and water rights. [Available data and databases \(www.waterboards.ca.gov/resources/data_databases/\)](http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/resources/data_databases/)

Groundwater-Specific Data

The Groundwater Ambient Monitoring and Assessment program (GAMA) administers the Groundwater Information System which provides ambient groundwater level and groundwater quality data, including data from special studies conducted by the United States Geological Survey and Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory. The State Water Board also maintains the GeoTracker database which contains well construction information for regulated sites, and information and sampling data for sites that impact groundwater quality or require cleanup to protect groundwater resources. It displays water quality data from various sources on an interactive Google-based map and is searchable by chemical or location. [More information on groundwater data \(www.waterboards.ca.gov/resources/data_databases/groundwater.html\)](http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/resources/data_databases/groundwater.html) or

contact the GeoTracker Help Desk at geotracker@waterboards.ca.gov or 866-480-1028, or the GAMA helpdesk at GAMA@waterboards.ca.gov or 916-341-5577.

Drinking Water Data

This site provides links to drinking water quality data, which are collected twice monthly, and a web portal for public water system information including locations, facilities, sources and sample points. [More Information on drinking water data \(www.waterboards.ca.gov/resources/data_databases/drinking_water.html\)](http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/resources/data_databases/drinking_water.html) or contact drinc@waterboards.ca.gov for drinking water quality data or sdwis@waterboards.ca.gov for public water system information.

Electronic Water Rights Information Management System

This database contains water rights data including Statements of Water Diversion and Use that have been filed by water diverters, as well as registrations, certificates, and water right permits and licenses. It also has a web mapping tool that allows searches for the locations of points of diversion. [More information on electronic water rights information \(www.waterboards.ca.gov/waterrights/water_issues/programs/ewrims/\)](http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/waterrights/water_issues/programs/ewrims/) or contact the Division of Water Rights at (916) 341-5300 or ewrims@waterboards.ca.gov.

State Water Board Notices

The State Water Board's [Press Room \(www.waterboards.ca.gov/press_room/\)](http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/press_room/) provides quick links to items including: press releases; Board resolutions, orders, and decisions; Board meeting calendar; fact sheets; Regional Water Board websites; and Water Board programs.

For More Information

This fact sheet and additional information on SGMA are available at the State Water Board's [Groundwater Management Program webpage \(www.waterboards.ca.gov/gmp/\)](http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/gmp/).

The State Water Board's SGMA program can be contacted at SGMA@waterboards.ca.gov.

These online resources may be updated. Parties interested in updates are encouraged to subscribe to the State Water Board's [Groundwater Management email list in the General Interests section](http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/resources/email_subscriptions/swrcb_subscribe.html)

[\(www.waterboards.ca.gov/resources/email_subscriptions/swrcb_subscribe.html\)](http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/resources/email_subscriptions/swrcb_subscribe.html).

[Additinal SGMA information is also available from Department of Water Resources \(DWR\) \(http://www.water.ca.gov/SGMA\)](http://www.water.ca.gov/SGMA).

Last Updated: April 2019