



MADERA COUNTY PUBLIC INFORMATION TEAM

MADERA COUNTY GOVERNMENT CENTER
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Recent Action Invites State to Intervene

Despite years of work and coordinated efforts, the Madera Subbasin appears headed for state intervention as only six of seven Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSA) approved a revised Groundwater Sustainable Plan (GSP).

Demand Management

As the GSA with the greatest share of historical overdraft in the Madera Subbasin, the County GSA began developing an allocation in 2019 with the County GSA Advisory Committee to achieve nearly 40% reductions in the use of groundwater by irrigated agriculture. In 2019 and 2020, an allocation approach was developed and allocations for irrigated agriculture were adopted. Allocations were in place in 2021 as a “dry run,” and in 2022 as well with a penalty adopted for implementation in 2023. To date, preliminary findings indicate that the County GSA is well under its allocated water in the Madera Subbasin. Unfortunately, other GSAs have not developed allocations to manage their recognized share of overdraft, so it is not known whether sufficient demand management is taking place elsewhere in this subbasin.

Funding Challenges

Prior to the original adoption in December 2019 of the Madera Subbasin Joint GSP, the County GSA conducted a rate study for administrative and planning charges (GSA Fee) associated with managing a GSA. The GSA fee was adopted in November of 2019, and it provides funding for critical activities that keep the GSA in compliance with SGMA, including planning activities and required annual reports. The GSA Fee cannot be used for projects.

Using State grants and funds from the GSA Fee, the County GSA began, among other planning and implementation tasks, an extensive rate study to quantify costs and benefits for projects detailed in the Madera Subbasin Joint GSP, including recharge, domestic well mitigation, purchases of water, and land repurposing. With exhaustive public outreach, many meetings, and additional mailings over and above the legally required Proposition 218 notice, three public hearings were held for the fees (GSP Fee) in the Madera, Chowchilla, and Delta-Mendota subbasins. There was a majority protest in the Chowchilla Subbasin, so no fees could be adopted. In the Madera and Delta-Mendota subbasins, there was not a





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majority protest from affected landowners, so the fees were adopted to fund the GSP projects. In the fall of 2022, the County GSA was sued by a small group of landowners who objected to this new GSP Fee. In December of 2022, a local court placed a preliminary injunction on the collection of the County GSA's GSP fee until the matter could be heard at trial. The funding for implementation of important sustainability projects is pending resolution of this case.

Despite this set-back, the County GSA continues to move ahead with implementation of the defined Projects and Management Actions (PMAs) in the GSPs through State-awarded grants. These PMAs include recharge project development and implementation (temporary and permanent), land repurposing, and implementation of an aggressive demand management program. The County GSA is the only GSA in the Madera and Chowchilla Subbasins with a groundwater allocation, which is a State-required threshold to be eligible for some of the grant opportunities.

To date, the County GSA has been highly successful in receiving grants and funding work that benefit all the subbasins and all GSAs, not just the County GSA. Recent grants and progress towards groundwater sustainability in the Madera Subbasin include:

Land Repurposing:

- \$200,000 Strategic Agricultural Land Conservation funds to develop a land repurposing plan (2020 to 2022)
- \$10 million for multi-benefit land repurposing around clusters of domestic wells in all GSAs in the County
- \$9.3 million for Land flex for land repurposing around clusters of domestic wells in the Madera Subbasin, County GSA

Recharge:

- \$4.2 million + \$500,000 for the Madera Subbasin, County GSA in Prop 68 Round 1 and 2
- \$180,188 for Fairmead Groundwater Resilience Project – California Resilience Challenge

Domestic Well Mitigation:

- Lead and coordinate County-wide Drought Work Group; assist Office of Emergency Services; Serve as a liaison with Self-Help Enterprises for all GSAs in all three subbasins

Water Purchases:

- Continued discussions with Sites about long-term water transfers from existing contractors to the County GSA
- Letter of Agreement with Bureau of Reclamation to expand Section 215 area for the County GSA





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Recent News

In recent news, six of seven GSAs adopted revised groundwater sustainability plans for submittal on March 21, 2023. The extensive coordination and substantial revisions were funded by a Proposition 68 grant, meaning there was no local cost to this work. While the revised plans were well coordinated, included a new zero-subsidence threshold, and were much more protective of domestic well users with higher minimum thresholds than in the original GSPs, Madera Irrigation District refused to adopt a revised plan. Their action likely invites the State Water Resources Control Board to intervene in the Madera Subbasin.

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