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**AB 1466 to Become Law, Delivering Clarity to Protecting
Small Well Users and the Indian Wells Valley Basin's Water Future**

RIDGECREST, Calif. (October 16, 2025) – The Indian Wells Valley Groundwater Authority (IWVGA) applauds the signing of Assembly Bill 1466, key legislation that strengthens the legal foundation for groundwater sustainability efforts in adjudicated basins across California.

The bill was passed with bipartisan support and was signed into law by Gov. Gavin Newsom on October 11, 2025, and goes into effect on January 1, 2026. It ensures that courts reviewing Groundwater Sustainability Plans under the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) have further clarity in groundwater adjudications.

AB 1466 allows courts to exempt or treat separately users who extract minor quantities of water. This means small well owners are less likely to be dragged into expensive and lengthy court battles such as was the case when the Indian Wells Valley Water District filed an adjudication in 2021 against all water users, including small well owners, in the Indian Wells Valley basin.

"This is a major win for Ridgecrest and for every community in California working to protect its groundwater rights, especially among small well users," said Scott Hayman, chair of the Indian Wells Valley Groundwater Authority. "AB 1466 gives local groundwater authorities a clearer path to move forward in groundwater adjudication actions and reinforces our role as the technical experts in our respective groundwater basins."

Indian Wells Valley Groundwater Authority, formed by state law to protect and manage groundwater resources in the critically overdrafted Indian Wells Valley groundwater basin, has been an active supporter of AB 1466 since it was introduced. The Indian Wells Valley Water District initially opposed AB 1466, but ultimately changed their position once it was clear that the legislation would keep small water owners out of their overall adjudication.

The passage of AB 1466 will have a direct impact on thousands of well owners in Kern County who own water rights and extract minor quantities of water each year.

“We have supported AB 1466 because it is essential for courts to consider the work GSAs and small communities have put in to comply with SGMA,” said Kern County District 1 Supervisor Phillip Peters, and board member of the Indian Wells Valley Groundwater Authority. “And we are very glad that the Indian Wells Valley Water District changed its position to eventually support the bill. This is about protecting our water now as well as future generations.”

Courts Required to Request Technical Reports from GSAs When Reviewing GSPs in Adjudications

Under AB 1466, courts are now required to request that a Groundwater Sustainability Agency (GSA), such as IWVGA, provide a technical report that quantifies and describes the groundwater use of pumpers that have not otherwise appeared in court. This was a key sticking point for IWVGA which has been steadfast in protecting the rights of all water rights holders, and putting the burden of proof on those filing an adjudication in a groundwater basin.

Reports provided by GSAs will help the courts evaluate the basin’s condition using science-based evidence. It also reinforces the role of GSAs as the technical authority on basin conditions.

“This legislation respects the hard work and expertise that goes into developing sustainability plans,” Hayman said. “It ensures that decisions made by local agencies, based on years of data and stakeholder input, are considered in court.”

IWVGA Continues to Fight to Protect Groundwater Sustainability

The bill’s passage comes at a critical time for IWVGA, which continues to defend its Groundwater Sustainability Plan against legal challenges from local and regional water users, including the Indian Wells Valley Water District.

“We will continue to protect our basin’s resources through science and technical evidence, community engagement, and transparent decision-making,” said Hayman. “We are committed to implementing a groundwater sustainability plan so that our basin has reliable water resources available for people to live and work in the region for generations to come.”

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About the Indian Wells Valley Groundwater Authority

The Indian Wells Valley Groundwater Authority (IWVGA) is the groundwater sustainability agency for the critically overdrafted Indian Wells Valley groundwater basin. The basin spans portions of Kern, Inyo, and San Bernardino Counties. It is home to the City of Ridgecrest and the U.S. Naval Air Weapons Station China Lake, a critical low-flight, weapons development, and testing facility. The groundwater basin serves approximately 38,000 residents.

IWVGA is a joint powers authority that includes representatives from Kern County, the City of Ridgecrest, Inyo County, San Bernardino County, and the Indian Wells Valley Water District. Two federal agencies, the United States Navy and the Bureau of Land Management, are also represented as ex-officio members of the IWVGA Board.

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