

# Santa Rosa Plain Groundwater Sustainability Agency Community Meeting Notes

April 27, 2022

## 1. Meeting Agenda and Purpose

Sam Magill, Facilitator, opened the meeting announcing the purpose of the gathering was two-fold:

1) introduce the Santa Rosa Plain Groundwater Sustainability Plan, and 2) receive feedback on the rate and fee study options. Magill gave a brief overview of the agenda and introduced Tom Schwedhelm, Santa Rosa Plain GSA Chair, who provided opening remarks.

## 2. Welcome and Background

Tom Schwedhelm welcomed the group and said that the purpose of today's meeting is to discuss the protection of our groundwater basin as we face ongoing climate change. In 2014, the state of California passed the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA), a statewide framework to help protect groundwater resources over the long-term. Groundwater is the only drinking water source for thousands in Santa Rosa Plain. There are three basins in Sonoma County that need to comply with SGMA: Santa Rosa Plain, Petaluma Valley and Sonoma Valley, all of which must be managed locally. The Groundwater Sustainability Agencies were created in 2017. The county, cities, towns, and special districts have supported the GSA for the first five years. In total, local agencies have paid more than \$2 million to support the GSA, and this has been matched by state grants and technical assistance of about \$2.4 million.

Today, we will discuss the existing fee structure and options for modifying it. The current fee is \$19.90 per acre-foot of groundwater pumped annually, equivalent to \$9.95 per parcel annually for rural homeowners. The new fee level under consideration is \$35-50 acre-feet per year, which for rural residents would be \$18-\$25 per parcel annually for homeowners.

## 3. Groundwater Basin Conditions, Projects, and Budget

Marcus Trotta, Sonoma Water Principal Hydrogeologist, shared information regarding the GSP, which is available online. The GSP was adopted in December 2021, following more than 50 public meetings and input from the GSA Board and a diverse, stakeholder-based Advisory Committee.

Section 3 of the Plan describes the status of five key sustainability indicators:

1. Groundwater Quality – Generally acceptable in the basin for most beneficial uses. Measured by looking at three different constituents of concern that are either naturally occurring or the result of human activities: arsenic, nitrates, and salts.
2. Land Surface Subsidence – No evidence of inelastic land subsidence due to groundwater pumping.
3. Interconnected Surface Water – Data is limited on the effect of groundwater pumping on stream flows, it will be important to gain more information as we move forward.
4. Groundwater Storage – Modeling indicates that groundwater in storage continues to decline from annual losses of 600 acre-feet to 2,100 acre-feet in the most recent water budget period.

5. Groundwater Levels – Generally stable. In the future, groundwater levels will decline in the deeper aquifer. Without projects to replenish groundwater or actions to reduce pumping, deeper wells could potentially be impacted by these declines.

Section 4 of the Plan sets thresholds and objectives for each of the five key sustainability indicators.

Section 6 includes projects and actions needed to address current and future problems such as water use efficiency and alternative water source projects for rural resident, commercial and industrial users, and agriculture. Other projects and actions include aquifer storage and recovery (ASR), storm water capture and on-farm capture and low-impact development, and policy options including discretionary review of well permits, Farm Plan Coordination, and well metering for non-residential pumpers.

The average annual budget is approximately \$1,074,600 and will be described in the following presentation.

#### 4. Fee and Rate Study Update and Next Steps

Jerry Bradshaw, SCI Consulting Group, gave an update on funding sources, groundwater pumping data, costs, and preliminary options and rates associated with the options.

Funding sources are broken down into three groups: 1) grants from the state, 2) GSA members (water agencies, cities, and towns), and 3) groundwater users (directly benefiting from pumping and/or spreading costs across all properties).

*Rate classes include:*

Municipal and other public service providers  
Agriculture and other irrigation  
Rural residential  
Commercial  
Urban wells

*Rate category breakdown:*

Municipal and other public systems (approximately 25% of water pumped)  
Ag, turf (approximately 40% of water pumped)  
Rural residential (approximately 25% of water pumped)  
Commercial and Urban irrigation (approximately 8% of water pumped)

The fee based on groundwater pumped is calculated by dividing the average annual cost of implementing the GSP by the average annual amount of groundwater pumped in the basin. If the budget assumes that the GSA will receive grant funding, the fee would be \$35 per acre foot of groundwater pumped. If it's assumed that no grant funding is received, the fee would be \$50 per acre foot. The fee study assumes that rural residents (with no commercial water use) use 0.5 acre-feet of water annually. So, rural residents would pay \$17.50-\$25 annually.

Alternative funding options include:

A wellhead fee, which would be between \$70 to \$115 per parcel annually, and which has the disadvantage of not distinguishing between commercial wells and residential wells;

A parcel tax, which would be levied on all parcels in the basin (not just groundwater users). The parcel tax would be \$8-\$14 per parcel, but requires to be placed on the ballot and 2/3 voter approval;

A benefit assessment approach, which would be a \$15 to \$25 fee on all property owners in the basin, based on the benefit received from groundwater as a resource.

Next steps include discussing community feedback with the GSA Board in April and asking the Board to narrow the available options; three additional community meetings; a meeting with the Advisory Committee; and potentially approval rates and fee in May or June.

## 5. Closing Remarks

Tom Schwedhelm thanked everyone for attending the meeting. He noted that there were over 200 questions received. With seven subject matter experts at this meeting, staff are able to respond and explain the direction we are going in lay persons terms. Please continue to remain involved. Again, SGMA was not the idea of Sonoma County, it was a law that was passed by state legislature to help protect groundwater resources over the long-term. We are learning as we go. Your feedback on the fee study is much appreciated, we will be discussing it at our next Board meeting on April 14 and you are invited to attend.

Again, if you are interested in reading the GSP which has been submitted to the state, it is on our website. We look forward to seeing you later in April. Thank you again for attending, this is not your last opportunity to stay informed.

For more information on the GSA and its Groundwater Sustainability Plan required by the Sustainable Management Groundwater Act, please visit <https://santarosaplaingroundwater.org/>.

For more information on the Santa Rosa Plain Groundwater Sustainability Plan, please visit <https://santarosaplaingroundwater.org/gsp/>.

To find out if your property is within the basin, please visit <https://santarosaplaingroundwater.org/user/>.

Attachments:

1. Questions and Answers / Comments

# Santa Rosa Plain 04.27.22 Community Meeting

## Questions and Answers

1. Glenn Nemhauser

How will it affect individual homeowners with wells and septic? Will there be limited water use? Are they going to meter?

Trotta- No the GSA has no authority to meter the wells of rural residential (de minimis). For other users, the GSA could require metering on other types of wells, but the GSA has not decided on this. It may be brought to the board to consider in the future. What the GSA can do is provide protection for homeowners to help ensure that water is available into the future. The GSA can gather information and identify any troubling trends in groundwater levels and can implement actions/ projects if there are groundwater issues for well owners.

2. Brad Potter

The recent construction of high density living around the basin doesn't match the "decline" in water that the GSA is talking about. Is it possible to add a service connection to my property to switch to city water versus my well?

Close-There is a procedure for requesting service connection to your property. He cannot speak to specific property options, but Colin provided his email ([cclose@srcity.org](mailto:cclose@srcity.org)) and phone number ((707) 543-4524) to the audience so they can get more information about how to look into connections. Colin said he also has information about water supply for growth and to please contact him to discuss further.

3. Rosalie Mack

How does building dense cluster housing impact groundwater more than rural wells?

Trotta- most of the high-density housing is being built within the cities. The cities are primarily using water from Sonoma Water and supplemental wells. Part of the long-term planning of the GSP is development—the GSP predicts out 50 years both in climate and development. There has been a lot of input and there is a likelihood the groundwater will be lower in the future which is why it's important to monitor and look for opportunities to recharge/save water.

4. Darren Crawford

Comment: Climate change is not affecting our water. You are shutting down dams, like Lake Pillsbury, and pumping water out of the area. How can you prove the ground has sunk?

There is no evidence of subsidence in the basin.

5. Ken Eide

What is being done to add water to our groundwater? Back in 2016 there was money allotted for Laguna regeneration and money for injection wells. What has been done over the last six years to remedy this? Where are the plans for the levee systems?

Trotta - I'm not sure what you are referring to. I would need more information to comment on the projects being asked about. There have been a lot of restoration projects in the Laguna that would help with groundwater. However, there's not a lot of recharge opportunity in the Laguna. There are however aquifer storage and recovery studies that have contributed to Sonoma Water receiving \$6 million in grant funding from the state recently for an ASR project.

6. Jens Kullberg

What about recycled water? The Geysers are receiving water and water is also going down to Petaluma. Why can't the water stay local?

Trotta - Recycled water has been injected into aquifers around the state. However, it should be noted that injection requires a higher level of treatment before it can be done. There are permits and monitoring that also need to be done, making it more costly. Here in Northern California utilizing the extra winter water from the Russian river is easier. Recycled water is a great resource but storing water in the wintertime is an issue.

7. Audience member

I'm a rural well owner with a septic. 90%+ of my water usage goes back into my land. Can you expand on how my water usage from my land does not affect recapture? Is the water recaptured?

Trotta: For rural residential with wells and septic in our ground water model being utilized in the ground water sustainability plan, we do incorporate septic return flows and are counted as return flows and recharge into the basin, however it's not a 1:1. Sometimes the recharge is going to a shallower aquifer and not the aquifer that its being drawn from. Marcus will share some studies to those interested and reach out to him.

8. Rosalie Mack

The Geysers and Santa Rosa contract promotes the Geysers over farmers.

Close- There is a long history in regard to Santa Rosa using recycled water, which it has done since the 1970s. The State had issues with the highly treated water being discharged to the Russian River. The city had to look for options in the winter months, when the farmers couldn't take the water, but when the most recycled water is being produced at the treatment plants. Santa Rosa chose the Geysers as an all-weather, cost-effective plan which helps with clean energy vs sending the water out to the ocean. Farmers are getting about 25% of the recycled water. Colin offered his contact information for anyone interested in more information.

9. Roy Edwards

He has concerns about what's going to happen once the fee get implemented will the fee go up at a later date. Will metering go into place? What reassurance do the well owners have that they aren't opening themselves up to liability and having outsiders come onto their property

Sam Magill indicated that the GSA has no authority for metering.

Jerry Bradshaw - The fee is on a five-year timeline. In five years, things will be clearer, and the fee can be adjusted depending on the information available at that time. The funds are to fuel the 20-year plan of the GSP, and grant funding will always be the first pursuit to keep the fee low.

There are no plans or reasons for the GSA to visit individual properties.

10. Mike Martini

Thank you for this heavy lift. There is no easy answer. The Sonoma County Farm Bureau has submitted a letter. I work with a lot of growers and processors in the county and the first thing that I request from this GSA is to find a way to maintain what has been done for the last two years so that people have time to understand these rates. The people need time to work with their state officials to find money to do the compliance side of SGMA. Not necessarily the implementation side, but the compliance side. I also have concerns that all the local basins (Petaluma and Sonoma Valley) will have different fees—it's an issue of equity.

11. Craig Hanson

This agency wouldn't exist if there wasn't a drought. If we're not in a drought we don't need to pay anything. Second, why not a moratorium that puts a pause on the drilling of new wells?

Trotta - the GSA does not have authority to issue well permits unless the existing permittee agency hands over authority to the GSA and the GSA wants it. Currently, the county is the well permitting agency, and they are a member of the GSA. They have no current moratorium on wells, but if things change, there may be. There are no plans of this.

SGMA was passed during a drought, but its not meant to specifically address drought. It's a 50-year plan and takes into account any possible future droughts. The new Governor's order does require that certain types of wells (not residential or public supply wells) that the county needs to get GSA approval from the GSA before issuing permits.

12. Joe

How do we recharge when there's so much concrete and development? Sonoma Water is in charge of an aqueduct that is leaking for five years; how much water is lost and what are the plans to fix the leak? If you can't find the money to fix the leak, where did you find the money to fund two coffee tables for \$11,000?

Trotta - Pavement does reduce some infiltration and recharge. There are new requirements for developments requiring the capture and management of stormwater. the GSA has no authority for new land use development. They can, however, support best management practices for new developments and provide recommendations. In terms of the leak, the GSA does not own any infrastructure.

Infrastructure does age, and there are new developments and technologies to help with this.

Colin - All new development has best management practices that needs to be followed and Santa Rosa has incentives for this. He asked that people wanting to learn more, to reach out to him.

Ann- She does not know anything about a purchase of tables and to please connect with her so she could learn more.

13. Bob Likins

a. Question one: Can we get the table showing income and expenses projected out for 10 years? The cost vs income information is needed.

Trotta - There are data gaps and uncertainty, but it was determined that 5 years is a safe time period to assume. The portions of the budget that are being planned for, the monitoring and administration, are being projected over the next 5 years will still be required. Depending on the feasibility of the projects and action/needs that come up once data gaps are filled and more information is known, that will be a may require a whole new fee study to fund projects that are not already part of what partner agencies are doing.

b. The GSA has no jurisdiction over metering but within the next 10 years do you expect that anybody--state or the man in the moon--having authority or jurisdiction to meter?

Marcus- No, there is no indications that the locally there will be authority to meter. The state is different.

c. Is there a group of advisory citizens that can contribute to the conversation regarding the GSAs actions?

Bradshaw – There is an advisory group that represents many interests and constituents. The list can be found at <https://santarosaplaingroundwater.org/ac/>

d. Why is it assumed rural residences are using more water than city residences?

Bradshaw - There is no good data on rural residential population and water use.

DuBay - 30-years of research and records have provided insight int the number assumed in the GSP and fee calculation.

e. Is the precedent anywhere for requiring metering?

Marcus – He can't comment with certainty, but there may be some counties in the state that have authority and may have implemented metering, but there are no plans in Sonoma County. Nor does the GSA have authority or is seeking this authority.

14. Chris Burnhardt

The questions on the survey that went out almost a year and a half ago were tricky. He tried to get them published in local papers with no success. Chris read his letter to the editor.

Other comments:

- Make property and income tax directly proportional not inversely to number of children.

- Ending sources of overpopulation, especially subsidized parenting slavery for non-parents. Making today's exorbitant disastrous for retirees, property tax income proportional like income tax or reviving the Williamson act repealed in 2012-13 for under 40 acres. down to 15 acres or less with just grazing/hay usage. Stopping/ reversing all new housing development approval.
- Stop subsidy of development with deliberating ridiculously low interest CD rates. How can retirees pay inflated exorbitant property tax, earning almost no interest on their life savings in cds? What if I have two properties listed as two parcels against my will? Will I be charged twice?

15. Dorothy and Jim Corcoral

Is there a well head fee? Are there statewide projects being considered? What about desalinization?

No, to a well head fee.

Trotta – DWR has information on state-wide projects being pursued. Sonoma County is not connected to state water project. The county doesn't benefit from snowpack and our water supply is not sent to Southern CA or the Central Valley.

16. Audience member

Was the spark to the GSP, the drought?

Trotta: SGMA was passed during a drought but is not written to specifically address drought. There have been decades of state-wide groundwater management. This is a long-term plan to sustain groundwater that accounts for drought and other factors.

17. Wendy Krupnick

I live in the basin, have a well, and represent the Sonoma County chapter of Community Alliance with Family Farmers—In regard to Ag Fee Rates, more categories need to be considered; it's not so much whether farmers are irrigating but how they are irrigating. There should be credits for producers who are implementing carbon farming plans and other measures to conserve; they agree with some of the concerns that the Farm Bureau raised around different fees among the three local basins. Overall, they support the efforts of the GSA trying to prevent wells from going dry.

18. Dawn Ha

Rural well owners are the stewards of their own lands. Sonoma Water sends water to Marin and there are other issues that the water agency hasn't addressed.

19. Dan

Encourages the audience to look into stratospheric aerosol injection and changing the weather patterns. The rainfall is being diverted to Texas.

20. Vince

The GSA is about local vs. state. He asked the audience; do you want the state to come in? Look at all the information.

21. Justin Merrick

- a. What is the percent of groundwater usage by commercial and business? [Justin acknowledged Jerry Bradshaw had a slide on this and would look at it more, but his question was answered during Jerry's presentation]
- b. Percent of water use by well owner's countywide? Can registered voter numbers give information on numbers?

Bradshaw: Several studies have been referenced and the information has been confirmed with local agencies for what their average residential water use within their systems and that was applied to the rural side.

[Justin: So not all city water comes from groundwater? Bradshaw: yes, that is correct. Its ten percent or less in the city]

- c. Will the county/state/cities be paying for well installation, maintenance, repair, etc. of my well?

Bradshaw: There is no charge for the water that is pumped out of the well. The GSA is using water usage to calculate the fees for the work they are doing.

[Justin commented that this wasn't a fee, but a tax. Sam mentioned that he would connect with Justin to provide him with additional information about why this is a fee, not a tax.]

- d. How are fees regulated and how will they be adjusted? Annually, biannually etc.?

Magill: The fees will be assessed annually and that the budget is for 5 years. Pumping will also be looked at and adjusted after 5-years.

- e. How do you have the authority to charge me (well user) for my water?

Magill: It's outlined in the CA constitution and the GSA can provide that to him if he requests.

Bradshaw: Specifically, its Water Code Section 10730—It's also in SGMA.

- f. If we are using 2019 fee structure and just updating data, why was there an almost 50% increase?

The budget was always a million a year but there were grants that offset the budget—these grants are ending. The Agency will continue to pursue grants to keep the fees down. The board will have to pass a resolution to change the fees in the future—This is a public process, and anyone can attend the Board or AC meetings.

[Justin: How can I follow/track the grants that are being applied for? Marcus: The state has some funds coming up, about \$200 million for 90 basins. The grants will open in September and will be competitive so there's no guarantee that funds will be received. The grants are one-time and spread over-time. The grants that are being applied for will be discussed in the public meetings: AC and Board. Ann mentioned to Justin that he can sign up for an email newsletter that will help keep him up to date on what is happening]

[Justin: Is there a marker that needs to be met that will trigger the goal is met and the fee is no longer needed?

Sam: The GSP can go into more detail on the standards. Marcus: SGMA is written so that GSA's have 20 years to achieve sustainability. There are 5-year check ins with the state. At the end of the 20-year period you have to demonstrate to the state that you have achieved or have been maintaining sustainability (if your basin is already sustainable), then after 20 year, you have to demonstrate for the next 30 years the basin is sustainable.]

## 22. Jens Kullberg

1. What mechanism gave the agency the authority to impose fees?
2. When will meters be required? Is basin currently overdrawn?
3. What about recharge with recycled water?

23. Michelle Larson

What will you do with the fee... how will you spend it?

24. Dolores Deckers

How can cities take underground water on my property?

25. Emilio Ricci

Well in city limits—How to determine acre feet?

26. Allen Baken

Casino Water

27. Judith Winds

1. Where is the extra \$500K added to budget come from—is there a list of salaries?

28. Joanne

- a. There is no way I use 446 feet of water a day. But if I'm going to be charged for that why not plant my field with sod?
- b. What is the money for is a year of flood?
- c. What is our tax amount exactly? We were told before would be about \$10.00/year

Rural residential is estimated to be between \$18-22 and would be charged on the property tax bill. It's based on a parcel with a home on it. Usage fees are based on studies and there are avenues for residents to correct assumptions through the GUIDE program on the GSA's website (reach out to GSA staff if you do not have internet access) and there is also appeals process that is in place and will be with the upcoming fees. Exceptions can be made on an individual basis, but there is a process that needs to be followed to show there needs to be an exception.

d. How does our money bring more water to us in the rural [area]?

Magill: Marcus Trotta outlined a number of projects and actions that are planned, as well as a process for when issues are identified within monitoring network that will need to be addressed on an individual bases as they come up.

Trotta: part of the funding is to plan for and implement projects that would increase supply to the basin. These projects would benefit all groundwater users throughout the basin. The GSP outlines projects.

For more information on the GSA, please visit <https://santarosaplaingroundwater.org/>

For more information on the Santa Rosa Plain Groundwater Sustainability Plan, please visit <https://santarosaplaingroundwater.org/gsp/>.

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