



SANTA ROSA PLAIN GROUNDWATER SUSTAINABILITY AGENCY

PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Community Meeting Scheduled on Santa Rosa Plain Groundwater Sustainability Fee

Santa Rosa, CA – The Santa Rosa Plain Groundwater Sustainability Agency (GSA) is hosting a community meeting on January 30, to discuss a proposed groundwater sustainability fee to provide short-term funding for the new agency. Attendees will also learn about a proposed well registration program. The meeting will be held 6 p.m. to 8 p.m., Wednesday, January 30, at the Finley Community Center, 2060 W. College Ave., Santa Rosa.

The GSA was created to sustain the quality and quantity of groundwater in the Santa Rosa Plain (generally, the valley floor stretching from Cotati to Windsor and from the foot of Sonoma Mountain to Sebastopol). This state-mandated agency is nearing completion of a year-long study to find ways to finance day-to-day operations and groundwater planning. A groundwater sustainability fee – based on estimated groundwater use – is being considered.

“The GSA Board has worked for more than a year to develop an equitable, low-impact solution that will allow us to fund this state-mandated agency,” said Santa Rosa Plain GSA board chair Lynda Hopkins. “The meeting is an opportunity for community members to learn about the proposed fee, and to share their thoughts.”

“The GSA Board and Advisory Committee have discussed fee options in 12 public meetings, we held a community workshop to solicit creative ideas, and we’ve provided monthly updates to our large email list,” said Santa Rosa Plain GSA vice-chairman Tom Schwedhelm. “We hope people can attend the January 30 meeting to learn more details.”

ABOUT THE RATE AND FEE STUDY

The Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) was passed into California law in fall 2014. The Act requires that State-designated medium and high priority basins form a GSA and develop a Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP). Santa Rosa Plain is a medium priority basin. In compliance with SGMA, the Santa Rosa Plain GSA was created in June 2017.

GSA member agencies contributed funds to pay for the first two years of GSA operating costs. In fall of 2017, the GSA sought a consultant to conduct a rate and fee study to develop options for funding the agency until the GSP is completed (in 2022). Raftelis (a financial consulting firm) began the study in December 2017. In spring 2018, the GSA was awarded a \$1 million Proposition 1 grant from the California Department of Water Resources to develop the GSP. The grant funds significantly offset GSA costs. However, funding is needed to cover the remaining operating costs of approximately \$337,000 annually.

Strict constitutional requirements on fees and taxes have narrowed the funding options to fees that would likely be based on actual or estimated groundwater use. Potential fee payors could include groundwater users such as cities, water districts, farmers, businesses and residents with wells. It is estimated that about one-third of all groundwater used in Santa Rosa Plain is used by agriculture; about one-third by cities and towns; about 25 percent by rural residents; and the remainder is split amongst other users including mutual water companies, schools, golf courses and other commercial users.

Proposed fee amounts could range from \$1- \$3 annually for a well owner with a small irrigation well (but whose main water supply is from a city) to between \$16-\$26 per acre foot for larger pumpers, like cities, towns, mutual water companies, agriculture and golf courses. (An acre foot of water is equivalent to 325,851 gallons.) Rural residents, who rely solely on a well for water, could pay between \$8-\$13 annually.

If the GSA does not impose fees, and as a result, cannot complete and implement the GSP, the state could intervene and impose fees that would range from \$100 annually for residential well owners to \$300 (base fee) plus \$40 per acre foot of groundwater use for agriculture, cities, mutual water systems, golf courses and commercial users.

For more information about the Santa Rosa Plain GSA, go to www.santarosaplaingroundwater.org.

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