



SANTA ROSA PLAIN GROUNDWATER SUSTAINABILITY AGENCY

PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Groundwater Agency Schedules Study Session on Fee Options

Santa Rosa, CA – On Thursday, December 13, 1 p.m., the Santa Rosa Plain Groundwater Sustainability Agency (GSA) Board of Directors will hold a study session on fee options to provide short-term funding for the new agency.

The nine-member Board will meet at the Santa Rosa Utilities Field Office, 35 Stony Point Rd, Santa Rosa, for a two-hour study session, as part of its regularly scheduled meeting. During the session, Board members will review decisions made to-date in a year-long rate and fee study, and will provide input to staff and consultants.

No decisions will be made during the study session, but Board members will provide feedback on fee options and a possible well registration program. People who attend the meeting will have an opportunity to comment.

“The Board is attempting to craft 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 study session will be an opportunity for Board members to discuss options and to share our thoughts on several important questions.”

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 (essentially, the valley floor, extending from Cotati to Windsor) 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 for the next three years, 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 for developing the GSP. The grant funds significantly offset GSA costs. Funding is needed to cover the remaining operating costs of approximately \$250,000 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 more than half of all groundwater used in Santa Rosa Plain is used by agriculture; about 25 percent by cities, towns and small mutual water districts; about 20 percent by rural residents; and about 3 percent by golf courses.

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 \$11-\$16 per acre foot for larger pumpers, like cities, towns, 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 \$6-\$10 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.santarosaplainingroundwater.org.

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