



PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 21, 2019

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Boards approve plan to offset proposed groundwater fee

(Santa Rosa, CA) – On Tuesday, May 21, the Board of Directors of the Sonoma County Water Agency (Sonoma Water Board) and the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors (County Board) approved a plan to offset a fee that is likely to be imposed on groundwater users in the Santa Rosa Plain (an area extending from Santa Rosa west to Sebastopol, north to Windsor and south to Cotati). Under the plan, the County and Sonoma Water would contribute a total of up to \$240,000 annually for three years to the Santa Rosa Plain Groundwater Sustainability Agency (GSA).

For the past 17 months, the GSA Board of Directors has been studying options to fund the agency. At its March meeting, the GSA Board approved a funding methodology that would charge all groundwater users in the Santa Rosa Plain a fee based on actual or estimated groundwater use. At its June 13 meeting, the GSA Board will consider adopting the fee.

Tuesday's action by the County Board and Sonoma Water Board would provide a contribution to the GSA equal to the fees that would be assessed on rural residents and other groundwater users in the unincorporated areas of the basin.

“Assuming that the GSA adopts a fee, the contributions by the County and Sonoma Water mean that rural groundwater users won't be charged for three years,” said Sonoma County Supervisor and Sonoma Water Director Lynda Hopkins, who also serves as the Chair of the GSA. “We believe that smaller, individual groundwater users shouldn't be charged while the GSA is in the start-up phase.”

“It’s critical that we all work together to manage our precious groundwater, and we don’t want the first interaction that people have with the GSA to be about fees,” said Sonoma County Supervisor and Sonoma Water Director Shirlee Zane, who also serves on the GSA Board.

The GSA was created as a result of a state law – the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) – which requires communities to sustainably manage groundwater basins. By January 31, 2022, GSAs must develop science-based plans that detail how much groundwater is being used and replenished, problem areas, and projects and plans to ensure that groundwater will be available in the future. The proposed fee would be levied for three years, to fund the GSA through the planning process, and only applies to the Santa Rosa Plain basin. For more information about the Santa Rosa Plain GSA, visit santarosaplainingroundwater.org

The \$240,000 contribution derives from three sources: County contingency funds (\$200,000 annually); Sonoma Water general fund (up to \$26,800 annually); and Sonoma Water transmission funds (up to \$13,200 annually).

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