

**Santa Rosa Plain Groundwater Sustainability Agency
Community Meeting on Groundwater on Sustainability Fee
Windsor – March 7, 2019 - Meeting Summary**

Welcome and Introductions:

Debora Fudge, Santa Rosa Plain GSA Board Member, welcomed the audience and thanked them for attending. She mentioned it is the fourth Community Meeting following the first meeting in January. She asked the Board, Advisory Committee members, and staff to identify themselves, and said they would be available to answer questions after the meeting. The meeting itself would allow the opportunity for questions following the presentations. Director Fudge also emphasized the purpose of the meeting was to share information and that no decisions would be made.

Ann DuBay, Community Affairs Manager, Sonoma Water, facilitated the meeting. She asked the audience to identify themselves. The majority of attendees were rural groundwater users (approximately 25), two people who use city water with a supplemental well, and no agricultural well owners. Ms. DuBay provided an overview of the agenda and reiterated that no decisions would be made at the meeting.

Background

Sandi Potter, Deputy Director for Water, Town of Windsor, and Santa Rosa Plain Advisory Committee Member, provided a background on the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act.

- California is one of the last western states to manage groundwater. A 2013/2014 USGS study of the Santa Rosa Plain identified issues of groundwater levels and quality. As much as 50% of the basin's water supply comes from groundwater and new wells are being installed every year. Climate change is expected to impact the balance of inflows and outflows, so this led to the California legislature regulating groundwater. Three basins in Sonoma County were mandated by the State to comply with SGMA: Sonoma Valley, Petaluma Valley and Santa Rosa Plain.
- On June 30, 2017, Step 1 of SGMA was completed through the formation of the Groundwater Sustainability Agency via a Joint Powers authority Agreement (JPA). Step 2 of SGMA, "Develop Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP)," should be completed by January 31, 2022. Step 3, "Achieve Sustainability," is due to be complete 20 years after the GSP adoption.
- Formation activities are being funded by GSA member agencies which include the Cities of Santa Rosa, Cotati, and Rohnert Park; Town of Windsor; Independent Water Suppliers; Gold Ridge and Sonoma Resource Conservation Districts; County of Sonoma; and Sonoma Water.
- The goals of the GSA are to sustainably manage the community's groundwater to ensure it is available now and into the future, to meet the requirement of SGMA, to ensure the GSP reflects the goals and priorities of the community, and to be as cost-effective and efficient as possible.
- To-date, the GSA has held 24 public meetings, two postcards have been mailed to all potential well owners in the Basin, and the Board and Advisory Committee alternate meetings every month. For

more information about meetings, documents, budgets and background go to www.santarosaplainingroundwater.org.

- The California Department of Water Resources (DWR) defines the Santa Rosa Plain Basin boundary. The city of Sebastopol and three neighboring mutual water companies proposed amending the boundaries to be included within the basin. In November 2018, DWR released a draft approval of the proposed boundary change request. DWR made its final determination on basin boundaries in February 2019, and Sebastopol and three mutual water companies could join the Santa Rosa Plain GSA.
- The first two years of GSA operations are funded by the member agencies. The Santa Rosa Plain GSA also received a \$1 million Proposition 1 grant for the preparation of the GSP and has received Facilitation and Technical Support Services from DWR. Moving forward, the GSA must identify an equitable funding source for costs above the \$1 million grant for the next three years. Costs to be covered are primarily for the administration of the GSA. The GSP may also include studies and water management programs.
- To achieve sustainability by implementing the GSP (after 2022), may require specific activities (depending on the GSP's conclusions). Activities could include studies, water management programs, and capital projects.
- The estimated annual funding needed for the next three years is \$337,000 (after member agency repayment deferral and grant funding).
- Prior to tonight's community meeting, many public meetings have been held to discuss the fee, including six Board meetings, six Advisory Committee meetings, a Community Workshop in March 2018 and another more recent Community Workshop in January, 2019.

Proposed Groundwater Sustainability Fee

Andy Rodgers, Santa Rosa Plain GSA Administrator, provided an overview of the proposed fee. He introduced himself as a geologist and rural residential well owner in the Santa Rosa Plain basin. Rodgers said the first two years of GSA operations were funded by the member agencies. The estimated annual funding needed for the next three years is \$337,000 (after member agency repayment deferral and grant funding). Rodgers explained there are three groundwater basins in Sonoma County and funding is needed for all three. To clarify, he mentioned that the other two groundwater basins in Sonoma County aren't proposing fees is because they have less groundwater users, fewer stakeholders, and less member agencies (five in Petaluma Valley Basin, six in Sonoma Valley Basin compared to nine in Santa Rosa Plain Basin). If fees were imposed in the other basins, the estimated fee in Petaluma Valley would be double what is proposed for the Santa Rosa Plain and almost two and a half times more in Sonoma Valley.

Rodgers then explained the proposed fee. He emphasized the fee is not a tax. It is a regulatory fee based on actual or estimated groundwater uses. Actual use is based on metered pumping data (for municipal and public water systems including some commercial uses such as wineries,) and estimated groundwater use when pumping data is not available (for general rural residential, agricultural and other users, e.g. golf courses and schools). Estimated usage is based on data, reports, and studies by independent parties.

For rural residential groundwater users, the fee is based on estimates (since most rural residential landowners don't have meters, and SGMA prohibits the metering of small water users). Based on studies, the estimated average usage for rural residential is 0.5 acre-feet per parcel (466 gallons per day).

For agriculture, the estimated use is based on the number of irrigated acres and estimated annual applied water for specific crop types, accounting for recycled water use and surface water rights.

For cities, towns, mutual water districts, commercial users, wineries, etc., the fee is based on actual groundwater pumped.

What is the rate based on? It is based on average annual costs of running the GSA divided by acre feet of groundwater used annually in the basin = acre foot rate. The first part of the equation is the average annual costs which are determined by taking the estimated 5-year operating expenses of \$3,000,000, less \$1,000,000 grant funding, less \$992,000 member agency deferral over the three remaining years of funding the GSA = \$337,000 to be recovered over the next three years.

Currently, the estimated fees are:

- \$8-\$13 per parcel/year for rural residential (compared to annual State intervention fees of \$100 per parcel)
- \$16-\$26 per acre foot of groundwater used for cities, towns, mutual water districts, golf courses, commercial users, agriculture (compared to State intervention fees of \$300 base fee plus \$40 per acre foot)
- \$1-3 per parcel/year for urban supplemental irrigation wells of (compared to annual State intervention fees of \$100).

The fee would be levied for three years, after which time the Board could end, extend, or replace it with a different fee. It would go into effect on July 1, 2019 and be collected on the 2019-2020 property tax bill (even though it is not a tax).

Proposed Groundwater Users Registration Program

Andy Rodgers provided an overview of the proposed groundwater user registration program. SGMA requires some form of regulation if fees are assessed to de minimis groundwater users (using less than 652,702 gallons per year). Most rural residential users fall into this category, which makes up approximately one-quarter of the total groundwater extraction/use in the Santa Rosa Plain.

Rodgers specified that registration is free to groundwater users. Costs for the program are funded by the GSA budget. Registration includes requests for information. The program does not require meters to be installed on wells – in fact, SGMA does NOT authorize the GSA to meter de minimis users, nor does it require groundwater users to fill out forms - unless they want to share or correct information. Technical assistance for the program will be available from Ag Commissioner, GSA staff and Permit Sonoma.

Next Steps

The audience input will be provided to GSA Board and posted online. There will be a fee methodology discussion and possible action at the Board meeting March 14 at 1pm, 25 Stony Pt Road in Santa Rosa.

Possible approval of fee and groundwater user registration at the Board meeting on April 11, time TBD.
Public comments: go to www.santarosaplainingroundwater.org for more information.

Questions/Comments received at the Meeting

A panel made up of Sandi Potter, Marcus Trotta, Sonoma Water, and Andy Rodgers took questions from the audience. All questions and comments will be shared with the Board and addressed.

- Question – With the water usage through the wells and Russian River, or the aqueduct that goes south, is that all part of a similar plan for Santa Rosa, Petaluma, and Novato?
 - Response – The Town of Windsor has a well field on the Russian River outside the boundary of the Santa Rosa Plain, many of the other wells may be also. Sonoma Water has wells on the Russian River that provide the majority of water to urban users in Santa Rosa Plain, Sonoma Valley, Petaluma Valley, Marin County - those wells are also on the Russian river, but they are outside this basin.
So, they are using water from our basin?
 - The water produced through the Russian River system is provided to cities and towns in the SRP and to cities and towns in Petaluma and Sonoma valleys and in Marin County. This water serves to offset some of the potential groundwater use. Also, to clarify, some wells are on the river outside the Santa Rosa Plain basin, but Sonoma Water has some wells that are in the basin.
- Question – You, bureaucrats that haven't been elected by us - are asking us to hear what you say. We have no recourse on your actions, but you have recourse on our actions. You show us this registration that will expire in three years, what happens after three years? You will know everyone who has a well. Where are the limits?
 - Response – The Board will make the decision, we put the information together and make recommendations, as does the Advisory Committee. This proposal is for the next three years, in three years we will have a much better picture of what the groundwater conditions are, through the well registration user program we will have better information than we have now. All we have now is information from various data sets from cities, the county, and the state. The Board may end the fee, change it, extend it, or do more work around water quality issues, storm water recharge, etc.... There will most likely be another series of meetings in three years like this to review the Plan.
- Comment to Audience - We aren't choosing to do this, we have been mandated to do it. The state recognized we have been in overdraft. This is our opportunity for local control.
- Comment/Question – I think it is a great idea to manage the groundwater. When we moved here, we had a problem with our well because of nitrate pollution. We called the county water agency and they said they can't do anything for small wells, so we couldn't get any help. It is a good idea to manage groundwater, but it seems like we haven't accounted for the carrying capacity for years, as to how many people you move into an area with limited water supply. Do we not have any idea that water is a finite resource? What are we doing with all the new

construction, are we going to limit growth to a sustainable carrying concept? Are you working together with the Planning Department?

- Response – Recently at one of the GSA Advisory Committee meetings, we had a staff geologist from Permit Sonoma talk to us about the connection between the county's land use policies and managing the resource. The county does take into consideration water use when there is construction. They have been implementing these policies since 2006. County has a monitoring program, they require groundwater analysis and mitigation measures before some building uses go in. The GSAs are working with Permit Sonoma, etc. working in a collaborative way. SGMA requires for the first time, that Planning people and Water people communicate and take into consideration, groundwater conditions.
- Question – When you gave the examples, you didn't provide examples for wineries or other commercial businesses. Do you have a plan for that? Wineries use about 14 gallons of water per case of wine. About 15 million cases of wine are produced annually in the county.
 - Response – Wineries fall under the Commercial category and are charged on their measured reported usage.
- Question – I still have a hard time believing your assumption that rural residential users are using .5-acre feet per year (466 gallons per day). We have a septic system and have an average use of 42 gallons /day for the past seven years. Where are you getting your numbers? People don't irrigate here from September to April.
 - Response – The estimate is an average. We questioned the studies, but all studies report approximately the 0.5 AFY. We have to work with the information we have. Luckily it doesn't equate to a high fee.
That isn't the point.
 - Response –One of the other interesting pieces of information we found is that the average parcel size is 3.2 acres, and with outside use and animals, it can add up to a lot of water.
- Comment: We live on one acre. We pump the water up and it percolates back down, it never leaves the land. Technically, we are not using water.
- Comment: We are recharging our ground, the City of Santa Rosa is different. We question your approach to the data. We are a source of revenue for you. For three years it will cost us \$8 or so, and when you don't get \$1 million grants in the future, it will cost us three times as much. It will be an escalating cost.
- Comment from meeting participant to the audience: Unfortunately, the Russian River Watershed Council, is missing from this group. I don't own a house but have a vested interest in healthy groundwater. Manage crops that use our water. Climate change could be affecting groundwater. So, with all the problems we have with Santa Rosa not able to manage the sewer in a flood, why are we using precious groundwater to move toxic waste. Now that we have the chance to rebuild, why can't we do it right, one property at a time? We have the usual suspects

sit on the Board, they don't care if wineries come into the county, they get lots of money. Please participate.

- Comment from meeting participant to audience: I haven't heard the background about how SGMA got started. We hear of depletion of water in the Central Valley, and know many coastal basins have problems too. We don't have a big problem here, but we have a system proposed for this resource before it becomes a big problem. It will be easier in the long run to know the water is in your well. Think about the money you are being asked to pay as an insurance policy to head off problems before they get started.
- Question/Comment – Who is exempt from this? Large corporations, the County? And a second thing, I don't mind the fee we are charged and paying back through the community, but we are paying twice. When we go shopping in Santa Rosa, the large corporations are just going to raise prices. Everyone is going to pay twice for the same thing. The dumps use a lot of water, they just raised their prices. The quarries will do the same thing. We will be paying twice for the decisions you make, and I don't think this is right.
 - Response – The exempt parties are the sovereign nations (tribes) so Graton Rancheria is exempt from SGMA. But they have been very involved with planning, participate on the Advisory Committee, and are funding significant monitoring programs in their area, and that information is very beneficial to us.

How about the wells you have in Santa Rosa that you draw water from for the people who live in Santa Rosa?

- The City of Santa Rosa has an acre-foot charge for the GSA.
You are price gauging the people in Santa Rosa for the water that they are using because they will probably have a city tax to pay for this in addition to paying for their water meter, use of the water, and everything else. There will be a lot of people who won't be able to pay it.
 - Response – Last night at the City of Rohnert Park meeting, the same question was asked – what is going to happen when Rohnert Park starts paying their fees? Is it going to show up on everybody's bill? The response is that amount was considered and incorporated several years ago, so there will be no difference going forward. That is the Rohnert Park example.
- Question – There are three basins in Sonoma county. How are the other two being funded, are they also charging fees by parcel?
 - Response – Right now the member agencies are funding it. The reason they didn't go to fees right now is, they have the same overhead costs, so it would be a significantly higher fee than what is being proposed in the Santa Rosa Plain.
- Question – Why didn't all three basins in Sonoma county join to deal with these issues and come up with a similar plan?
 - Response – The law that came out of Sacramento brought a framework for folks to do local groundwater management. There was a two-year period for us to form the GSAs. During that discussion, there was strong interest to maintain local control. So, the governance structure that evolved was to create three separate governing agencies that

would be controlled by a Board of Directors - all elected officials - that would allow for the greatest amount of local control and accountability. The law requires we have coordination between the three agencies because the basins all border each other. There is some interaction with groundwater that needs to be coordinated between the GSAs. Moving forward there could be changes in the governance structures between the three GSAs. Right now, SGMA applies to these three basins but in the future, it could apply to others.

- Question – Apparently the Board members are getting paid, are most of these fees to cover salaries?

- Response – The Board members are not paid for this. They come from their local jurisdiction and are sitting as City Council members or Board of Supervisor members. Like many of their commitments and obligations, they do this on their own time as a service to the community.

Then what is the \$3 million over five years going towards? What are we paying for?

- Response – It pays for the development of the groundwater sustainability plan which is the roadmap for reaching sustainability as required by law, and for the administration of the agency. State requires tasks, lots of technical, outreach and legal thresholds to be met to operate and comply with SGMA. The budget is on the website.

- Question – I am having a hard time swallowing this. You're proposing the budget. What happens if you don't get enough money? Do you have a plan on how much you can increase?

- Response – Hopefully, with all this planning, we will have gotten this right and that won't happen. We have been successful in obtaining grants, we could look toward the member agencies, or we could potentially move things around. Hopefully, we would see it well enough in advance to avoid the problem.

Would you provide a plan on fee increase?

- The fee is fixed for three years.

- Comment - This is just another stupid program to get money.
- Comment – I am interested in seeing the take-away soon. You are selling out the farm without knowing how much water is there. I went to the California Environmental Protection Agency. They changed the plan mid cycle in Prop 50. This county was one of seven that came away with millions of dollars. This is late.... I would like to see more incentive for more people to get involved and help with the assessment. It is critical that we know how much water is being used. I encourage everyone to get involved and get solutions going.

Adjournment