



SANTA ROSA PLAIN GROUNDWATER SUSTAINABILITY AGENCY

PRESS RELEASE

Ann DuBay
707.524.8378 (office)
707.322.8185 (cell)
Ann.DuBay@scwa.ca.gov

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
February 20, 2019

Three New Community Meetings Scheduled on Santa Rosa Plain Groundwater Sustainability Fee

Santa Rosa, CA – The Santa Rosa Plain Groundwater Sustainability Agency (GSA) is hosting a series of community meetings in early March, to discuss a proposed groundwater sustainability fee to provide short-term funding for the new agency. Attendees will also learn about a proposed groundwater user registration program. The same information will be presented at each of the meetings, which will take place at 6 p.m., on March 4, March 6 and March 7 at various locations throughout the Santa Rosa Plain basin (details below). The March 4 meeting will be taped and posted online. The March 6 meeting can be viewed live on Comcast Channel 26 or watched remotely.

The additional meetings are scheduled to allow people an opportunity to ask questions and provide feedback after an overflow crowd attended a January 30 meeting in Santa Rosa. The March meetings will cover the same information that was discussed at the January meeting. No decisions will be made at the Community Meetings. The GSA Board will consider the fee methodology and levels at its March 14 and April 11 meetings (1 p.m., 35 Stony Point Road, Santa Rosa).

“The GSA has a responsibility to make sure that clean groundwater is available to the thousands of people, farms and businesses that rely on it -- today and into the future,” said Santa Rosa Plain GSA Chairwoman Lynda Hopkins. “To do this, the GSA needs a small, stable funding source. We hope that people will come to the meetings or watch them remotely, and share their thoughts.”

“While the fee is relatively small (less than \$13 a year for rural residential well owners), people at the January 30 meeting had a lot of questions,” said Santa Rosa Plain GSA Vice-Chair Tom

Schwedhelm. “The additional meetings will provide both important information to landowners and additional feedback to the GSA Board.”

This state-mandated 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). The GSA is nearing completion of a year-long study and regular public meetings 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 looked at multiple fees, rates or taxes to find an option that is fair, equitable and easy to administer. While no choice was perfect, a fee based on actual or estimated groundwater use meets all these criteria,” said GSA Board member Joe Dutton, who also served on an ad hoc committee that reviewed fee options. “To make sure that estimated groundwater use reflect what’s happening in the field, we talked to farmers and local agriculture experts and adjusted the numbers based on their feedback.”

Proposed fee amounts currently range up to \$3 annually for a well owner with a small irrigation well (but whose main water supply is from a city) and up to \$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.)

The proposed fee range for rural residents is up to \$13 annually. ‘Rural Residential’ well owners rely solely on a well for water, and comprise an estimated 24% of groundwater use in the Santa Rosa Plain basin. The GSA is not legally permitted to (nor does it have a desire to) meter rural residential wells, so must use estimates to determine total rural residential water use.

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 \$337,000 annually.

Strict constitutional requirements on fees and taxes have narrowed the funding options to fees 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 a third of all groundwater used in Santa Rosa Plain is used by agriculture; about a third by cities and towns; about a quarter by rural residents; with the remainder split amongst other users including mutual water companies, schools, golf courses and other commercial users.

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 annually for agriculture, cities, mutual water systems, golf courses and commercial users.

MEETING INFORMATION (the same materials and presentations will be presented at each meeting)

Monday, March 4, 6-8 p.m.

City of Santa Rosa, Utilities Field Office

35 Stony Point Road, Santa Rosa

The meeting will be taped, and can be viewed afterwards by going to

www.santarosaplainingroundwater.org

Wednesday, March 6, 6-8 p.m.

City of Rohnert Park, City Council Chambers

130 Avram Avenue, Rohnert Park

Televised live and broadcast on Comcast Channel 26. The meeting will also be taped, and can be viewed afterwards by going to www.santarosaplainingroundwater.org.

Thursday, March 7, 6-8 p.m.

Town of Windsor, Town Council Chambers

9291 Old Redwood Highway, Building 400, Windsor

For more information about the Santa Rosa Plain GSA, go to

www.santarosaplainingroundwater.org.

###