



SANTA ROSA PLAIN GROUNDWATER SUSTAINABILITY AGENCY

Groundwater Sustainability Fee Fact Sheet

Why a fee is needed

A state law, the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA), was passed in 2014. The primary aim of this law is to provide a framework for sustainable, local groundwater management in places like the Santa Rosa Plain.

Rather than let the State take over managing the groundwater basin at a much higher cost to residents [\$100 annually for rural residential well owners, and \$300 (base fee) plus \$40 per acre foot of water used annually for large well owners], local agencies stepped forward to create the Santa Rosa Plain Groundwater Sustainability Agency (GSA). These agencies provided funding for the first two years of the GSA’s operations. The boards of these agencies agreed that the GSA must become self-funded beginning its third year of operation – July 1, 2019 through at least 2022 when a Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) is required by the State.

Groundwater Sustainability Fee

For more than a year, the GSA’s Board, Advisory Committee, staff, consultants and legal counsel – in consultation with stakeholder groups and the community – considered fair, legal and effective ways to fund the GSA. The resulting, proposed groundwater sustainability fee would be paid by all groundwater users in the Santa Rosa Plain. The fee is based on actual (if known) or estimated groundwater use, and will ensure that clean, plentiful groundwater is available to people today and into the future.

Table 1. Proposed Groundwater Sustainability Fee

WHO	HOW MUCH
Rural residential well owners who use their wells for drinking, landscaping and gardening would pay:	\$8 - \$13 per parcel annually
Cities, towns, mutual water districts, agriculture, golf courses, and other commercial users would pay:	\$16-26 per acre foot of actual or estimated groundwater used annually
Urban well owners who get drinking water from a city or water district but use well water for irrigation would pay:	\$1-\$3 per parcel annually

NOTE: A range of fees is shown because the actual amount of the fee is still being determined, and won’t be known until the spring, when the GSA will learn from the California Department of Water Resources if Sebastopol and three mutual water companies will be included in the groundwater basin. The final fee will fall somewhere within this range.

How the fee is calculated

The fee would be based on actual or estimated groundwater use. California state law and best practice nationwide supports the use of estimates, based on reports, studies and crop type. See the table below to learn how the fee is calculated for your groundwater use.

Table 2. Fee Calculation

WHO	ASSUMED GROUNDWATER USE
Rural residential landowners who use their wells for drinking, landscaping and gardening	All rural residential landowners are assumed to use .5 acre feet of groundwater annually (equivalent to 162,925 gallons)
Urban well owners who get drinking water from a city or water district but use well water for irrigation	All urban well owners are assumed to use .10 acre feet annually (equivalent to 32,585 gallons)
Cities, mutual water companies, golf courses and other large water users with metered wells	Fee calculated on actual water use, averaged over a five year period
Large water users without meters (primarily agriculture)	Fee calculated by multiplying number of irrigated acres by estimated annual applied water for specific crop type (crop coefficient)

Note: For data sources, go to www.santarosaplaingroundwater.org/finances/fee.

How fee will be used

The fee will raise about \$337,000 annually. Part of this funding will pay for the development of the state-required Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP). The GSP is a science-based, quantitative plan to ensure that residents, farms, businesses and the environment has groundwater now and for 20 years into the future. Fortunately, the GSA was awarded a \$1 million state grant, which covers 90% of the GSP costs. The fee would cover the remainder of the GSP costs and the GSA’s day-to-day operations. Expenses include applying for and complying with grants; legal services; informing people about the GSA and what it is doing; developing agendas for the Board and Advisory Committee, staffing meetings and coordinating contracts. The full budget is available online.

How long will the new rates or fees be in place once they are enacted?

The fees implemented for the GSP development stage will be in place through at least 2022, at which time the continued funding of the GSA and its work to implement the completed GSP will be reassessed.

Well Registration Program

To help implement the groundwater sustainability fee and to gain a better understanding of the number of wells in the basin, the GSA will also implement a well registration program. People and businesses in areas without a public water system and farmers who irrigate crops will be assumed to have a well and will receive a letter letting them know that their well will be registered. If the well users are willing to share information about their well to add to the GSA’s knowledge of the basin, they can go online or call to speak to staff. An appeals process will be established for landowners who receive a letter, but don’t have a well. For more information, go to www.santarosaplaingroundwater.org/wellregistration.

Next Steps

The Santa Rosa Plain GSA Board of Directors and the Advisory Committee have, to-date, discussed fees and funding options in 14 public meetings, including a community meeting in March 2017 where they received input from about 200 basin residents. The Board will meet on February 14 to review the fee methodology and is likely to hold a public hearing for possible fee adoption on April 11. Meeting information and agendas are available at www.santarosaplaingroundwater.org.