



Community Engagement Plan

for the Implementation of the

Groundwater Sustainability Plan

Santa Rosa Plain Groundwater Sustainability Agency

2025-2030

Purpose, Outcomes & Goals

The purpose of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA), signed by Governor Brown in 2014, is to ensure local sustainable groundwater management in medium- and high-priority groundwater basins statewide. California's Department of Water Resources has determined that Sonoma County has three medium -priority basins that are subject to SGMA Implementation:

- Petaluma Valley basin
- Santa Rosa Plain subbasin
- Sonoma Valley subbasin

This Community Engagement Plan applies only to the Santa Rosa Plain Groundwater Sustainability Agency, although many outreach activities will be coordinated with the other basins.

SGMA Milestones:

1. The Santa Rosa Plain basin achieved the first milestone in SGMA by creating a Groundwater Sustainability Agency (GSA) by June 30, 2017.
2. The second major milestone in the SGMA was the adoption of a Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) by January 30, 2022 which was approved by the California Department of Water Resources in January 2023.
3. The third milestone is achieving sustainability through GSP Implementation by 2042.

Several key steps must be taken to ensure that the Groundwater Sustainability Plan is adopted, including:

- Adoption and implementation of a financing plan that will allow the Santa Rosa Plain GSA to be financially independent;
- Identifying and filling data gaps so that the GSA better understands what is happening in the subbasin.
- Monitoring the subbasin conditions to identify trends and possible areas of concern or improvements in order to address them.
- Annual reporting to DWR and a five-year update of the GSP that will incorporate new information.
- Planning, developing and implementing projects and actions that will address existing and potential future problems with groundwater levels, groundwater quality and other indicators of subbasin problems; and
- Educating people about the groundwater subbasin and engaging stakeholders in opportunities to understand and improve subbasin problems.

Outcomes: The desired outcome for this communication and outreach plan is to achieve Milestone Three with input from and in consideration of Sonoma County’s diverse people, economy and ecosystems.

Plan Goals: SGMA requires the GSA to consider the interests of all beneficial uses and users of groundwater, and encourage involvement of diverse social, cultural, and economic elements of the population within the subbasin during GSP preparation and implementation.

The goals of the Community Engagement Plan are to:

- Enhance understanding and inform the public about water and groundwater resources in the Santa Rosa Plain, the purpose and need for sustainable groundwater management, the benefits of sustainable groundwater management and the need for a GSP.
- Engage a diverse group of interested parties and stakeholders and promote informed feedback from stakeholders, the community and groundwater-dependent users throughout the GSP implementation process.
- Reach out to and engage disadvantaged communities throughout the rate/fee study and GSP implementation process.
- Coordinate communication and involvement between the GSA (Board, Advisory Committee and staff), and other local agencies (including other GSAs), elected and appointed officials, and the general public.
- Utilize the GSA Advisory Committee to facilitate a comprehensive public engagement process.
- Employ a variety of outreach methods that make public participation easy and accessible. Hold meetings at times and venues that encourage broad participation.
- Respond to public concerns and provide accurate, accessible, and up-to-date information.
- Manage the community engagement program in a manner that provides maximum value to the public and an efficient use of GSA and local agency resources.

Time Period: The Community Engagement Plan is intended to cover communication and outreach for the time period between July 2025 and June 2030.

Interested Parties and other stakeholders: SGMA lists interested parties who the GSA must consider when developing and implementing the GSP, including:

- Agricultural users of water
- Domestic well owners
- Municipal well operators
- Public water systems
- Land use planning agencies
- Environmental users of groundwater
- Surface water users
- The federal government
- California Native American tribes
- Disadvantaged communities (including those served by private domestic wells or small community water systems).

See Appendix A for a list of the interested parties in Santa Rosa Plain. Representatives of most of the interested parties are included on the GSA Board or Advisory Committee.

Other stakeholders can also be impacted by decisions made by the GSA, including businesses, schools, land stewardship organizations, and state government agencies.

See Appendix B for a listing of additional stakeholders that were considered and solicited for feedback during GSP development and implementation.

Outreach Roles

The GSA Board, which is comprised of elected and appointed officials representing land-use agencies and entities responsible for water supply and management will make the ultimate decisions on funding options and implementation of specific projects and management actions. As required by the Joint Powers Authority agreement that created the GSA, the GSA Board will consider the recommendations of the Advisory Committee, which is comprised of appointed representatives from stakeholder groups.

In regard to outreach, the Board is responsible for:

- Adopting and overseeing implementation of the Community Engagement Plan;
- Receiving and considering public comments made in writing and at Board meetings;
- Considering the recommendations of the Advisory Committee.

In addition, the Board may choose to play a more active role in outreach through communication with the public, stakeholder groups, and the entities it represents.

The **Advisory Committee**, which is comprised of members appointed by the GSA Board, representatives of entities that comprise the GSA, and representatives of eligible entities not part of the GSA, will become familiar with issues and financing options and issues related to the GSP.

The Advisory Committee is charged with actively engaging with the public for input and feedback. This charge will be carried out through various mediums and a variety of activities, but generally includes:

- Advising staff in the drafting of the Community Engagement Plan;
- Actively seeking input from the represented stakeholder groups on issues before the GSA;
- Sharing input and feedback with the full Advisory Committee meeting; and
- Making recommendations to the Board.

The Santa Rosa Plain GSA Board, the Santa Rosa Plain GSA Advisory Committee, and staff are committed to keeping the **public informed**, providing the public with **balanced and objective information** to assist the public in understanding SGMA, available options and recommendations, and **creating an open process** for public input on the implementation of the GSP.

When evaluating the options and making decisions, the Board, Advisory Committee and staff will **solicit public input** through a variety of methods, including public workshops, written and verbal comments, meetings with stakeholder organizations and community events. Input can be made during public comment periods at Advisory Committee and Board meetings, and in writing.

True engagement requires policymakers and the public to not only talk, but to also listen. The Santa Rosa Plain GSA asks all participants – whatever their role – to follow these rules of engagement:

- Be a good listener. Listen to what is being said; find out why it is being said.
- Be respectful to all participants.

Community Engagement Plan

To truly engage the public when implementing the GSP project and management actions, the GSA will strive to meet these overall objectives:

- Educate the public in compelling ways. Communicate what may often be complex concepts in simple and compelling ways with graphics and examples.
- Ensure inclusion. Identify and engage local community groups to partner or assist in reaching out to economically, socially and culturally diverse communities.
- Manage expectations. The GSA and the GSP are not designed to solve all water problems in the subbasin. Develop materials and messages that clearly communicate the goals of the GSA and the GSP.
- Show how the input received has been incorporated into the process. Demonstrating to the public how their ideas have been reflected in the planning are important to successfully achieving the goals.
- Remain focused on results. Understand objectives of each public meeting and facilitate the achievement of those objectives.

The Community Engagement Plan is comprised of two categories of activities: ongoing and project- or program-specific.

Ongoing activities are the “housekeeping” tasks of the GSA outreach, including website maintenance and updates, updates to the interested parties list, social media posts, updating fact sheets and FAQs, and issuing press releases or advertisements about community meetings.

Project or program-specific engagement activities

Engagement activities are developed to meet the outreach goals of each project or program and could include meetings and communications with affected neighbors or specific stakeholders and project-specific fact sheets, media releases, and social media posts.

The goal of outreach for the first five years of GSP implementation (2022-2027) will be educating and engaging the general public, stakeholders (including disadvantaged communities and tribes), the Advisory Committee and Board on the technical, fiscal, and beneficial aspects of implementing the GSP. This phase will include a mix of communication tools, to be used in a variety of forums, including community meetings.

This plan is intended to be adaptive, with outreach staff working with the Advisory Committee (or a working group) to incorporate tools and techniques that worked well on prior projects and modifying or eliminating tools that failed to engage stakeholders.

Community Engagement in areas of chronic decline or other indicators of undesirable results: In the future, the GSP implementation could reveal that some areas of the subbasin are experiencing chronic problems of groundwater level decline or some other indicator of concern, which could result in activities or policies that impact well owners in the affected zone. If that occurs, the Advisory Committee and staff will strategically employ communications tools outlined in this plan to conduct outreach to these specific areas using multiple platforms including but not limited to community events, outreach via existing organizations, public workshops, email correspondence, direct mail and social media.

Communication Forums & Tools

Governance Agencies Briefings: Board members will brief their councils or boards regularly on GSA activities and will work with GSA staff to provide additional briefings on sensitive or important topics.

Stakeholder Briefings: Advisory Committee members will meet with and communicate regularly with organizations comprised of the stakeholder groups they represent. To avoid overlap and mixed messages, briefings will be coordinated with outreach staff.

Community events: Community events are an opportunity to educate specific stakeholder groups through materials and informal conversations.

Disadvantaged Community Engagement – Community Events & Using Existing Venues

Disadvantaged Communities (DACs) are specifically called out in SGMA as an interested party. Thirty-six percent of the area in the Santa Rosa Plain Basin is designated an Economically Distressed Area, and 24% of the area in the basin is categorized as DAC. A large percent of the people living in the DAC areas are relatively recent immigrants from Spanish-speaking and Asian countries. The “A Portrait of Sonoma County: 2021 Update”, highlights the disparities between the average Sonoma County resident and the average Latino resident. The report also highlights the disparities by geographic area, including within the three basins. Previous assessments of engaging Sonoma County’s Spanish speaking community recommend using “food, faith and festivals” as opportunities to educate and interact with people on critical issues. Connecting with communities through existing organizations and through community events, churches and schools provides an opportunity to share information and solicit feedback on GSP implementation elements and rate/fee options.

Spanish-language media is another method of reaching the Spanish-speaking community. To date, the GSA has participated in several Spanish-language radio programs discussing groundwater. This tool will continue to be used by the GSA to provide information to stakeholders on specific programs and projects.

Public Meetings/Hearing

Public meetings or hearings are formal opportunities for people to provide official comments on programs, plans and proposals. SGMA requires that a public meeting be held prior to the adoption of a fee and public hearings for the adoption of GSP elements and the final plan. There are also constitutional requirements for public hearings for some fee/rate options. Public meetings and hearings are an important forum for people to share viewpoints and concerns, but often occur at the end of a process, when only one option is under consideration. The GSA will hold the required public meetings and hearings but will also use less informal public workshops (described below) to solicit feedback and information throughout the process.

Public Workshops

Public educational workshops provide less-formal opportunities for people to learn about groundwater, SGMA, financing options, and GSP elements. Workshops can be organized in a variety of ways, including open houses, world cafes and traditional presentations with facilitated question and answer sessions. To solicit feedback from people who may not be comfortable speaking in public, workshops can include small group breakout discussions, “dot” voting, comment cards and other techniques. Whatever format of workshop is used, it will be designed to maximize opportunities for public input.

Public Notices.

Should the GSA Board decide to take action on an item that is required to be publicly noticed, the GSA must provide a written statement describing the manner in which interested parties may participate in the development and implementation of the item. The statement must be provided to all the cities within the subbasin and to the County of Sonoma. As outlined in this Community Engagement Plan, there will be a variety of opportunities for people to participate, including workshops, public hearings, providing comments at Board and Advisory Committee meetings and through written comments

Direct Mail.

Public notices, project announcements and invitations to participate in GSP programs may be disseminated via targeted, direct mail campaigns to reach groundwater users regarding implementation activities and programs.

Individual Conversations.

To garner feedback and help build trust, staff and Advisory Committee members may reach out to individual well owners and interested parties for one-on-one conversations regarding implementation actions, program participation, and policy considerations.

Specific tools will be used to inform and engage people, including:

Interested Persons List

SGMA mandates the creation of an Interested Persons List. Since 2017, the GSA has maintained a list of people who are interested in receiving information and updates. The list currently includes approximately 1295 people who indicated they want to receive information about the Santa Rosa Plain quarterly email newsletter with project, program and policy updates, as well as other notices are sent to the Interested Persons list, along with special updates on specific meetings and events.

Informational Materials. Developing a variety of informational materials is critical to successful education outreach and necessary to circulate consistent, accurate information. Outreach staff, with

the input of the Administrator, Plan Manager, and the Advisory Committee, will develop materials, as needed, including at least the following:

- **Talking Points:** Clear, concise messages to be used by Board and Advisory Committee members and staff when communicating with media, organizations and stakeholders.
- **Milestone Fact Sheets:** For the rate/fee study and implementation of GSP elements.
- **Slide Decks:** Develop instructional slides with graphics and language for presentations both in person and online.
- **Flyers and graphics:** language and graphics on handouts and shareable digital media that provide simple, easy to digest descriptions of projects and programs with words and images
- **Frequently Asked Questions:** FAQs will be issued on the rate/fee study, projects and programs and for specific stakeholders, including private well owners.
- **Newsletter Articles:** A short paragraph (50-100 words) that Advisory Committee members can insert into organizational newsletters. These brief articles can also be published in the Sonoma County Water Agency's e-newsletter, which has a broad distribution.
- **Newspaper editorials:** Authored by Outreach staff and Board or Advisory Committee members for submittal to local news sources.
- **Briefing Packets:** For milestone briefings. Packets will include standard talking points, PowerPoint presentations, and other materials to assist in educational outreach and for soliciting feedback.

Website. The GSA website, SantaRosaPlainGroundwater.org, is a hub for the distribution and archiving of meeting and communication materials as well as a repository for annual reports and studies. Outreach staff update the subbasin website monthly. The website also provides pages that outline programs for public participation and a blog with current updates and feature articles about GSA Implementation projects and programs.

Social Media. Existing Sonoma County Groundwater profiles on Facebook and Instagram platforms will be utilized to share news and events. Video content is posted on YouTube

Surveys. Online tools, such as Survey Monkey, will be used periodically to gather stakeholder ideas and to provide feedback on key issues.

Media Plan. Outreach staff will work with the administrator to develop press releases as needed and for milestones and community meetings. The press releases will be distributed to local and regional media and Legislative and Congressional representatives.

Appendix A:* Consideration of Interests, as required by SGMA¹

*This list is not exhaustive or exclusive.

Cities, Town, County

- Cotati
- Rohnert Park
- Santa Rosa
- Sebastopol
- Windsor
- County of Sonoma
- Tribal Stakeholders / AB52 Contact List
- Cloverdale Rancheria of Pomo Indians
- Kashia Band of Pomo Indians of the Stewarts Point Rancheria
- Dry Creek Rancheria of Pomo Indians
- Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria
- Guidiville Indian Rancheria
- Lytton Rancheria Band of Pomo Indians
- Middletown Rancheria of Pomo Indians
- Mishewal-Wappo Tribe of Alexander Valley
- Muwekma Ohlone Indian Tribe of the SF Bay Area
- Pinoleville Pomo Nation
- Robinson Rancheria of Pomo Indians
- Yocha Dehe Wintun Nation

Federal Government

- National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration/NMFS
- US Army Corps of Engineers
- Natural Resource Conservation Service
- USFWS
- EPA

Public Water Systems

(Note: Many of the mutual and PUC-regulated water companies listed below have joined together and hold one seat on the GSA Board and one seat on the GSA Advisory Committee. The other water companies have been contacted but are not currently interested in participating in the GSA.)

- Sonoma County Water Agency
- Cal-American, Larkfield
- Penngrove Water Company
- Athena Terrace Mutual Water Company
- Branger Mutual Water Company, Inc.
- Hawkins Water Co-Cal Water Service
- Holland Heights Mutual Water Company
- Madrone Mutual Water Company
- Mount Weske Estates Mutual Water Company
- Park Royal Mutual Water
- Wendell Water Company
- Willowside Mutual Water Company

¹ Water Code §10723.2

Agriculture

- Sonoma County Farm Bureau
- United Winegrowers
- Community Alliance of Family Farmers/Farmer's Guild
- Western United Dairywomen's Association
- Sonoma County Winegrape Commission
- Sonoma County Vintners
- BRONC
- North Bay Agricultural Alliance
- Santa Rosa Plain Vintners and Growers
- Gold Ridge Resource Conservation District
- Sonoma Resource Conservation District
- Sonoma County Growers Alliance

Organizations that Represent Environmental Uses of Groundwater

- Sonoma County Water Coalition
- Sonoma County Conservation Action
- Fairfield Osborn Preserve
- Pepperwood Preserve
- Sebastopol Water Information Group (SWIG)

Disadvantaged Communities (and organizations that represent disadvantaged communities)²

- Roseland, Southwest Santa Rosa, Southeast Santa Rosa, Northwest Santa Rosa, Kawana Springs, Apple Valley
- Boys and Girls Club
- Los Cien
- Community Action Partnership
- Burbank Housing
- Catholic Charities
- Immigration advocacy groups
- North Bay Organizing Project
- North Bay Jobs with Justice
- National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)-Santa Rosa/Sonoma County Branch
- Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) Coalition North Bay

Well Owners (including domestic well owners)

² As identified by the County of Sonoma

Appendix B:* Other Interested Parties³

* While not required to be engaged under SGMA, these stakeholders will be including in the outreach program. This list is not exhaustive or exclusive.

- Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation & Open Space District
- Sonoma County Planning Commission
- City/Town Planning Commissions
- Russian River Watershed Association
- Santa Rosa Plain school districts
- Sonoma State University
- Santa Rosa Junior College
- Memorial Hospital
- Sutter Hospital
- Kaiser Hospital

State Government

- Regional Water Quality Control Board
- California Department of Fish and Wildlife

Business / Developers

- Sonoma County Alliance
- Construction Coalition
- North Bay Association of Realtors
- Economic Development Board
- Chambers of Commerce

Citizens & Community Organizations

- League of Women Voters
- Democratic and Republican Club
- Rotaries
- Kiwanis
- SIRS
- Sonoma County Community Foundation
- Sonoma Land Trust
- Accountable Development Coalition
- Concerned Citizens for Santa Rosa
- Sierra Club

³ Appendix B includes parties and organizations that may be interested in groundwater management, but are not specifically identified as an interest that must be considered under Water Code §1072