



On the Path to Groundwater Sustainability!

Significant progress is being made on the Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP)

Since 2014, the San Benito County Water District (SBCWD) has been actively engaged in adaptation of its groundwater management into the framework provided by the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA). That act is intended to address groundwater management issues and assist local water managers in achieving long-term sustainability of their groundwater basins.

The SBCWD is the designated Groundwater Sustainability Agency (GSA) for the North San Benito Basin in San Benito County, in partnership with Valley Water for small areas of the basin that extend into Santa Clara County. SGMA requires that a Groundwater Sustainability Plan be prepared by 2022, and that the basin demonstrate sustainability by 2042.

SBCWD initiated the GSP process in June 2018. This 2020 Progress Report summarizes what's been accomplished so far on production of the comprehensive draft GSP, showing that we are firmly on the path toward sustainability of our crucial groundwater supply. For more details on this important project, please visit sbcwd.com and click on Sustainable Groundwater Management.

The Groundwater Sustainability Plan is Moving Forward

The GSP for the North San Benito Basin has nine sections, several of which have been completed.

Sections 1 and 2 - Introduction and Plan Area ✓ Draft Complete

These sections introduce the GSP and set the foundation for the plan by defining the GSA management structure and legal authority, estimated implementation costs and funding plans, jurisdictional boundaries, existing monitoring and management programs, well distribution, land use designations, and description of land use plans.

Sections 3 and 4 - Hydrogeologic Conceptual Model and Groundwater Conditions ✓ Draft Complete

Here, we characterize how the groundwater/surface water system works, and the state of the basin. We analyzed groundwater elevation maps and hydrographs, changes in groundwater storage, groundwater quality issues (contamination sites, salt and nutrient loading), subsidence extent and rate (if any significant), and interconnected surface water systems/groundwater dependent ecosystems.

Section 5 - Water Budget ✓ Draft Complete

This section provides a quantitative assessment of the water balance (or water budget) of the North San Benito Basin, including estimates of inflows and outflows for individual Management Areas, and changes in groundwater storage over time, including historical, current, and projected future conditions. It provides a tool to evaluate management actions and future conditions including potential growth and climate change. The Water Budget Section has shown our groundwater basin is sustainable (not overdrafted) as long as we have imported water and no undesirable effects.

Section 6 - Sustainability Criteria Now Underway

Section 6 identifies the undesirable effects that we want to avoid. These include such possibilities as lowering of groundwater levels, reduction of groundwater storage, degraded water quality, land subsidence, and surface water depletions with adverse impacts on beneficial uses.

Sections 7, 8, and 9 - Management Actions and Projects, Monitoring, and Implementation Plan

Upcoming in 2021

The Management Actions and Projects section will identify actions—including projects, programs, and policies—to maintain or achieve sustainability according to the sustainability indicators. To support effective management focused on local issues, four Management Areas have been defined (Southern, Hollister, San Juan, Bolsa) which together cover the entire basin. Each of these may have different minimum thresholds, management objectives, monitoring, or management actions.

The Monitoring Section will identify and describe the basin's monitoring network used to measure each sustainability indicator and track the basin's progress relative to sustainability. The Implementation Plan will provide a roadmap for moving forward with basin sustainability once the GSP has been completed.

Basin Consolidation Achieved

Four basins combined as North San Benito Basin for more efficient management

San Benito County includes all or portions of more than a dozen groundwater basins that are important sources of agricultural and urban water supply, and which support the environment. Of those basins, the most developed for water supply have been the Bolsa, Hollister, San Juan Bautista, and Tres Pinos Valley groundwater basins, which have historically been managed comprehensively by SBCWD.

In 2019, these four key basins were consolidated into the **North San Benito Basin**, which is largely in San Benito County except for small areas in Santa Clara County. This consolidation of basins, approved in 2019 by California's Department of Water Resources, supports comprehensive and cost-effective management including preparation of one, unified GSP. Recognizing the unique circumstances and challenges in different parts of the Basin, four Management Areas—Southern, Hollister, San Juan, and Bolsa—have been defined to support local implementation of the GSP.



Technical Advisory Committee Brings Deep Experience

Producing the GSP is a collaborative, cooperative process. Part of that process is making use of a Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), which is a group of people representing a variety of local stakeholder interests. Our TAC includes growers, land use professionals, a San Benito County Farm Bureau representative, land use attorneys, and representatives from local agencies including Valley Water, San Benito County, Sunnyslope County Water District, and the City of Hollister.

Working together through seven meetings (as of February 2020), the TAC has been effective in assisting in the development of a technically sound GSP. The TAC has accomplished this by its members representing GSP-related subject areas, reviewing draft GSP work products and materials, and providing input to GSA staff and consultants. The results so far are very positive, as key sections of the GSP have been drafted with a great deal of very productive, thoughtful input from members.



Grant Funding

In 2018, the project was awarded an \$830,000 state grant for GSP Preparation, which is already being used in the Plan preparation phases. Part of that grant was used to initiate a robust outreach program focused on GSP development, including a new website (sbcwd.com) with dedicated SGMA pages, public workshops, and a variety of public outreach materials and activities.

In January 2020, the California Department of Water Resources recommended award of a \$1.17 million grant to the SBCWD, for “Reaching Sustainability: Dedicated Monitoring

Wells and Managed Aquifer Recharge for North San Benito Basin.” The SBCWD/GSA is planning on beginning this grant-funded work this year.

As part of that work, ten new dedicated monitoring wells are planned, which will be located and designed to fill data gaps and provide information for improved decision making. In addition, a Managed Aquifer Recharge Study will provide basin-wide data on recharge capabilities and identify promising sites for District percolation of surface water, thereby enhancing groundwater supply and quality.