



# Groundwater Management Fees

## Project Background

The Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) is a California State law requiring that groundwater basins are made sustainable—maintaining balanced levels of pumping and recharge, and assuring reliable water quality. San Benito County Water District (SBCWD) is the Groundwater Sustainability Agency (GSA) in San Benito County for the North San Benito Basin (a consolidation of the Bolsa, Hollister, San Juan Bautista, and Tres Pinos groundwater basins; see map on back). Its responsibility is to develop and implement a Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) for this basin, and demonstrate sustainability within 20 years of GSP implementation.

A GSP supports agriculture and rural communities, groundwater-dependent habitats and the environment, and urban water use, helping meet the challenges of urban growth. It helps prepare local agencies to address climate/weather variability challenges, and provides tools for managing and sustaining our groundwater supplies. For more information, visit [sbcwd.com/groundwater](http://sbcwd.com/groundwater).

The costs of developing and implementing a GSP may be passed along to landowners (with access to groundwater) through management fees.

Since 2017, the San Benito County Water District/North San Benito County Groundwater Sustainability Agency (GSA) has been developing a Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP), as required by State law (see Background article on the left). To ensure a groundwater basin is sustainable, the GSP is intended to provide for improved monitoring of groundwater levels and quality, increased replenishment of groundwater, and expanded monitoring of commercial and agricultural groundwater use.

### Fee Structure

As authorized by California Water Code Section 10730(a), the GSA can collect fees to recover costs for GSP development, monitoring, and GSP Annual Reports. These fees are based on acreage, as the most appropriate way to ensure property owners are paying their fair share toward cost recovery.

Land categories as outlined below have been identified as the basis for application of fees to land within the basin:

1. Valley areas overlying productive portions of the basin and benefitting significantly from GSP development and implementation, including major municipal and industrial areas, will be charged a land-based fee.
2. Upland areas with less access to groundwater and insignificant benefit of groundwater management and GSP development will not be charged a fee.

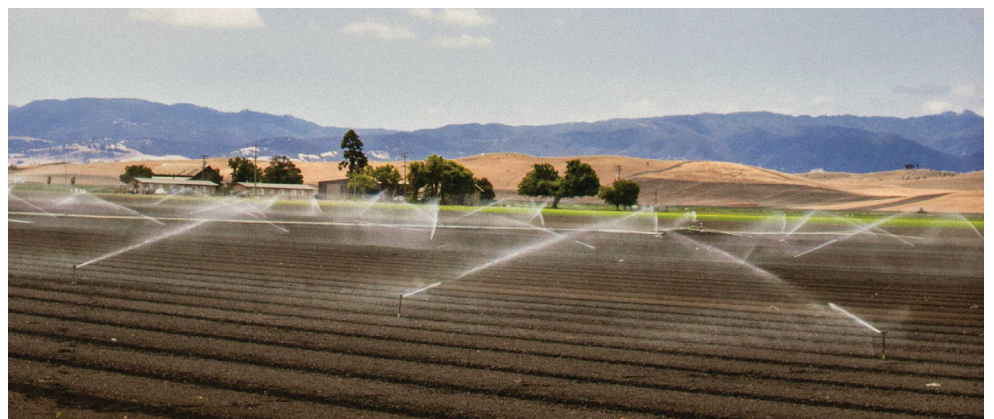
The annual per-acre fees for each of the next five fiscal years are:

Fiscal Year	Annual Fee Per Acre
2021-2022	\$5.77
2022-2023	\$5.92
2023-2024	\$6.07
2024-2025	\$6.23
2025-2026	\$6.39

Urban users will pay fees through the municipal agencies with jurisdiction in those areas; all other lands in valley areas will be charged a fee as part of their San Benito County tax bill.

After the first five years, the SBCWD expects to have collected sufficient data (see **Measuring Groundwater Use**, on back) to understand the actual levels of groundwater extraction. At that point, fees will be revised to account for cost-recovery of extraction measurements.

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## Avoiding State Intervention

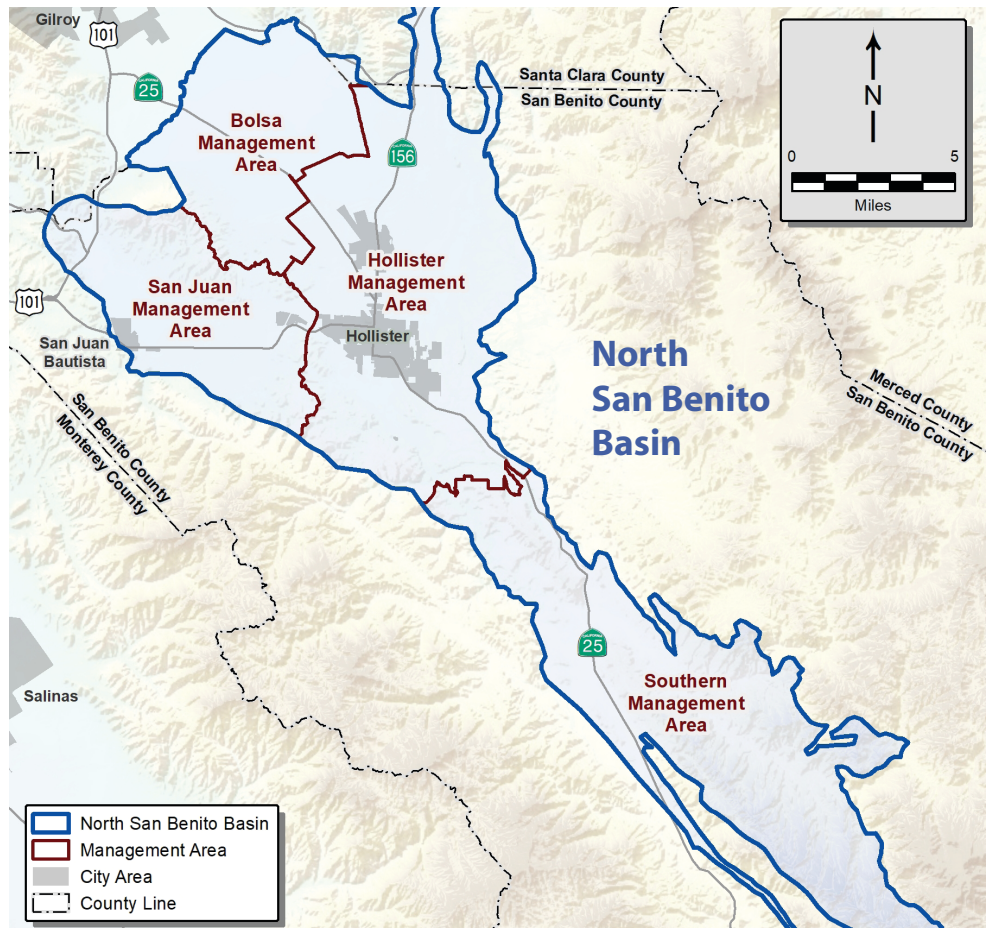
These fees will allow the GSP to be implemented and thereby avoid unwanted State intervention and loss of local control of groundwater. If the GSA does not impose fees and as a result cannot complete and implement the GSP, the State has the ability to then intervene and impose its own fees. In such a case, those using groundwater would be required to submit an annual groundwater extraction report with the State Water Board, pay a \$300 per well base filing fee, and an extraction fee which may range from \$10 to \$55 per acre-foot.\*

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\*Source: [www.waterboards.ca.gov/water\\_issues/programs/sgma/reporting\\_and\\_fees.html](http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/sgma/reporting_and_fees.html)



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*The District is piloting a satellite imagery program to remotely evaluate groundwater extraction.*

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## Measuring Groundwater Use

Measuring groundwater extraction is an important part of ensuring long-term sustainability of our basin. Traditional in-line metering is direct and accurate, but that method takes significant time to implement, requires access to wells, and meter costs are borne by the well owners. Instead, the SBCWD is piloting a state-of-the-science alternative to in-line metering: satellite imagery is used as a substitute for meters, to remotely evaluate groundwater extraction.

This methodology is accurate, can be implemented quickly, and covers 100% of the basin immediately and continuously. It is less expensive, and a more cost-effective way to comply with State requirements to estimate groundwater extraction, as compared to in-line metering. It also provides more timely access to water-use information, including details beyond what we can get from traditional metering, such as soil moisture at multiple depths. And, because it's basin-wide we will have more data on the overall health of the groundwater basin and our water supply, contributing important information to assist in groundwater management decisions.

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*Accurate and in-depth data will assist in decisions.*

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