



County of Fresno

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Legislation Text

File #: 19-1580, **Version:** 1

DATE: January 7, 2020

TO: Board of Supervisors

SUBMITTED BY: Steven E. White, Director
Department of Public Works and Planning

SUBJECT: Groundwater Sustainability Plan for Westside Subbasin Groundwater Sustainability Agency

RECOMMENDED ACTION(S):

Adopt Resolution adopting the Westside Subbasin Groundwater Sustainability Plan for the Westside Subbasin for portions of Fresno County in the Westside Subbasin where the County serves as groundwater sustainability agency.

Approval of the recommended action will adopt a Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) for the Westside Subbasin (Subbasin), as required by the California Department of Water Resources (DWR), to maintain and manage local groundwater resources. The GSP covers the entire Subbasin, including portions of Fresno County Groundwater Sustainability Agency (GSA) areas. This item pertains to location in District 4.

ALTERNATIVE ACTION(S):

Your Board may determine not to approve the recommended action; however, it would likely result in delay of submitting the required GSP by the January 31, 2020 deadline, as the County would be obligated to prepare a GSP for the portion of County lands that have been included in the GSP. If the GSP is not submitted by the deadline, intervention from the State Water Resources Control Board (State) could occur, which would result in the State managing local groundwater resources in the Subbasin.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no increase in Net County Cost associated with the recommended action. On May 2, 2017, the Board approved Agreement No. 17-275, which is the "Memorandum of Understanding between the County and Westlands Water District with Respect to Implementation of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act in the Westside Subbasin" (MOU). The MOU provides that each party shall bear all costs with respect to its activities, except that the County shall provide assistance and support in applying for grant funding related to Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) implementation when so requested by Westlands Water District (WWD). To date, activities at County expense have been limited to Department of Public Works and Planning staff participation at various implementation meetings resulting in a cost of approximately \$4,000. The costs associated with development of the GSP were funded through a Proposition 1 grant from DWR. Sufficient appropriations and estimated revenues for Department staff costs are included in the Department's Org 4360 FY 2019-20 Adopted Budget. Annual administration costs for implementation of the GSP are estimated to be \$600,000, of which estimates the County will be responsible for 1.64%, based upon proportion of land acreage in the Subbasin for which the County serves as the GSA, resulting in an annual anticipated cost of \$9,840. Sufficient appropriations and estimated revenues are included in the CAO's Interest and Miscellaneous Expenditures Org 2540 FY 2019-20 Adopted Budget to fund SGMA invoices. If there are significant implementation costs beyond the Department's allocated resources, staff will return to

your Board for direction and to request additional resource allocation.

DISCUSSION:

SGMA, signed into law September 16, 2014, and codified at Water Code sections 10720 to 10737.8, and established a new structure for managing California's groundwater resources at a local level by local agencies. SGMA allows the formation of locally controlled GSAs in the State's higher priority groundwater basins. Each GSA is then required to develop and implement a GSP by January 31, 2020. Sustainability is defined as the management and use of groundwater in a manner that can be maintained during the planning and implementation horizon without causing undesirable results. Failure to implement a GSP and meet its sustainability goal could result in the State asserting its power to manage local groundwater resources.

On August 3, 2016, WWD submitted a Notice of Intent (NOI) to the DWR to form a GSA for the Subbasin. However, portions of the Subbasin are located outside of WWD's jurisdictional boundary, and the County is the only other local government agency in those portions of the Subbasin, see Exhibit A. Nonetheless, the County and WWD expected that DWR would still allow WWD to serve as the GSA for the entire Subbasin. To that end, on October 18, 2016 the Board authorized the execution of the MOU. On November 1, 2016, 90 days after the posting of the NOI by DWR, County and WWD staff assumed that WWD had been presumed by the State to be the exclusive GSA for the entirety of the Subbasin.

Thereafter, DWR and the State indicated that those Subbasin areas outside of the jurisdictional boundary of an agency that filed to be a GSA for those areas would be considered unmanaged. Subsequently, on May 2, 2017, the Board adopted a Resolution No. #17-275 to authorize Department staff to submit a Notice of Intent to DWR indicating that the County intends to serve as a GSA for the unmanaged areas in the Subbasin that are within the jurisdictional boundary of the County and outside the jurisdictional boundary of WWD. The County not serves as the GSA for those areas in the Subbasin.

The City of Huron (City) is included within the GSA boundary. The City's water is supplied by contract with the United States Bureau of Reclamation and is delivered via the California Aqueduct and WWD. The City does not have groundwater wells and has chosen not to file a NOI to serve as a GSA, so it was also included in the area where the County serves as a GSA.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Subbasin covers 972 square miles (622,215 acres) and spans approximately 17 miles east and west and 67 miles from Mendota to Kettleman City. The Subbasin lies within the western portion of the larger San Joaquin Groundwater Basin. The GSP covers the entire Subbasin, the majority of which falls within the WWD's boundaries. As mentioned previously, several small areas along the western side of the Subbasin extend past the District's boundaries and fall within the jurisdiction of Fresno and Kings Counties. The County and the WWD entered into MOU to develop a single GSP for the entire Subbasin. Pursuant to the MOU, the County agreed to adopt and implement the GSP within the County portions, approximately 10,183 acres. The Kings County portion of the Subbasin that falls outside of the District's boundaries lies within the Lemoore Naval Air Station, which is owned by the Federal government and thus exempt from the requirements of SGMA.

WATER BUDGETS

Groundwater pumping during the historic water budget period of 1989-2015 for the Subbasin ranged from 79,000-acre to 697,000-acre feet per year, with an average annual extraction of 324,000-acre feet per year. For the GSP's current year (2016) water budget, groundwater pumping was estimated to be 501,600-acre feet. The projected water budget (2017-2070) is anticipated at an average of 316,000-acre feet per year.

SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT CRITERIA

The GSP establishes sustainable management criteria for each of the undesirable results required by SGMA including chronic lowering of groundwater levels, reduction in groundwater storage, land subsidence, surface water depletions, and water quality. Criteria for seawater intrusion was not included as this area is not subject to this issue.

The measurable objectives identified within the GSP for the chronic lowering of groundwater levels and reduction in storage is set to avoid shallow groundwater pumping while maintaining levels above that have been identified as minimum threshold elevations for the entire Subbasin to preserve groundwater storage. The GSAs will periodically evaluate the GSP, assess changing conditions in the area that may warrant modifications of the GSP or management objectives, and adjust components accordingly. The GSAs will focus their evaluation on determining whether the actions under the GSP are meeting the management objectives and whether those objectives meet the sustainability goal of the area.

Land subsidence is a major concern in the Subbasin due to the use of groundwater to supplement variable surface water supplies. Subsidence has the potential to damage local, State, and Federal infrastructure, including reducing the freeboard and flow capacity of the San Luis and Coalinga Canals, and irrigation water-delivery canals, bridges, roads, and flood control structures. The Subbasin's aquifer system includes fine-grained sediments, clays, silts, and sandy or silty clays that are susceptible to compaction if depressurized by pumping wells. The County will work with WWD to ensure future well permits are evaluated to avoid impacts within areas known for subsidence.

PROJECTS AND MANAGEMENT ACTIONS

There are no projects or management actions proposed at this time for the portion of the Subbasin where the County serves as the GSA.

PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

Groundwater resources have been and will continue to be managed in this area through a number of existing monitoring and management programs, which will continue in support of the implementation of the GSP. Should concerns be identified in the required annual evaluation or 5-year update of the GSP that are within the boundaries of the portion of the Subbasin where the County serves as the GSA, the County will work with WWD to address and mitigate those concerns.

The County will continue to work with WWD to meet SGMA requirements and maximize the benefits of local groundwater resources. The adoption of the GSP by your Board is necessary to meet the requirement that all GSAs within Subbasin adopt the GSP and submit by the January 31, 2020 deadline. [The GSP is generally considered a "living document", in that it is acknowledged that updates will occur as better data is obtained and necessary modifications are made. The GSP provided for Board approval will be signed and stamped by the consulting hydrogeologist following approval by both GSAs.](#)

Following adoption of the GSP by the GSAs, the GSP will be submitted to DWR for review and evaluation under Water Code section 10733.4. Once DWR has performed a completeness review of the GSPs, they will then post the GSPs on their website for a 60-day public comment period. Once posted, DWR will have two years to issue an assessment of the GSP. The assessment by DWR may include an approval or may include recommended corrective actions to address any deficiencies identified in the GSP.

Under Water Code, section 10728.6, the California Environmental Quality Act does not apply to the preparation and adoption of a GSP.

REFERENCE MATERIAL:

BAI #12, May 2, 2017

BAI #29, October 18, 2016

ATTACHMENTS INCLUDED AND/OR ON FILE:

Exhibit A

On file with Clerk - Resolution

On file with Clerk - Westside Subbasin Groundwater Sustainability Plan

CAO ANALYST:

Sonia M. De La Rosa