



NEW 2024 GROUNDWATER SUSTAINABILITY PLAN PAVES THE WAY TO GROUNDWATER SUSTAINABILITY IN THE KERN COUNTY SUBBASIN

Bakersfield, CA – August 22, 2024

In May 2024, the Kern County Subbasin Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSAs) submitted a new Groundwater Sustainability Plan (2024 GSP) to the California State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB). The 2024 GSP comprehensively addresses deficiencies identified by the Department of Water Resources (DWR) in prior plans and incorporates feedback from SWRCB staff. The 2024 GSP is the product of hundreds of collaborative meetings between technical and policy representatives from all Subbasin GSAs and also incorporates SWRCB staff feedback.

The Kern Subbasin GSAs developed the 2024 GSP to comply with the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA), which was enacted in 2014 and gave local agencies new authorities to manage groundwater. Under SGMA, GSAs must develop and implement a GSP that will achieve sustainable groundwater management by 2040.

In March 2023, DWR deemed the Kern Subbasin's 2020 and 2022 GSPs inadequate, resulting in the transfer of regulatory oversight to the SWRCB pending correction of the deficiencies identified by the DWR. The new 2024 GSP corrects the deficiencies.

New 2024 Groundwater Sustainability Plan Protects Beneficial Users and Will Achieve Groundwater Sustainability by 2040

The new 2024 GSP blends decades of water management expertise from local agencies, extensive technical knowledge and experience developing plans that achieve regulatory compliance, and feedback gathered from SWRCB staff during 10 consultation meetings focused on 2024 GSP elements. The new GSP focuses on protecting beneficial users of groundwater while establishing a clear pathway to groundwater sustainability by 2040. Additionally, stakeholders were consulted throughout development of the new GSP, and their feedback was incorporated into the draft [2024 GSP](#).

Key improvements of the 2024 GSP include:

- Development of a preliminary well inventory to accurately characterize beneficial users throughout the Subbasin and understand vulnerable communities.
- Use of identical data and methodologies across the entire Subbasin to develop uniform definitions of the Subbasin's sustainability goal, sustainable management criteria, and undesirable results. Groundwater level minimum thresholds were compared against the well inventory to ensure groundwater levels were set at a depth that are protective of drinking water wells.
- Expansion of the monitoring network to provide more robust and accurate data on water levels, water quality, and subsidence.
- Planned investment of over \$1.5 billion to implement a portfolio of 82 water supply projects and 48 demand management actions to address the Subbasin's water budget deficit.

- Identification of the causes of subsidence and a risk-based approach to mitigate GSA-related land subsidence
- Inclusion of a Basin-Wide Minimum Threshold Exceedance Policy that requires all GSAs provide timely notification if groundwater levels drop and exceed minimum thresholds at any single monitoring well and develop a plan to remedy any exceedance(s).
- Development of a comprehensive subbasin-wide well mitigation program for drinking water wells impacted by the lowering of groundwater levels.

Draft State Water Resources Control Board Staff Report and Probationary Recommendation based on Incomplete Review

Despite the significant progress demonstrated by local Kern Subbasin GSAs in the 2024 GSP, the SWRCB released a [draft staff report](#) on July 25, 2024, focusing on a review of the deficiencies present in the obsolete 2020 and 2022 GSPs. Although the GSAs submitted the new 2024 GSP almost two months prior and directly requested the SWRCB staff review the new GSP, the SWRCB staff report did not meaningfully consider or review the new 2024 GSP. As a result, the SWRCB staff recommended the Subbasin be placed in probation and issued a formal [probationary hearing notice](#) for February 20, 2025. The SWRCB has issued notification letters regarding the probationary hearing to impacted landowners. If the Kern Subbasin is ultimately placed on probation, it will mark the official transfer of groundwater management from local control to the State. This shift would require all landowners with wells within the Subbasin to register their wells with the SWRCB and pay a minimum fee of \$20 per acre-foot of groundwater pumped and a well registration fee of \$300 per well per year.

In response to the staff report's findings on the 2020 and 2022 GSPs, the Subbasin GSAs prepared a technical memorandum clearly demonstrating how the 2024 GSP corrects all of DWR's identified deficiencies, protects beneficial users, and will achieve groundwater sustainability by 2040. A copy of the memorandum can be found [here](#).

Upcoming Events and Public Participation

State Water Resources Control Board Public Workshops

The SWRCB will hold two public workshops on August 26 and 29, 2024, to present the draft staff report findings on the outdated 2020 and 2022 GSPs and describe how the public can participate in the state intervention process. Verbal public comments will be accepted at both workshops. Additional information regarding the workshops can be found in the [SWRCB's notice](#).

Kern County Subbasin GSA's 2024 GSP Public Workshops

Regardless of the SWRCB staff's focus on the deficiencies of the historical 2020 and 2022 GSPs in both their draft staff report and public outreach workshops, the Kern County Subbasin GSAs remain focused on the future of sustainable groundwater management in the Subbasin by incorporating additional local stakeholder feedback into the 2024 GSP. The Subbasin GSAs will hold in-person and online public workshops in September to gather feedback from the interested stakeholders on the new 2024 GSP. Interested parties can receive additional information regarding the workshops by emailing comments@kerngsp.com.

Subbasin GSAs Call for Public Feedback on the 2024 GSPs

The Kern County Subbasin GSAs have opened a public comment period on the [2024 GSP](#) and encourage all interested parties to review and provide feedback. The GSAs are committed to transparency and public engagement and welcome all feedback as part of their ongoing efforts to achieve sustainable groundwater management. A Subbasin-wide Notice of Intent to adopt a new GSP was distributed on July 19, 2024 and final adoption of the 2024 GSP by the Subbasin GSAs will occur at each GSA's publicly noticed Board of Directors meeting this Fall. Interested parties can determine which GSA they are in by using the attached map.

