

2018 Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) Basin Boundary Modification

Frequently Asked Questions

The purpose of the 2018 Basin Boundary Modification Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) is to provide new FAQs identified during the 2018 Basin Boundary Modification period and to update some relevant FAQs previously presented in the 2016 Basin Boundary Modification FAQ (2016 FAQ). The 2016 FAQ provides a more comprehensive list of questions regarding the Basin Boundary Modification process and can be found here: https://water.ca.gov/-/media/DWR-Website/Web-Pages/Programs/Groundwater-Management/Basin-Boundary-Modifications/Files/2016_FAQ_Basin_Boundaries_update.pdf

Please note that dates identified in the 2016 FAQ reflect the timeline associated with the 2016 Basin Boundary Modification period. Timelines for the current period are identified on DWR's website under the 2018 Draft Modifications tab and can be found here: <https://water.ca.gov/Programs/Groundwater-Management/Basin-Boundary-Modifications>

After the current round in 2018, when will future basin boundary modification periods occur?

The Department has not yet scheduled the next submission period for accepting boundary modification requests. The Department will, at any time, consider boundary modification requests submitted by a local agency or entity when directed to do so by a court in an adjudication action, but other modification periods will be related to updating or revising Bulletin 118, or scheduled as needed.

How will basin boundary modification requests to critically overdrafted basins (COD) be addressed?

Requests involving modifications to the boundaries of a critically overdrafted basin, as with other modification requests, will be evaluated to determine whether the request has the overall effect of promoting sustainable groundwater management.

How can I view and obtain the Bulletin 118 groundwater basin boundaries?

Bulletin 118 groundwater basin boundaries can be viewed using one of several online mapping applications:

1. Bulletin 118 Website - <https://water.ca.gov/Programs/Groundwater-Management/Bulletin-118>
2. ArcGIS map and feature services -
https://gis.water.ca.gov/arcgis/rest/services/Geoscientific/i08_B118_CA_GroundwaterBasins/MapServer
https://gis.water.ca.gov/arcgis/rest/services/Geoscientific/i08_B118_CA_GroundwaterBasins/FeatureServer
3. Mapping Applications:
DWR's SGMA Data Viewer - <https://sgma.water.ca.gov/webgis/?appid=SGMADataViewer>
DWR's Basin Boundary Assessment Tool – <https://gis.water.ca.gov/app/bbat/>
DWR's Water Management Planning Tool – <https://gis.water.ca.gov/app/boundaries/>

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4. BBMRS - <https://sgma.water.ca.gov/basinmod/> (ability to view and download proposed basin boundary modification for each request)

How are parcels spilt by basin boundaries supposed to be incorporated under SGMA?

Basin boundaries often do not necessarily coincide with political or legal boundaries. Where a parcel is divided by basin boundaries, each Groundwater Sustainability Agency or other local agency with groundwater management authority will have jurisdiction over that portion of the parcel which is within its boundaries.

Can basin boundaries be aligned with parcel lines?

A local agency may request that basin boundaries be adjusted to correspond with political or other non-geologic boundaries, including parcel lines, through a jurisdictional modification (23 CCR § 342.4). However, external basin boundaries established on the basis of geologic features, including external boundaries and inter-basin faults, are not subject to adjustment to follow non-geologic features.

What is the accuracy of the basin boundary lines?

The question of basin boundary “accuracy” raises two separate issues. The first relates to the utility of boundaries in the Department’s basin boundary database, available here <https://data.cnra.ca.gov/dataset/ca-bulletin-118-groundwater-basins>, which raises a question of precision rather than accuracy. The Department’s basin boundary database was created by digitizing Bulletin 118 boundaries. As a legal boundary, local agencies should regard these digitized basin boundaries as precise, with no margin of error. The second issue raises a separate question of whether the boundaries, as defined in Bulletin 118 or transcribed through the digitation process, are, in fact, technically or scientifically correct. The Department recognizes that the digital files may be incorrect for a variety of reasons, including that the digitization process failed to follow the linework in Bulletin 118 or that the original Bulletin 118 boundary itself did not correctly follow the intended border, whether geologic or jurisdictional. This second category represents real or potential discrepancies between what the current boundary is and what it “should” be. The Department makes “administrative adjustments” to the digital boundary database to correct obvious errors, and local agencies are encouraged to submit boundary modification requests to better track geologic boundaries depicted in qualified maps. But, for basin management purposes, the digital boundaries in the Bulletin 118 geographic information system reflect the official boundary of a basin.

What is considered aquifer material contained by the boundaries of a basin?

Aquifer is defined in the basin boundary regulations as a three-dimensional body of porous and permeable sediment or sedimentary rock that contains sufficient saturated material to yield significant quantities of groundwater to wells and springs, as further defined or characterized in Bulletin 118 (23 CCR § 341(f)). Bulletin 118-2003 characterizes an aquifer as a geologic formation that stores groundwater and transmits and yields significant quantities of water to wells and springs. Significant quantity is an amount that satisfies local needs and may range from thousands of gallons per minute to less than 5 gpm, depending on rock type and intended use (Bull. 118-2003, p. 233).

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Questions Revised from 2016 FAQ

How is a local agency defined?

SGMA defines a public agency as a local agency that has water supply, water management, or land use responsibilities within a groundwater basin (Wat. Code § 10721(n)).

What is considered the definable bottom of a basin or subbasin?

Neither SGMA nor the Department's regulations include a definition for the definable bottom of a basin, but the phrase is characterized in Bulletin 118-2003 as "rock or sediments of very low permeability if no aquifers occur below those sediments within the basin."

What are the key components required to have in a qualified map?

A qualified map is defined in the basin boundary regulations as a geologic map of a scale no smaller than 1:250,000 that is published by the U.S. Geological Survey or the California Geological Survey, or is a map published as part of a geologic investigation conducted by a state or federal agency, or is a geologic map prepared and signed by a professional geologist that is acceptable to the department (23 CCR § 341(u)).

For scientific modifications, a qualified map is required that depicts the lateral boundaries of the aquifers that define the basin or subbasin (23 CCR § 344.14(a)). For scientific modifications involving a hydrogeologic barrier, a qualified map is required that depicts geologic structures or features that could significantly impact or impede groundwater flow (23 CCR § 344.14(b)).

Who is eligible to submit a basin boundary modification request?

Any local agency may request that the department revise the boundaries of a basin, including the establishment of new subbasins. In addition, any entity may be directed a court in an adjudication action to file a basin modification request.

Can DWR make adjustments to basin boundaries without being requested to do so?

The Department makes administrative adjustments to the digital basin boundaries to correct unambiguous errors, such as where a boundary, defined as following a county border, does not, in fact, follow that border (see 23 CCR § 341(b)).