

2018 Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) Basin Prioritization

Frequently Asked Questions

What is basin prioritization?

Prioritization is the classification of groundwater basins based on a variety of factors identified in statute, such as population and the number of water wells in a basin (*see* Water Code § 10933). DWR was first directed to prioritize basins as part of the Groundwater Monitoring legislation adopted in 2009, to establish the order in which DWR would evaluate basins to determine whether monitoring provided sufficient information to demonstrate seasonal and long-term trends in groundwater elevations, as required by that law. DWR created the California Statewide Groundwater Elevation Monitoring (CASGEM) Program in response to the Groundwater Monitoring legislation, and released the CASGEM prioritization of basins in 2014. The Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA), which became effective in 2015, required DWR to prioritize basins for purposes of SGMA shortly after the law took effect (*see* Water Code § 10722.4). DWR adopted the 2014 CASGEM prioritization as the initial SGMA prioritization in 2015.

Why are basins being reprioritized?

SGMA requires DWR to reassess groundwater basin prioritization any time it updates Bulletin 118 boundaries. Publication of Bulletin 118 Interim Update 2016 triggered the need to reassess the 2015 SGMA Basin Prioritization. DWR's reassessment indicated a need to prioritize basins whose SGMA compliance status was uncertain as a result of the basin boundary modifications, as well as the need to reprioritize based on the presence of new and enhanced information, and the consideration of factors specifically relevant to SGMA.

What process was used to prioritize the groundwater basins/subbasins?

DWR used the same process for the 2018 SGMA Basin Prioritization as was used for the 2014 CASGEM Basin Prioritization. A description of the prioritization process can be found in the following documents:

[2014 CASGEM Basin Prioritization Process and Results Document](#)

[2018 SGMA Basin Prioritization Process and Results Document](#)

If the same process was used, why did the prioritization of some basins change?

Although DWR used the same process to prioritize basins for the 2014 CASGEM Basin Prioritization and the 2018 SGMA Basin Prioritization, the use of different data or other factors specific to SGMA resulted in changes to the prioritization of about 10% of basins. Changes were most likely to occur in the following situations: (1) Where boundary modifications resulted in a significant realignment of population, groundwater use, or other factors that were critical in determining CASGEM Basin Prioritization; (2) Where new or improved data established different use or reliance of groundwater than had been identified in the CASGEM Basin Prioritization; and (3) Where other information, determined to be relevant to DWR for the purposes of SGMA, was included in the prioritization. SGMA relies on the prioritization components in Water Code § 10933 (as amended by SGMA), but requires DWR to prioritize basins for the purposes of SGMA (see Water Code § 10722.4). Those purposes are different from the purposes of CASGEM, and led to the use of additional factors, as discussed in the 2018 SGMA Basin Prioritization Process and Results Document.

*** How are adjudicated areas addressed under SGMA? What requirements are there for adjudicated areas under SGMA?**

Water Code §10720.8 identifies adjudicated areas in SGMA, which have an existing defined entity administering the adjudication. Under SGMA, adjudicated portions of basins are exempt from developing a groundwater sustainability plan (GSP) and forming a groundwater sustainability agency (GSA). However, the entities administering the adjudications are subject to submitting annual reports to DWR by April 1 each year. SGMA requires that annual reports include the following information for the portion of the basin subject to adjudication:

- a) Groundwater elevation data unless submitted pursuant to Water Code §10932.
- b) Annual aggregated data identifying groundwater extraction for the preceding water year.
- c) Surface water supply used for or available for use for groundwater recharge or in-lieu use.
- d) Total water use.
- e) Change in groundwater storage.
- f) The annual report submitted to the court.

*** What are groundwater related water transfers and why are they a factor considered in the 2018 Basin Prioritization?**

Groundwater related water transfers include groundwater substitution transfers and out-of-basin groundwater transfers. Groundwater substitution transfers make surface water available for transfer by reducing surface water diversions and replacing that water with groundwater pumping.

DWR considered groundwater related transfers as part of the 2018 Basin Prioritization because transfers result in groundwater being directly or indirectly exported from a basin. Programs in basins that resulted in direct or indirect groundwater exports were considered relevant in the 2018 Basin Prioritization. DWR recognizes water transfers as a water management tool to enhance flexibility in the allocation and use of water in California. These transfers may be useful for meeting critical needs during drought periods. However, groundwater related transfers must be carried out in a responsible manner to be sure there are no adverse impacts on groundwater levels, depletion of interconnected surface water, land subsidence, other water users, or the environment.

How does basin prioritization impact a basin or subbasin with regards to SGMA compliance and implementation?

SGMA applies to all groundwater basins identified by DWR's Bulletin 118. SGMA requires that all high- and medium-priority basins be managed under a Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) or Alternative. SGMA encourages and authorizes, but does not require, low- and very low- priority basins to be managed under a GSP (see Water Code § 10720.7).

How can I find the ranking for my groundwater basin?

Check the interactive Web map application, available on the DWR 2018 SGMA Basin Prioritization webpage at the following link:

<https://gis.water.ca.gov/app/bp2018-dashboard>

Can I see how the ranking was determined for my basin?

Yes. The [2018 SGMA Basin Prioritization Process and Results Document](#) identifies the datasets used in the evaluation and summarizes details on the process used to prioritize the basins. Download the document at the following link:

https://www.water.ca.gov/-/media/DWR-Website/Web-Pages/Programs/Groundwater-Management/Basin-Prioritization/Files/CA_GW-Basin-Prioritization_07-10-14.pdf

How can the public submit comments about the proposed basin prioritization?

DWR will accept public comments for 60 days following the release of draft results. DWR will conduct public meetings in June 2018 on the 2018 SGMA Basin Prioritization process after the draft release. The final 2018 SGMA Basin Prioritization will consider input received during the public comment period.

For more information regarding how to comment, visit the website at the following link:

<https://www.water.ca.gov/Programs/Groundwater-Management/Basin-Prioritization>

*** What is the significance and practical effect of a change in basin prioritization?**

DWR prioritizes groundwater basins based on factors such as population, irrigated acreage, and the number of wells (see Water Code §10933). Most factors are neutral as to groundwater management, focusing simply on the importance of groundwater in a basin. As a result, a sustainably managed basin may be designated as high-priority based on which of these factors are present. Changes in status from the 2014 CASGEM prioritization generally reflects changed conditions or new information about existing conditions. Changes in status are not meant as a comment on changes to groundwater management in that basin.

Although SGMA applies to all basins in California, only high- and medium-priority basins are required to adopt a GSP or submit an alternative. Low- and very low-priority basins may adopt these plans, but are not required to. A low- or very low-priority basin reclassified as high- or medium-priority will be required to adopt a GSP or submit an alternative. A high- or medium-priority basin reclassified as low- or very low-priority will no longer be required to adopt a GSP or submit an alternative. SGMA does not treat low-priority basins differently than very low-priority basins. SGMA does not treat high-priority basins differently than medium-priority basins. For this reason, a change from medium- to high-priority does not affect requirements under SGMA.

Now that a basin is ranked as high- or medium- priority, is there a new deadline to form a GSA and submit a GSP or Alternative Plan?

Basins previously ranked as low- or very low priority that are now prioritized as high- or medium-priority are subject to SGMA and have additional time to form Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSAs) and develop and implement GSPs or to submit an Alternative (see Water Code § 10722.4(d)). If a basin is reprioritized from low or very low to high- or medium-priority, the following deadlines apply:

- Two years from Final Basin Prioritization to form a GSA
- Two years from Final Basin Prioritization to submit an Alternative Plan
- Five years from Final Basin Prioritization to develop a GSP

Visit DWR's SGMA Website for more information at

<https://www.water.ca.gov/Programs/Groundwater-Management/SGMA-Groundwater-Management>.

What are the SGMA requirements for basins newly ranked as low- or very low- priority?

Basins previously prioritized as high or medium that are now low- or very low- priority are not subject to SGMA. Although basins designated as low- or very low- priority are not subject to SGMA, local agencies are encouraged to form GSAs and develop GSPs, update existing groundwater management plans, and coordinate with others to develop a new groundwater management plan in accordance with [Water Code Section 10750 et seq.](#)

What tools are available to help meet the requirements of SGMA now that the basin is designated as a high- or medium- priority basin?

DWR provides a variety of services and support to GSAs including Facilitation Support, Technical Support Services, Communication and Engagement, and Financial Assistance.

Basin Points of Contact

DWR has designated Basin Points of Contacts (POCs) to assist local agencies as GSPs are developed and implemented. Once the 2018 SGMA Basin Prioritization is finalized, POCs will be identified for those new high- and medium-priority basins. For more information, please contact your DWR regional office representatives identified below:

Northern Region: Bill Ehorn, Bill.Ehorn@water.ca.gov, (530) 528-7403

North Central Region: Bill Brewster, Bill.Brewster@water.ca.gov, (916) 376-9657

South Central Region: Dane Mathis, Dane.Mathis@water.ca.gov, (559) 230-3354

Southern Region: Tim Ross, Timothy.Ross@water.ca.gov, (818) 549-2345

Resources

DWR has developed a suite of data, tools, guidance documents, and references to assist in the development and implementation of GSPs. Throughout the SGMA implementation horizon, DWR will continue to develop relevant and useful tools with open access to necessary data and scientific information, in addition to providing access to Basin Points of Contacts. Available resources include:

- [Technical Support Services](#)
 - Monitoring Well Installation
 - Groundwater Level Monitoring Training

- Borehole Video Logging
- Other Field Activities
- [Facilitation Support Services](#)
 - Identification and engagement of interested parties
 - Meeting facilitation
 - Interest-based negotiation/consensus building
 - Public outreach facilitation
- [Communication and Engagement](#)
 - DWR Region Office Contacts
 - Communication and Engagement Digital Toolkit
- [Financial Assistance](#)
 - Groundwater
 - Integrated Regional Water Management
 - Water Quality or Drinking Water
 - Water Supply or Management
 - Water Use Efficiency
- [Data, Modeling and Tools](#)
 - SGMA Portal
 - SGMA Data Viewer
 - DWR Land Use Viewer
 - Climate Change data and modeling
 - Best Management Practices & Guidance Documents

What funding is available to help meet the requirements of SGMA?

DWR offers a variety of services and assistance to support GSA development of GSPs. DWR is funding Technical Support Services and Facilitation Support Services to aid GSAs that includes meeting facilitation, field activities, modeling and mapping.

In addition to the technical and facilitation support, DWR offers several Integrated Regional Water Management (IRWM) Grant programs. IRWM Grant programs fund planning, implementation, and disadvantaged community involvement. At this time, there are no additional Proposition 1 funds remaining for the Sustainable Groundwater Planning Grant program; however, DWR may administer another round of solicitation should any new funds become available. Information on the Proposition 1 grant funding available through the program is available at <https://www.water.ca.gov/Work-With-Us/Grants-And-Loans/IRWM-Grant-Programs>. There are additional grant programs with open solicitations available that may be applicable – more information is available on our website at: <https://www.water.ca.gov/Work-With-Us/Grants-And-Loans>.

The State Water Resources Control Board also has Proposition 1 funding available through the Groundwater Grant Program and the Technical Assistance Funding Program available at the following links:

Groundwater Grant Program:

https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/grants_loans/proposition1/groundwater_sustainability.shtml

Technical Assistance Funding Program:

https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/grants_loans/proposition1/tech_asst_funding.shtml

For a GSA or local agency that was just awarded Proposition 1 grant funding for GSP development, but the basin is now low- or very low- priority, is the basin still eligible for the grant award?

Yes, GSAs or local agencies who received grants from the Sustainable Groundwater Planning Grant Program have the option to use the funding to proceed with development and adoption of a GSP and the project scope defined in the grant agreement or to return the funding to DWR.

If a GSA or local agency is receiving technical or facilitation support services from DWR, but the basin is now designated as low- to very low- priority, is the basin still eligible for these services?

Yes, basins receiving these services will still be eligible as it relates to development of their GSP. However, with regards to the SGMA implementation timeline and deadlines, planning priority will be given to high- and medium-priority basins that are subject to SGMA.

Is the CASGEM legislation still in effect?

Yes. DWR created the CASGEM Program in response to the 2009 Groundwater Monitoring law. That law is still in effect and basins must remain CASGEM compliant to assure full eligibility for water grants or loans awarded or administered by the State (see Water Code § 10933.7). In the future, groundwater monitoring reported by a GSA will be accepted in lieu of CASGEM reports if those reports provide sufficient information to satisfy the requirements of the Groundwater Monitoring law. Currently, CASGEM compliance is required of any local agency that submits an alternative in lieu of a GSP (see [Water Code § 10733.6](#))).

What are the implications of basin prioritization to the CASGEM program? How can DWR engage monitoring within the low- to very low- basins?

The 2018 SGMA Basin Prioritization applies to the CASGEM Program. Although basins designated as low- and very low- priority are not subject to SGMA, not participating in CASGEM may result in ineligibility for a State water grant or loans in those basins. DWR staff can provide guidance and technical assistance to agencies in low and very low- priority basins seeking to participate in the CASGEM Program.

How will the 2018 basin prioritization be affected by the 2018 basin boundary modifications?

The submission period for 2018 basin boundary modification requests is open until June 30, 2018, and the final basin boundary modifications are anticipated in Fall/Winter 2018. SGMA requires that DWR reassess basin prioritization following basin boundary modifications (see Water Code § 10722.4(c)). As a result, if any basin modifications are made in response to the 2018 requests, those modifications may require changes to the 2018 SGMA Basin Prioritization results. DWR anticipates that only basins that are modified will require reassessment.