

2018 Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) Basin Prioritization

Frequently Asked Questions

The following frequently asked questions and responses are intended to provide clarifying information regarding the 2018 SGMA Basin Prioritization and identify other SGMA related resources.

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 implemented the 2014 CASGEM Basin Prioritization as the initial SGMA basin prioritization in 2015.

Why are basins being reprioritized?

SGMA requires DWR to reassess groundwater basin prioritization any time it updates Bulletin 118 basin boundaries. Finalization of the 2016 Basin Boundary Modifications documented in Bulletin 118 Interim Update 2016 required DWR to reassess the 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.

***Why has my basin's prioritization changed between the 2018 draft and 2018 final release?**

DWR revised the 2018 SGMA Basin Prioritization after considering public comments received through 3 public meetings, a webinar, and online comment submittals during the 94-day comment period. DWR considered all comments received and made adjustments to the 2018 SGMA Basin Prioritization where commenters identified SGMA-related issues that the Department determined warranted reevaluation of the prioritization methodology or presented the Department with credible data that resulted in a reassessment of the priority of a basin. Most changes to basin prioritization are a result of modifications to the weight given to basins participating in groundwater-related transfers (8.d) and water quality impacts (7.d). Additional information regarding these sub-components is available in the 2018 SGMA Basin Prioritization Process and Results document available on DWR's website: <https://water.ca.gov/-/media/DWR-Website/Web-Pages/Programs/Groundwater-Management/Basin-Prioritization/Files/2018-Sustainable-Groundwater-Management-Act-Basin-Prioritization.pdf>. Other revisions to the 2018 SGMA Basin Prioritization included use of new data or information to improve understanding of basins and update prioritization calculations.

***Why has DWR split the prioritization process into two steps?**

Final 2018 SGMA Basin Prioritization has been divided into two steps:

- Step 1 based on 2016 Basin Boundaries including 458 basins not affected by the 2018 Basin Boundary Modification requests
- Step 2 will prioritize the 59 basin areas affected by the 2018 Basin Boundary Modification requests.

Step 1 of the Final 2018 SGMA Basin Prioritization was released in January 2019. Following the Final 2018 Basin Boundary Modifications, DWR will release draft Step 2 results, hold a public meeting, and will open a public comment period. The results of Step 2 of the Final 2018 SGMA Basin Prioritization is anticipated to be released in Spring 2019.

*** 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 Basin 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 groundwater sustainability plan (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.

*** Do prioritization rankings mean a basin is or is not being sustainably managed in accordance with the SGMA?**

The priority of basins and subbasins determines whether SGMA provisions apply in any given basin. DWR ranks basins either very low-, low-, medium-, or high-priority based on the results from the statewide prioritization evaluation process of 517 basins/subbasins, using consistent data and methodology. These four rankings provide an indicator of the overall relative importance of groundwater in relation to the components identified in the Water Code (see Water Code § 10933) for each of the State's basins or subbasins. Rankings do not provide an assessment on local groundwater management practices or basin sustainability as defined in SGMA. Assessment of groundwater management practices and basin sustainability will be assessed based on an analysis of GSPs prepared by GSAs or alternatives.

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 GSP or an alternative. SGMA encourages and authorizes, but does not require, low- and very low- priority basins to be managed under a GSP or an alternative (*see* Water Code § 10720.7).

How can I find the ranking for my groundwater basin?

Check the [2018 SGMA Basin Prioritization Dashboard](#) web mapping application

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.

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 2014 CASGEM Basin Prioritization; (2) Where new or improved data established different use or reliance of groundwater than had been identified in the 2014 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 is a groundwater-related water transfer and why is it a factor considered in the 2018 SGMA 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 SGMA 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 SGMA 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 can the public submit comments about the proposed basin prioritization?**

DWR accepts public comments following the release of draft results. DWR will conduct public meetings following the release of draft results from step 2 of the 2018 SGMA Basin Prioritization process. The final 2018 SGMA Basin Prioritization for step 2 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 will DWR do with the comments received on the draft 2018 SGMA Basin Prioritization results?**

DWR will consider all comments received during the public comment period while finalizing the 2018 SGMA Basin Prioritization results. DWR will evaluate any data provided during the public comment period to determine whether it is consistent with processes and datasets used in the evaluation, and may use the data received to enhance the prioritization analysis. Comments concerning the processes or scope of the datasets used in the 2018 SGMA Basin Prioritization will also be evaluated and if the suggested changes are determined to be appropriate, then the updated process or datasets will be applied to all basins.

*** Is there a new deadline to form a GSA and submit a GSP or alternative in those basins newly ranked medium- or high-priority after prioritization results are finalized?**

Basins previously ranked as low- or very low priority that are 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
- 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 after prioritization is finalized?**

Basins previously prioritized as high- or medium-priority that are now low- or very low-priority are not subject to the requirements in SGMA to form a GSA and prepare a GSP or an alternative to avoid potential State Water Resources Control Board intervention. However, these basins are still 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 if basins change to a high- or medium-priority?

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

*** Is a GSA or local agency still eligible for Proposition 1 grant funding for GSP development in a basin previously ranked high- or medium- priority, but after the prioritization results are finalized is designated as low- or very low- priority?**

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.

*** Is a basin still eligible for facilitation support services if it was previously ranked medium- or high-priority, but after the prioritization results are finalized is designated as low- or very low-priority?**

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 the requirements of SGMA to form GSAs and prepare GSPs or an alternative to avoid potential State Water Resources Control Board intervention.

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-priority basins?**

The 2018 SGMA Basin Prioritization applies to the CASGEM Program. Basins designated as low- and very low-priority are not subject to the requirements in SGMA to form a GSA and prepare a GSP or an alternative to avoid potential State Water Resources Control Board intervention. However, 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.

*** Will I receive an extension on my deadline to submit a GSP if my basin boundary modification is not accepted?**

The Department does not have the authority to extend the deadlines associated with submittal of GSPs, as defined in Water Code § 10720.7.

The 2014 CASGEM Basin Prioritization establishes the basin priority until the 2018 SGMA Basin Prioritization is final. The 2018 SGMA Basin Prioritization was finalized in January 2019 for basins not affected by basin boundary modifications, and is anticipated to be finalized in Spring 2019 for basins affected by a basin boundary modification request. The 2018 SGMA Basin Prioritization process does not affect statutory deadlines for basins, unless a basin's priority changes from high or medium to low or very low.