



Alternatives to Groundwater Sustainability Plans

Alternative Annual Reports: Annual reports for the prior water year (October 1, 2018 - September 30, 2019) are due April 1, 2020 from basins with Alternatives. However, due to the ongoing health and safety concerns, the Department will accept reports submitted after the April 1, 2020 due date. The reports can be viewed by the public once they are submitted on the **SGMA Portal**. The reports provide information on groundwater conditions and implementation of the Alternatives for the prior water year.

The Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) requires local agencies throughout California to sustainably manage groundwater basins. Basins ranked as medium- or high-priority are required to develop groundwater sustainability plans (GSPs) or submit an alternative to a GSP by the applicable statutory deadline. Alternatives should demonstrate how water managers have already achieved or will achieve sustainable groundwater management.

An alternative, per [Water Code Section 10733.6 \(b\)](#), may be any of the following:

1. An existing groundwater management plan.
2. Groundwater management pursuant to an adjudication.
3. An analysis of basin conditions that demonstrates that the basin has operated within its sustainable yield over a period of at least 10 years.

Submitting an Alternative

Agencies submitting an alternative should visit the SGMA Portal's [Alternatives Reporting System](#) for information.

Viewing and Commenting on Submitted Alternatives

All submitted alternatives are available for viewing on the SGMA Portal's [Alternatives Reporting System](#). Once an alternative is submitted, it will be open for a public comment period and public comments can be submitted within the Alternatives Reporting System.

Requirements for Approval

Evaluated alternatives underwent extensive technical review by Department staff to confirm they met the following standards:

- Alternatives must achieve the same outcome as a GSP, which is sustainable groundwater management for the basin.
- Alternatives must have been submitted by January 1, 2017, cover the entire basin, and be complete. Basins covered by an alternative must also comply with existing groundwater monitoring law.
- Alternatives based on a 10-year sustainable yield analysis must demonstrate the absence of undesirable results.
- Alternatives based on an existing groundwater management plan must demonstrate that implementation of the plan is likely to achieve sustainability within 20 years.

Alternative assessments are listed below and link to documents associated with the decisions.

Next Steps

Basins with approved alternatives are required to continue implementing plans and provide annual reports and five-year progress updates.

Basins in which the submitted alternative is not approved must comply with the same deadlines applicable to other high- and medium-priority basins defined by SGMA. Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSA) in these basins must submit a GSP by January 31, 2022.

Alternative Assessments

Existing Groundwater Management Plan

Approved

Niles Cone Subbasin

- [Cover Letter](#)
 - [Statement of Findings](#)
 - [Assessment Staff Report](#)
 - [Assessment Summary](#)
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Indio Subbasin

- [Cover Letter](#)
 - [Statement of Findings](#)
 - [Assessment Staff Report](#)
 - [Assessment Summary](#)
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Mission Creek Subbasin

- [Cover Letter](#)
 - [Statement of Findings](#)
 - [Assessment Staff Report](#)
 - [Assessment Summary](#)
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Pajaro Valley Subbasin

- [Cover Letter](#)
 - [Statement of Findings](#)
 - [Assessment Staff Report](#)
 - [Assessment Summary](#)
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Santa Clara Subbasin

- [Cover Letter](#)
 - [Statement of Findings](#)
 - [Assessment Staff Report](#)
 - [Assessment Summary](#)
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Llagas Area Subbasin

- [Cover Letter](#)
 - [Statement of Findings](#)
 - [Assessment Staff Report](#)
 - [Assessment Summary](#)
-

Tahoe South Subbasin

- [Cover Letter](#)
 - [Statement of Findings](#)
 - [Assessment Staff Report](#)
 - [Assessment Summary](#)
-

Not Approved**Big Valley Basin**

- [Cover Letter \(11/14/2019\)](#)
 - [Statement of Findings \(11/14/2019\)](#)
-

- [Notification Letter](#)
 - [Assessment Staff Report](#)
-

10-Year Sustainable Yield Analysis**Approved****Coastal Plain of Orange County Basin**

- [Cover Letter](#)
 - [Statement of Findings](#)
 - [Assessment Staff Report](#)
 - [Assessment Summary](#)
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Livermore Valley Basin

- [Cover Letter](#)
 - [Statement of Findings](#)
 - [Assessment Staff Report](#)
 - [Assessment Summary](#)
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Not Approved

Eel River Valley Basin

- [Cover Letter \(11/14/2019\)](#)
 - [Statement of Findings \(11/14/2019\)](#)
-

- [Notification Letter](#)
 - [Assessment Staff Report](#)
-

- [Department Response to Request for Extension](#)
-

Sutter Subbasin

- [Cover Letter \(11/14/2019\)](#)
 - [Statement of Findings \(11/14/2019\)](#)
-

- [Notification Letter](#)
 - [Assessment Staff Report](#)
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- [Department Response to Request for Extension](#)
-

South American Subbasin

- [Cover Letter \(11/14/2019\)](#)

- [Statement of Findings \(11/14/2019\)](#)
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- [Notification Letter](#)
 - [Assessment Staff Report](#)
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Napa Valley Subbasin

- [Cover Letter \(11/14/2019\)](#)
 - [Statement of Findings \(11/14/2019\)](#)
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- [Notification Letter](#)
 - [Assessment Staff Report](#)
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- [Department Response to Request for Extension](#)
-

- [Department Communication Regarding Timing of County Response](#)
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Ojai Valley Basin

- [Cover Letter \(11/14/2019\)](#)
 - [Statement of Findings \(11/14/2019\)](#)
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- [Notification Letter](#)
 - [Assessment Staff Report](#)
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Frequently Asked Questions

What is an alternative?

SGMA requires that each medium- or high-priority groundwater basin develop a GSP that defines a sustainability goal for the basin (Water Code § 10727). SGMA provided an opportunity for local agencies to submit an alternative to a GSP for evaluation and assessment by the Department if the local agency believed that the alternative satisfied the objectives of SGMA for the basin ([Water Code § 10733.6](#)). Alternatives could be either (1) an existing groundwater management plan, (2) an adjudication, or (3) an analysis of basin conditions that demonstrates that

the basin has operated within its sustainable yield over a period of at least 10 years (referred to hereafter as a “10-year analysis”). Additional requirements and evaluation criteria are provided in the GSP Regulations (23 CCR § 358 et seq.).

Are alternatives subject to further review?

Agencies with approved alternatives are required to submit annual reports by April 1 of each year. Information provided in the annual reports is utilized by the Department as part of its ongoing evaluation to determine whether the alternative continues to satisfy the objectives of SGMA. Agencies with approved alternatives are also required to submit the alternative every five years and whenever the alternative is amended, and to provide a written assessment to the Department. The written assessment must describe whether implementation of the alternative, including implementation of projects and management actions, is meeting the sustainability goal in the basin, and shall include detailed information as stated in 23 CCR §356.4. The five-year update should show how a local agency is addressing any recommended actions identified in the Department’s written assessment of the alternative.

The annual reports and five-year updates from the agencies that submitted 10-year analyses must demonstrate that the basin has continued to operate within its sustainable yield and has not experienced undesirable results.

The annual reports and five-year updates from those agencies that submitted existing plans must demonstrate that, through implementation of the plan, the agency is moving towards or achieving sustainable groundwater management of the basin.

Why is the Department including recommended actions for alternatives in the written assessments?

The primary purpose of recommended actions is to facilitate the Department’s ongoing evaluation and assessment of whether the alternatives are satisfying the objectives of SGMA. If followed, recommended actions are intended to allow the Department to better track whether implementation of an alternative is achieving the sustainability goal for the basin.

How was the submitting agencies’ explanation of “functional equivalency” utilized in the Department’s evaluation and assessment?

Alternatives based on existing plans and studies that were developed prior to adoption of the GSP Regulations were not expected to precisely follow the format and terminology of a GSP. Therefore, the GSP Regulations allow for an agency submitting an alternative to explain how the elements of the alternative are functionally equivalent to the elements of a GSP. The Department used the submitting agency’s explanation of functional equivalency to facilitate its evaluation and assessment of whether the alternative contained sufficient information and data to demonstrate that it satisfied the objectives of SGMA.

Was there a public comment period on the alternative submittals?

Yes, a public comment period was open for 90 days following the submission of alternatives. The Department reviewed and considered public comments received on each alternative.

Is there an appeal process for the Department's assessments of the alternatives?

SGMA does not provide for an appeal process related to the Department's evaluation and assessment of alternatives. See responses above regarding the public comment period and the process for finalizing the Department's assessments of the alternatives.

What happens in those basins where the submitted alternative was not approved?

Basins in which the submitted alternative was not approved by the Department must comply with the same planning deadlines applicable to other high- and medium-priority basins under SGMA. GSAs in these basins must submit a GSP by January 31, 2022.

What happens in those basins where the submitted alternative was not approved and no GSA has been formed?

Basins without a GSA are subject to the State Water Board's groundwater extraction reporting requirements when disapproval of the alternative becomes final. To avoid groundwater extraction reporting requirements, the county or a local agency must notify the Department of its intent to be the GSA for unmanaged areas within the basin, per Water Code Section 10723 et seq. The State Water Board intends to coordinate with affected county governments to support the immediate formation of GSAs in unmanaged basins to avoid mandatory extraction reporting requirements.

Basins that have not yet formed a GSA(s) that intend to develop a GSP(s) for the entire basin may also be designated probationary by the State Water Board. A probationary designation may only occur after notice and a public hearing before the State Water Board. The State Water Board intends to coordinate with affected county governments to support the formation of GSAs that will develop a GSP for the entire basin to avoid probationary status.

Basins without an approved alternative where no GSA has been formed may avoid State intervention by taking action to immediately form a GSA and taking steps to develop a GSP for submission to the Department by January 31, 2022.

What tools and assistance, including financial assistance, are available to those local agencies with approved alternatives or with alternatives that are not approved?

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

Financial Assistance

Local agencies with approved alternatives may be eligible for Proposition 68 implementation grants, for which the Department anticipates releasing the grant solicitation in spring 2020. The implementation grants may provide financial assistance for those GSAs and local agencies implementing projects and management actions in support of implementation of their GSP or alternative.

- [DWR Grants and Loans](#)

Programmatic Questions

For programmatic questions, contact the Sustainable Groundwater Management Office:

- **Communications and Engagement Section Chief:** Keith.Wallace@water.ca.gov
- **GSP Review Section Chief:** Craig.Altare@water.ca.gov
- **Technical Assistance Section Chief:** Steven.Springhorn@water.ca.gov

State Water Board Questions

For questions of the State Water Board, contact the Groundwater Management Program by phone (916) 322-6508 or email SGMA@waterboards.ca.gov.

Basin Points of Contact

The Department has designated Basin Points of Contacts (POCs) to assist GSAs as GSPs are developed and implemented. POCs have been identified for all high- and medium-priority groundwater basins. For more information, please contact your Department regional office representatives identified below:

- **Northern Region:** Bill.Ehorn@water.ca.gov
- **North Central Region:** Bill.Brewster@water.ca.gov
- **South Central Region:** Dane.Mathis@water.ca.gov
- **Southern Region:** Timothy.Ross@water.ca.gov

Resources

The Department has developed a suite of data, tools, guidance documents, and technical references to assist in the development and implementation of GSPs. Throughout the SGMA implementation horizon, the Department will continue to develop relevant and useful tools with open access to necessary data and scientific information, in addition to providing access to Basin POCs. 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
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