

**STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT PLAN
UPPER VENTURA RIVER GROUNDWATER BASIN
(4-003.01) VENTURA COUNTY, CALIFORNIA**

**SUSTAINABLE GROUNDWATER MANAGEMENT ACT
(SGMA) PROGRAM**

**PREPARED AND ADOPTED BY THE UPPER VENTURA
RIVER GROUNDWATER AGENCY, MAY 10, 2018**

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1 INTRODUCTION

This Stakeholder Engagement Plan (Engagement Plan) summarizes the strategies to educate and involve stakeholders (those individuals and representatives of organizations who have a direct stake in the outcome of the planning process) and other interested parties in the preparation and implementation of a Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) for the Upper Ventura River Groundwater Basin (UVR Basin) – Department of Water Resources (DWR) Basin No. 4-003.01 (Figure 1). This GSP will be prepared in accordance with the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA), which was signed by Governor Brown in September 2014 and became effective January 1, 2015.

SGMA provides a framework to regulate groundwater for the first time in California’s history. The intent of SGMA is to strengthen local management of specified groundwater basins that are most critical to the state’s water needs by regulating groundwater and land use management activities. SGMA also aims to preserve the jurisdictional authorities of cities, counties and water agencies within groundwater basins while protecting existing surface water and groundwater rights.

The Upper Ventura River Groundwater Agency (UVRGA or Agency), a Groundwater Sustainability Agency (GSA), was formed by five local agencies: County of Ventura (County), City of San Buenaventura (City), Casitas Municipal Water District (CMWD), Meiners Oaks Water District (MOWD), and Ventura River Water District (VRWD). There was extensive stakeholder engagement during that process. The governing board consists of one representative from each of those agencies plus two stakeholder directors representing environmental and agricultural interests. The GSA is responsible for developing a GSP for the UVR Basin to achieve long-term groundwater sustainability. Additionally, SGMA requires and directs GSAs to encourage active involvement of stakeholders and interested parties in the process to sustainability manage the basin.

2 PURPOSE

The purpose of the outreach activities described in this Engagement Plan is to encourage the active involvement of individual stakeholders and stakeholder organizations, and other interested parties in the development and implementation of the GSP for the UVR Basin. This GSP is required under SGMA to be completed no later than January 31, 2022. The projects and management actions necessary to implement the GSP could affect individuals and groups who have a stake in ensuring the basin is sustainably managed as required by SGMA.

In an effort to understand and involve stakeholders and their interests in the decision- making and activities, the UVRGA has prepared this Engagement Plan to encourage broad, enduring and productive involvement during the GSP development and implementation phases. This Engagement Plan will assist the UVRGA in providing timely information to stakeholders and receive input from interested parties during GSP development. This Engagement Plan will identify stakeholders who have an interest in groundwater in the UVR Basin, and recommend outreach, education and communication strategies for engaging those stakeholders during the development and implementation of the GSP. The plan also includes an approach for evaluating

the overall success of stakeholder engagement and education of both stakeholders and the public. In consideration of the interests of all beneficial uses and users of groundwater in the basin, this Engagement Plan has been developed pursuant to California Water Code Section 10723.2. Additionally, this Engagement Plan has been developed to encourage the active involvement of diverse social, cultural, and economic elements of the population within the UVR Basin, in accordance with GSP Regulations Section 354.10.

3 GENERAL INFORMATION

The following personnel will serve as contacts for the public during GSA formation and GSP preparation.

3.1 Agency Administrator

For general information about UVRGA and the GSP status, contact:

Maureen Tucker, Paralegal, Olivarez, Madruga, Lemieux, O’Neill, LLP, (805)495-4770, email mtucker@omlolaw.com

3.2 Executive Director and GSP Project Manager

The UVRGA’s Executive Director and GSP Project Manager will be available for stakeholders and the public seeking specific detailed information about the GSP. Contact:

Bryan Bondy, PG, CHG, (805) 212-0484, email BBondy@uvrgroundwater.org

4 OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

The UVRGA will implement the following outreach activities to maximize stakeholder involvement during the development of the GSP and throughout SGMA implementation.

4.1 Public Notices

To ensure that the general public is apprised of local activities and allow stakeholders to access information, SGMA specifies several public notice requirements for GSAs. Refer to Table 1 in Appendix A for a summary of statutory requirements. Three sections of the California Water Code require public notice fees before establishing a GSA, adopting (or amending) a GSP, or imposing or increasing fees:

- Section 10723(b). “Before electing to be a groundwater sustainability agency, and after publication of notice pursuant to Section 6066 of the Government Code, the local agency or agencies shall hold a public hearing in the county or counties overlying the basin.”
- Section 10728.4. “A groundwater sustainability agency may adopt or amend a groundwater sustainability plan after a public hearing, held at least 90 days after providing notice to a city or county within the area of the proposed plan or amendment. ...”
- Section 10730(b)(1). “Prior to imposing or increasing a fee, a groundwater sustainability agency shall hold at least one public meeting, at which oral or written presentations may be made as part of the meeting....(3) At least 10 days prior to the meeting, the groundwater sustainability agency shall make available to the public data upon which the

proposed fee is based.”

- In accordance with California Water Code Section 10723(b), the following was noticed to the public: On March 9, 2017, the UVRGA held a public hearing to consider becoming a GSA for the UVR Basin. The public hearing was noticed in the *Ventura County Star* and *Ojai Valley News* in accordance with Government Code Section 6066.
- Future noticing will occur as required by SGMA.

4.2 Stakeholder Identification

Pursuant to Water Code Sections 10723.8(a)(4) and 10723.2, the Agency will consider the interests of all beneficial uses and users of groundwater, as well as those responsible for implementing a GSP.

UVRGA has engaged stakeholders in the development of the Agency to serve as the GSA. For example, during development of the joint powers authority agreement (“JPA Agreement”) forming the Agency, the signatory members held numerous public meetings to discuss important terms to be included in the JPA Agreement. The signatory members also held multiple stakeholder outreach meetings to engage and educate stakeholders within the UVR Basin about the SGMA requirements the JPA Agreement, and the Agency’s intention to form a GSA for the UVR Basin. In addition to the Agency’s public outreach efforts, it also designated two seats on its seven-seat Board of Directors for Stakeholder Directors: one seat is reserved for an Agricultural Stakeholder Director and one seat is reserved for an Environmental Stakeholder Director.

The Agency plans to continue its practice of seeking broad stakeholder engagement in management of the UVR Basin’s groundwater resources as it undertakes the process to develop and implement the Plan for the UVR Basin over the next several years.

SGMA mandates that a GSA establish and maintain a list of persons interested in receiving notices regarding plan preparation, meeting announcements, and availability of draft plans, maps, and other relevant documents. The UVRGA compiled a list of interested persons for this purpose that will be maintained throughout the GSA formation and GSP development phases. An initial list of stakeholders and interested parties include, but are not limited to, the following:

- a) Holders of overlying groundwater rights, including:
 - 1) Agricultural well owners - There are agricultural users of groundwater operating on land overlying the UVR Basin. To account for these users’ interests, the Agency designated a seat on its seven-member governing board to be filled by an Agricultural Stakeholder Director. The Agricultural Stakeholder Director is appointed from nominations received by the Ventura County Farm Bureau. The Agricultural Stakeholder Director is responsible for engaging the UVR Basin’s agricultural users of groundwater and representing their interests before the Agency.
 - 2) Domestic well owners - There are many domestic wells overlying the UVR Basin. It is believed that the majority—if not all—of these domestic well owners are de minimis users, as defined by SGMA. The Agency anticipates

that the Plan will address the collective interests of domestic users of groundwater wells and plans to engage in outreach to domestic well owners throughout the development of the Plan through inviting their participation in the Agency's public meetings.

- b) Municipal Well Operators - The Agency is a joint powers authority created by five local public agencies. Two of the Agency's signatory members—the City of San Buenaventura and Casitas Municipal Water District—operate municipal wells within the UVR Basin and are represented on the Agency's Board of Directors.
- c) Public water systems
 - 1) Casitas Municipal Water District
 - 2) Casitas Mutual Water Company
 - 3) Meiners Oaks Water District
 - 4) Rancho Matilija Mutual Water Company
 - 5) Tico Mutual Water Company
 - 6) Ventura River Water District
 - 7) Ventura Water (City of San Buenaventura)

Signatory members to the JPA Agreement forming the Agency, as well as the Agency itself, have communicated with these entities throughout development of the JPA Agreement and the Agency's decision to form a GSA for the UVR Basin. The Agency will continue to communicate with these entities concerning Plan development and implementation and opportunities to participate in the process, including through the advisory committee to be established. In addition to holding multiple public meetings, the Agency also plans to retain a seat on an advisory committee for a representative chosen from among the public water companies overlying the UVR Basin.

- d) Local land use planning agencies - Both the County of Ventura ("County") and the City of Ojai have land use planning authority on land overlying the UVR Basin. The County is a signatory member to the JPA Agreement forming the Agency and represented on the Agency's Board of Directors. As noted above, although the City of Ojai declined to participate in the JPA, the Agency intends to coordinate with the City of Ojai and keep them informed about Plan development activities through public meetings and other outreach. [SEP]
- e) Environmental and Ecosystem - There are numerous environmental organizations dedicated to preserving and maintaining environmental values operating within the boundaries of the UVR Basin. To account for these users' interests, the Agency designated a seat on its seven-member governing board to be filled by an Environmental Stakeholder Director. The Environmental Stakeholder Director is appointed from nominations received from local environmental nonprofit organizations supportive of the UVR Basin's groundwater sustainability. The Environmental Stakeholder Director is responsible for engaging stakeholders within the UVR Basin representing environmental users of surface and groundwater and

representing their interests before the Agency. Environmental organizations include, but are not necessarily limited to:

- 1) California Department of Fish and Wildlife
- 2) State Water Resources Control Board, Instream Flow element of California Water Action Plan
- 3) Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board
- 4) National Marine Fisheries Service
- 5) Santa Barbara Channelkeeper
- 6) Matilija Coalition
- 7) Surfrider Foundation
- 8) Friends of the Ventura River
- 9) Ojai Valley Land Conservancy
- 10) Ojai Green Coalition
- 11) Cal Trout
- 12) Ventura River Watershed Council

f) Surface water users, if there is a hydrologic connection between surface and groundwater. Based on past studies performed in the UVR Basin, there is a hydrologic connection between surface and groundwater in certain areas of the Ventura River. The State Water Resources Control Board (“SWRCB”) identifies Six entities and/or individuals that have claimed either riparian or appropriative surface water rights to the Ventura River. Three of these six rights holders are signatory members to the JPA Agreement forming the Agency and represented on the Agency’s Board of Directors. The Agency plans to engage with the other three water rights holders throughout development of the Plan to better understand and take into account their interests.

- 1) City of San Buenaventura
- 2) Casitas Municipal Water District
- 3) Meiners Oaks Water District
- 4) Ernest Ford
- 5) Michael Cromer
- 6) Rancho Matilija

g) The federal government – No land overlying the UVR Basin is managed by the Federal Government

h) California Native American Tribes

- 1) Barbareño-Ventureño Band of Mission Indians

A representative of overlying California Native American tribes is on the Agency’s interested parties list, as a result of which this individual receives notices of all

Agency meetings and other stakeholder involvement opportunities.

- i) Disadvantaged communities, including, but not limited to, those served by private domestic wells or small community water systems. The community of Casitas Springs is recognized as a disadvantaged community. The community is served by Casitas Mutual Water Company, Ventura River Water District, and Casitas Municipal Water District, the latter two being signatory members to the JPA Agreement forming the Agency. Thus the community is represented on the Agency’s Board of Directors.
 - 1) Casitas Springs
 - 2) Ojala
- j) Entities listed in Section 10927 that are monitoring and reporting groundwater elevations in all or a part of a groundwater basin managed by the groundwater sustainability agency. The County is the designated California Statewide Groundwater Elevation Monitoring (“CASGEM”) entity for the UVR Basin. The County is a signatory member to the JPA Agreement forming the Agency and represented on the Agency’s Board of Directors.

The UVRGA intends to work cooperatively with partner agencies, stakeholders, and interested parties to develop and implement the GSP for the UVR Basin and will maintain a list of stakeholders and interested parties to be included in the formation of the GSP. A person can be added to the interested parties list by following directions on the UVRGA website: <http://www.uvrgroundwater.org> or by contacting the Executive Director.

4.3 Integrated Regional Water Management

The Ventura River Watershed Council is actively involved in the community on a wide range of issues affecting the watershed, including the UVR Basin. The Council prepared a watershed management plan in 2015. Since this group provides a forum for the discussion of issues that are important to the community, it is important for this group to be well informed throughout GSP development. Representatives from the UVRGA attend Council meetings to provide up-to-date information and hear feedback from Council members.

4.4 Public Hearings/Meetings

4.4.1 Planning Commission

Updates on SGMA planning and implementation will be provided to the Ventura County and City of Ojai Planning Commissions.

4.4.2 Public Meetings

Comprehensive stakeholder involvement will include regularly scheduled public meetings to aid in developing and implementing the GSP. Each GSP chapter will be the subject of a public meeting to receive comments prior to approval. In addition to signing up to receive information about GSP development at the UVRGA webpage, interested parties may participate in the development and implementation of the GSP by attending and participating in public meetings (Water Code Section 10727.8(a)). Prior public meetings have been held at the Casitas Municipal Water District, 1055 Ventura Avenue, Oak View, or the Oak View Community Center, 18 Valley Rd, Oak View. Future public meetings will likely be held at these locations. During the COVID-18 pandemic, public meetings have been and will be held virtually using GotoMeeting

or similar platform. Special meetings may be held at different locations to accommodate a larger attendance. Each meeting will have a scheduled time for public comments. Information about upcoming meetings can be found on the UVRGA website: <http://www.uvrgroundwater.org>.

4.4.3 Local Agency Meetings

To ensure their constituency is kept informed of the progress of GSP development and implementation, the Directors representing UVRGA member agencies, which consist of County of Ventura, City of San Buenaventura , Casitas Municipal Water District , Meiners Oaks Water District, and Ventura River Water District have committed to providing periodic updates during their regularly scheduled board meetings. These meetings offer a chance for the public to receive information and provide comment. Information about upcoming meetings are provided on the following agency websites, or by the means each agency currently meets its legal noticing requirements, whichever is appropriate:

<http://venturariverwd.com>

<http://casitaswater.org>

<http://meinersoakswater.com>

<http://cityofventura.ca.gov>

<http://ventura.org> (Board of Supervisors and Planning Commission)

4.5 Direct Mailings/Email

Public meetings and project information will be disseminated through email, from the Agency office, or direct mail under special circumstances if requested. This communication will provide information for the Ventura River valley community, public agencies, and other interested persons/organizations about milestones, meetings, and the progress of GSP development. Property owners with groundwater wells within the basin are notified via email and/or direct mailings about the establishment of an interested persons list and given the opportunity to receive future notices.

4.6 Newsletters/Columns

Updates will be provided to the *Ventura County Star* and the *Ojai Valley News* newspapers to advise, educate, and inform the public on SGMA implementation.

4.7 UVRGA Website

Updates on the GSP development and implementation will be provided on the UVRGA website. In addition, general information about SGMA and groundwater conditions will be produced by the UVRGA. This information will include maps, timelines, frequently asked questions, groundwater information, and schedules/agenda of upcoming meetings and milestones. This information will be accessible on the UVRGA webpage located at: <http://www.uvrgroundwater.org>. UVRGA staff will update the website and invite users to request information or be added to the interested persons list.

4.8 Database

To distribute information about GSP development, an email list has been compiled into a database of interested persons and stakeholders. The database will be updated regularly to add names of attendees at public meetings along with those requesting information via email or the

through the UVRGA website.

4.9 Tribal Engagement

Portions of the Barbareno-Ventureno Band of Mission Indians are located within the UVR Basin. Although the tribe is not subject to the requirements of SGMA, any federally recognized Indian tribe may voluntarily participate with GSAs in the preparation or administration of a GSP.

Since tribal participation is integral to the success of groundwater sustainability in the UVR Basin, tribal participation is encouraged. After the UVRGA was formed, communication was established with the Tribal Elder, Julie Tumamait, to determine the preferred level of involvement throughout GSP development and implementation. UVRGA will maintain close contact with Barbareno-Ventureno Band of Mission Indians throughout the GSP development process and GSP implementation.

4.10 Additional Opportunities

Additional opportunities for stakeholder participation (e.g., an advisory committee) will be considered as GSP development progresses and as stakeholder interests evolve.

5 EVALUATION

To determine the level of success of the Engagement Plan, the UVRGA will implement the following measures:

5.1 Attendance/Participation

A record of those attending public meetings will be maintained throughout the GSP development process. The UVRGA will utilize sign-in sheets and request feedback from attendees to determine adequacy of public education and productive engagement in the GSP development and implementation process. Meeting minutes will also be prepared and will be provided on the UVRGA website once approved.

5.2 Adherence to Schedule

Public participation in developing projects and management actions for inclusion in the GSP is instrumental to the success of the GSP. Keeping these tasks on schedule will be an important indicator of stakeholder involvement.

5.3 Plan Update

This Plan will be updated at least annually.

APPENDIX A

TABLE 1

<i>During GSA Formation:</i>	
“Before electing to be a groundwater sustainability agency... the local agency or agencies shall hold a public hearing.”	Water Code Sec. 10723 (b)
“A list of interested parties [shall be] developed [along with] an explanation of how their interests will be considered.”	Water Code Sec. 10723.8.(a)(4)
<i>During GSP Development and Implementation:</i>	
“A groundwater sustainability agency may adopt or amend a groundwater sustainability plan after a public hearing”.	Water Code Sec. 10728.4
“Prior to imposing or increasing a fee, a groundwater sustainability agency shall hold at least one public meeting”.	Water Code Sec. 10730(b)(1)
“The groundwater sustainability agency shall establish and maintain a list of persons interested in receiving notices regarding plan preparation, meeting announcements, and availability of draft plans, maps, and other relevant documents”.	Water Code Sec. 10723.4
“Any federally recognized Indian Tribe... may voluntarily agree to participate in the preparation or administration of a groundwater sustainability plan or groundwater management plan... A participating Tribe shall be eligible to participate fully in planning, financing, and management under this part”.	Water Code Sec. 10720.3(c)
“The groundwater sustainability agency shall make available to the public and the department a written statement describing the manner in which interested parties may participate in the development and implementation of the groundwater sustainability plan”.	Water Code Sec. 10727.8(a)
<i>Throughout SGMA Implementation:</i>	
“The groundwater sustainability agency shall consider the interests of all beneficial uses and users of groundwater”.	Water Code Sec. 10723.2
“The groundwater sustainability agency shall encourage the active involvement of diverse social, cultural, and economic elements of the population within the groundwater basin”.	Water Code Sec. 10727.8(a)