

**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**

UPDATED NOVEMBER 2022

Table of Contents

1 INTRODUCTION	3
2 PURPOSE	3
3 GENERAL INFORMATION.....	4
3.1 Agency Administrator.....	4
4 OUTREACH ACTIVITIES	4
4.1 Public Notices.....	4
4.2 Stakeholder Identification	5
4.3 Integrated Regional Water Management.....	8
4.4 Public Hearings/Meetings	8
4.4.1 Planning Commission	8
4.4.2 Public Meetings.....	8
4.4.3 Local Agency Meetings.....	9
4.5 Direct Mailings/Email	9
4.6 Newsletters/Columns.....	9
4.7 UVRGA Website.....	9
4.8 Database	9
4.9 Tribal Engagement	9
4.10 Additional Opportunities.....	10
5 EVALUATION	10
5.1 Attendance/Participation.....	10
5.2 Adherence to Schedule	10
5.3 Plan Update.....	10
APPENDIX A.....	11
TABLE 1: Statutory Requirements of SGMA Referenced in this Plan.....	11

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 process) and other interested parties in the 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 was 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 sustainably 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 implementation of the GSP for the UVR Basin. The GSP was submitted to DWR on January 24, 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 process, the UVRGA prepared this Engagement Plan to encourage broad, enduring and productive involvement during the GSP development and implementation phases. This Engagement Plan was used to assist the UVRGA in providing timely information to stakeholders and receive input from interested parties during GSP development. This Engagement Plan identifies stakeholders who have an interest in groundwater in the UVR Basin, and recommends outreach, education and communication strategies for engaging those stakeholders. We polled the participants during our GSP development workshops to determine what methods of outreach were working participants indicated that they heard from our agency from emails, connections with UVGRA board members and staff or from friends. 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 serve as contacts for the public.

3.1 Agency Administrator

For general information about UVRGA contact:

Maureen Tucker, Paralegal, Aleshire & Wynder, LLP, (805)495-4770, email

mtucker@awattorneys.com

3.2 Executive Director and GSP Project Manager

The UVRGA's Executive Director and GSP Project Manager is 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 is implementing the following outreach activities to maximize stakeholder involvement 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 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."
- 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 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 continues its practice of seeking broad stakeholder engagement in management of the UVR Basin’s groundwater resources as it carries out and updates the GSP.

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 and updated. A 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 if issues emerge during Plan implementation and will reach out to those owners by 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 GSP. The Agency will continue to communicate with these entities during plan implementation.

- 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. The City of Ojai declined to participate in the JPA. However, in February 2022 the City requested to become a member of the GSA. An ad hoc committee was appointed, and the process has not been completed as of this update.

- e) Environmental Organizations and Government Agencies - 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 operating in the UVR Basin. 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 and government agencies include, but are not necessarily limited to:

- 1) California Department of Fish and Wildlife
- 2). Wildlife Conservation Board
- 3) State Water Resources Control Board, Instream Flow element of California Water Action Plan
- 4) Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board
- 5) National Marine Fisheries Service
- 6) U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
- 7) State Coastal Conservancy
- 8) Ventura County Public Works, Watershed Protection District

- 9) Ventura County Resource Conservation District
 - 10) Santa Barbara Channelkeeper
 - 11) Matilija Coalition
 - 12) Surfrider Foundation
 - 13) Friends of the Ventura River
 - 14) Ojai Valley Land Conservancy
 - 15) Ojai Green Coalition
 - 16) Cal Trout
 - 17) Ventura River Watershed Council
- f) Surface water users - 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 is engaged with Mr. Ford and Mr. Cromer through the Agricultural Stakeholder Director, and Rancho Matilija is engaged through the Rancho Matilija Mutual Water Company’s representative, who participated in phases of GSP development.
- 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- A representative of overlying California Native American tribes, the Barbareño-Ventureño Band of Mission Indians, was on the Agency’s interested parties list as the GSA formed, but then did not re-subscribe once the formal interested parties list was made. The tribe does not have any land overlying the Upper Ventura groundwater basin. Our agency’s director reached out directly to the tribe’s elder and was contacted by the attorney for the tribe just after the formation of the agency.
- 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.

- 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 will continue to work cooperatively with partner agencies, stakeholders, and interested parties as the GSP is implemented and updated for the UVR Basin. The Agency will maintain and update a list of stakeholders and interested parties. After the GSA formation a new interested parties list was started that only included people who specifically requested to be added to the list as we added a disclaimer on the website that lets people know their information would be released if a public records act request is received (see <https://uvrgroundwater.org/join-interested-parties-list/>). We emailed the pre-GSA unofficial list on (DATE) to letting them know if they wanted to continue to be on the interested parties list that they would need to register on the website.

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 updated on the GSP implementation. 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 implementation will be provided to the Ventura County and City of Ojai Planning Commissions as needed.

4.4.2 Public Meetings

Comprehensive stakeholder involvement will include public meetings to aid in implementing the GSP. In addition to signing up to receive information about GSP implementation at the UVRGA webpage, interested parties may participate in the 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 Zoom 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 implementation and updates, 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 Basin community, public agencies, and other interested persons/organizations about milestones, meetings, and the progress of GSP implementation. 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 GSP implementation will be provided on the UVRGA website. In addition, general information about SGMA and groundwater conditions will be produced by 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.urvgroundwater.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 implementation and updates, 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

Members of the Barbareno-Ventureno Band of Mission Indians live 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. There was no tribal engagement during GSP development.

A letter was sent to the Barbareño-Ventureño Band of Mission Indians in November 2022 letting them know about our agency including a link to the GSP and information on how to join the interested parties list.

4.10 Additional Opportunities

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

5 EVALUATION

To evaluate 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 has been maintained throughout the GSP development process. The UVRGA utilized sign-in sheets and requested feedback from attendees to determine adequacy of public education and productive engagement in the GSP implementation process. Meeting minutes were prepared and once approved were uploaded on the UVRGA website.

The UVRGA board meeting notes are regularly approved and uploaded to the website and these notes include inquiries and discussions from attending members of the public and interested parties.

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 reviewed and updated every 5 years or more frequently if needed.

APPENDIX A

TABLE 1: Statutory Requirements of SGMA Referenced in this Plan

<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)