What is SGMA – and why should I care?

What is it?
The Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) is the first comprehensive groundwater legislation in California history. Adopted in 2014 - the centennial of the State Water Commission Act of 1914 – SGMA establishes a "bottom up" framework for local agencies to manage groundwater basins in a sustainable manner.

Who does it impact?
Of the 515 alluvial groundwater basins identified by the Department of Water Resources (DWR) Bulletin 118, 127 basins were determined to be medium or high priority with regard to projected groundwater use - with 21 basins classified as critically overdrafted. These 127 basins underlie communities that are home to 88 percent of the state’s population and are the source of 96 percent of all the groundwater extracted in the state. SGMA specifically excludes the adjudicated areas within 29 adjudicated basins.

What are the requirements?
The local water agencies in each of the high and medium priority basins were required to form Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSAs) by June 30, 2017 and to submit Groundwater Sustainability Plans (GSPs) by January 31, 2020 (for the critically-overdrafted basins) or by January 31, 2022. The GSPs will define basin sustainability goals and the management actions and projects needed to achieve sustainability by the required deadline (2040 for critically overdrafted basins, 2042 for all other basins). With over $85 million in planning grants issued by DWR through Proposition 1, the development of GSPs began in 2017 and is well underway in 2019.

How is groundwater sustainability defined under SGMA?
Sustainability is defined as the management of groundwater supplies in a manner that can be maintained without causing any of the six “undesirable results” defined under SGMA. The GSPs will establish minimum thresholds, measurable objectives, and 5-year interim milestones to evaluate progress toward sustainable groundwater management by 2040/2042. Development of GSPs is a stakeholder-driven process that considers all beneficial uses and all users of groundwater in the basin.
What role can Water Resource Recovery Facilities play?

In developing GSPs, management actions to reduce water demand and projects to increase water supply will be identified. Projects may include imported surface water, stormwater recharge, potable and non-potable recycled water projects, and other sources. Groundwater augmentation with recycled water can be a significant source of new supply. This can be accomplished through in-lieu recharge (using recycled water instead of groundwater to meet demands) or by using recharge basins or injection wells – with higher levels of treatment required for the more direct introduction of recycled water to the aquifer.

Examples of successful groundwater augmentation programs currently include both potable and non-potable reuse projects in Monterey, Orange County, and Inland Empire, as well as large-scale projects under development with the Cities of Modesto and Turlock in collaboration with Del Puerto Water District and Regional San’s South Sacramento County Agricultural and Habitat Lands Water Recycling Program. The latter project was recently offered $280 million in Proposition 1 grant funding under the California Water Commission’s Water Storage Investment Program.

Questions for your agency:

- Are we located within a basin that is developing a GSP?
- If so, how do we engage with the local GSAs and efforts to shape the GSPs?
- What are the potential benefits to my agency of reducing effluent discharges to receiving waters?
- Should I anticipate potential operational impacts as a result of conservation or other similar demand management measures?
- Do we have an existing recycled water supply that can be expanded to offset demands on groundwater?
- What mutually beneficial partnerships could we explore (agricultural water districts; water agencies; wildlife refuges; industrial water users)?
- What funding sources can we tap into by participation in a SGMA implementation project?

For more information on the implementation of SGMA, please visit DWR: [https://water.ca.gov/Programs/Groundwater-Management/SGMA-Groundwater-Management](https://water.ca.gov/Programs/Groundwater-Management/SGMA-Groundwater-Management)

For more information on recycled water regulations and programs, please visit WateReuse Association of California: [https://watereuse.org/sections/watereuse-california/](https://watereuse.org/sections/watereuse-california/)