

## Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) 2019 Basin Prioritization Frequently Asked Questions

The following frequently asked questions and responses are intended to provide clarifying information about the SGMA 2019 Basin Prioritization and identify other SGMA-related resources.

### **What is basin prioritization?**

Basin prioritization is the classification of groundwater basins based on a variety of factors identified in statute, such as population, groundwater pumping, the number of water wells, and other related factors in a basin (see Water Code § 10933).

### **What is the history of basin prioritization?**

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. The current SGMA 2019 Basin Prioritization includes all 515 groundwater basins and is used for SGMA implementation.

### **When does basin prioritization occur?**

SGMA requires DWR to reassess groundwater basin prioritization any time it updates Bulletin 118 basin boundaries.

### **Why did DWR split the SGMA 2019 Basin Prioritization process into two phases?**

SGMA 2019 Basin Prioritization was split into two phases in response to two different rounds of basin boundary modifications. Phase 1 of SGMA 2019 Basin Prioritization was based on the 2016 Basin Boundary modifications and was finalized in January 2019. Phase 2 of SGMA 2019 Basin Prioritization applies to the basins involved in the 2018 basin boundary modifications.

### **Was there a difference between the technical process used for Phase 1 and Phase 2 of SGMA 2019 Basin Prioritization?**

No, the same technical process was used for Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the SGMA 2019 Basin Prioritization. For a full description of the technical process please see [SGMA 2019 Basin Prioritization Process and Results Document](#). For general information about SGMA 2019 Basin Prioritization please visit the Basin Prioritization web page at : <https://water.ca.gov/Programs/Groundwater-Management/Basin-Prioritization>

**Why did a basin's priority change between the draft and final release of SGMA 2019 Basin Prioritization?**

A basin's priority may have changed between the draft and final release of SGMA 2019 Basin Prioritization because the Department received and considered public comments. The Department held four public meetings, two webinars, and received online comment submittals during two public comment periods. DWR considered all comments, made improvements to the technical process and incorporated local datasets that were consistent with the statewide process which may have led to a basin's priority changing between the draft and final results of SGMA 20019 Basin Prioritization.

**What were the changes to the technical process that occurred as a result of public comments?**

The Department made improvements to the SGMA Basin Prioritization technical process based on public comments received. Specific improvements were made to the technical process related to groundwater-related transfers (8.d) and water quality impacts (7.d). Additional information regarding these sub-components is available in the [SGMA 2019 Basin Prioritization Process and Results Document](#).

**Why would a basin have a different priority in the 2014 CASGEM Basin Prioritization than the SGMA 2019 Basin Prioritization?**

Although DWR used largely the same process to prioritize basins for the 2014 CASGEM Basin Prioritization, and SGMA 2019 Basin Prioritization, the use of new or improved data and other factors specific to SGMA resulted in changes to the prioritization of some basins. Changes were most likely to occur in the following situations: (1) Where boundary modifications resulted in a significant change to one of the eight components of basin prioritization, (2) Where new or improved data was incorporated; 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 [SGMA 2019 Basin Prioritization Process and Results Document](#).

**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 still be designated as high-priority based on which of these factors are present. Changes in status from the 2014 CASGEM Basin Prioritization generally reflect changed conditions or new information about existing conditions. Changes in status are not meant as a comment on groundwater management in that basin.

Although SGMA applies to all basins in California, only high- and medium-priority basins are required to form a groundwater sustainability agency (GSA) and adopt a groundwater sustainability plan (GSP) or submit an alternative to a GSP. 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 form a GSA and adopt a GSP or submit an alternative to a GSP. A high- or medium-priority basin reclassified as low- or very low-priority will no longer be required to form a GSA, adopt a GSP or submit an alternative to a GSP. 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 SGMA?**

No, the priority of basins and subbasins determines whether SGMA provisions apply in any given basin. DWR ranks basins as either very low-, low-, medium-, or high-priority based on the results from the statewide prioritization evaluation process of 515 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. The prioritization does 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 made based on an analysis of groundwater sustainability plans prepared by groundwater sustainability agencies or alternatives.

**How does basin prioritization impact a basin or subbasin with regards to SGMA compliance and implementation?**

SGMA applies to all 515 groundwater basins identified by DWR's Bulletin 118. SGMA requires that all high- and medium-priority basins be managed under a groundwater sustainability plan (GSP) or an alternative to a GSP. 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 [SGMA 2019 Basin Prioritization Dashboard](#) web mapping application or visit the Basin Prioritization web page at: <https://water.ca.gov/Programs/Groundwater-Management/Basin-Prioritization>

**Can I see how the ranking was determined for my basin?**

Yes. The [SGMA 2019 Basin Prioritization Process and Results Document](#) identifies the datasets used in the evaluation and summarizes details on the process used to prioritize the basins. The actual datasets used for each component of basin prioritization are available online on the California Natural Resources Agency's Open Data Platform at <https://data.cnra.ca.gov/dataset/sgma-basin-prioritization>.

**Where can I view the public comments that have been submitted for SGMA Basin Prioritization?**

All public comments submitted for SGMA 2019 Basin Prioritization are available online on the California Natural Resources Agency's Open Data Platform at <https://data.cnra.ca.gov/dataset/sgma-basin-prioritization-public-comments>.

**How did DWR use the comments received on the draft results of SGMA 2019 Basin Prioritization?**

DWR considered all comments received during the public comment periods. DWR evaluated any data provided during the public comment periods to determine whether it was consistent with the technical processes used for SGMA 2019 Basin Prioritization and represented the best available data. Comments concerning the process or scope of the datasets used in SGMA 2019 Basin Prioritization were also evaluated and some changes to the technical process and/or datasets were applied in all 515 basins.

### **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 and managing the groundwater in the basin. Under SGMA, adjudicated portions of basins are exempt from developing a groundwater sustainability plan and forming a groundwater sustainability agency. However, the entities administering the adjudications are required to submit annual reports to DWR by April 1 of each year. SGMA requires that annual reports include the following information for the portion of the basin subject to adjudication:

- Groundwater elevation data unless submitted pursuant to Water Code §10932.
- Annual aggregated data identifying groundwater extraction for the preceding water year.
- Surface water supply used for or available for use for groundwater recharge or in-lieu use.
- Total water use.
- Change in groundwater storage.
- The annual report submitted to the court.

### **What is a groundwater-related water transfer and why was it a factor considered in the SGMA 2019 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 SGMA 2019 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 SGMA 2019 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 ensure there are no adverse impacts on groundwater levels, depletion of interconnected surface water, land subsidence, other water users, or the environment. For additional information about the technical process regarding groundwater-related water transfers please view the [SGMA 2019 Basin Prioritization Process and Results Document](#).

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

Yes, basins previously ranked as low- or very low priority that are prioritized as high- or medium-priority are required to form groundwater sustainability agencies (GSAs) and develop and implement groundwater sustainability plans (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 [GSA web page](#) for more information.

**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 required to form a groundwater sustainability agency (GSA) and prepare a groundwater sustainability plan (GSP). 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 groundwater sustainability agencies 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 groundwater sustainability agencies (GSPs) are developed and implemented. Once SGMA 2019 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](mailto:Bill.Ehorn@water.ca.gov), (530) 528-7403

**North Central Region:** Bill Brewster, [Bill.Brewster@water.ca.gov](mailto:Bill.Brewster@water.ca.gov), (916) 376-9657

**South Central Region:** Dane Mathis, [Dane.Mathis@water.ca.gov](mailto:Dane.Mathis@water.ca.gov), (559) 230-3354

**Southern Region:** Tim Ross, [Timothy.Ross@water.ca.gov](mailto: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 Training
  - Borehole Video Logging
- [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 assist groundwater sustainability agencies develop groundwater sustainability plans. DWR is funding Technical Support Services and Facilitation Support Services to aid GSAs. This 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, the State Water Resources Control Board has Proposition 1 funding available through the [Groundwater Grant Program](#) and the [Technical Assistance Funding Program](#).

For updates, go to the Integrated Regional Water Management Grant Programs [web page](#).

On May 3, 2019, DWR released the Draft [SGM Grant Program Proposition 68](#) 2019 Guidelines and Planning Grant - Round 3 Proposal Solicitation Package (PSP) to conduct the third SGM Planning Grant solicitation to make approximately \$47 million available for competitive grants. The Proposition 68 SGM Implementation Grant solicitation is anticipated to open in early 2020. At least \$88 million will be available for competitive grants for projects that address drought and groundwater investments.

**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, groundwater sustainability agencies (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 groundwater sustainability plan (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 groundwater sustainability plan (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 groundwater sustainability agencies 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 ensure 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 groundwater sustainability agency (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 groundwater sustainability plan (see [Water Code § 10733.6](#))).

**What are the implications of SGMA 2019 Basin Prioritization to the CASGEM program? How can DWR engage monitoring within the low- to very low-priority basins?**

SGMA 2019 Basin Prioritization priorities apply to the CASGEM Program. Basins designated as low- and very low- priority are not subject to the requirements in SGMA to form a groundwater sustainability agency GSA and prepare a groundwater sustainability plan 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.

**Is there an appeal process for the SGMA 2019 Basin Prioritization?**

SGMA does not provide for an appeal process related to the Department’s basin prioritization. See responses above regarding the public comment period and the process for finalizing the Department’s prioritization of groundwater basins.

**When will the next basin prioritization occur?**

The Department has not scheduled another round of prioritization for California’s groundwater basins. The Department will reassess the current prioritization whenever Bulletin 118 boundaries are updated or as otherwise required.

**How does the passage of Senate Bill 779 impact the results of SGMA 2019 Basin Prioritization?**

An amendment to Senate Bill (SB) 779 that became law on January 1, 2020. The amendment to SB 779 resulted in minor changes to the basin boundary descriptions for two groundwater basins (Upper San Luis Rey – 9-007.01 and Lower San Luis Rey – 9-007.02). As required by law<sup>1</sup>, the Department reassessed the prioritization of these two basins pursuant to Section 10933(b). The reassessment of basin prioritization utilized the same technical process and data as SGMA 2019 Basin Prioritization

The Department released updated results for SGMA Basin Prioritization on March 24, 2020 for the Lower San Luis Rey and Upper San Luis Rey basins followed by a 30-day public comment period. Prioritization for the Upper and Lower San Luis Rey basin was finalized on April 23, 2020. For more information on SB 779 or this prioritization project, please see the SGMA Basin Prioritization – Process and Results Document.

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<sup>1</sup> Water Code § 10722.4(c)