



Cuyama Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency

Cuyama Basin Groundwater Sustainability Newsletter

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Update on Cuyama Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency Activities

GSP Submitted to Department of Water Resources

In 2014, the State enacted the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) to address the groundwater problems across California. Cuyama Basin was listed as a critically over-drafted basin and the Cuyama Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency (CBGSA) was formed in 2017 to develop a Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) to comply with SGMA. The GSP is a roadmap for the long-term reliability of groundwater supplies for Cuyama Basin groundwater users.

The Cuyama Basin community was very active throughout the two-year GSP development process, asking questions and providing input in numerous meetings and workshops. All these comments and questions helped shape the GSP.

The GSP was submitted to the California Department of Water Resources (DWR) on January 28, 2020, meeting the State's deadline of January 31, 2020. DWR staff will now take up to two years to review the GSP. During the review period, the CBGSA will begin to implement specific elements of the GSP, beginning with establishing the groundwater monitoring network.

GSP Implementation Gets Underway

The next step toward achieving groundwater sustainability is to begin implementing the GSP. The first project currently underway is to establish a groundwater level monitoring network. This monitoring network is needed to better understand groundwater conditions by measuring groundwater levels at specific well locations in the Cuyama Basin. This data will allow the CBGSA to manage groundwater levels to the thresholds in the GSP. Other elements of the monitoring network will monitor water quality, surface flows, subsidence, and groundwater levels near important habitats called Groundwater Dependent Ecosystems.



Measuring a dedicated monitoring well using an electronic sounder.

Monitoring Network Objectives

The objective for the monitoring network is to detect **undesirable results** in the Cuyama Basin. The sustainability criteria (also referred to as minimum thresholds and measurable objectives) were established in the GSP to define and avoid these undesirable or unwanted results:

1. Land subsidence – where land sinks or settles
2. Chronic lowering of groundwater levels
3. Reduction in groundwater storage
4. Degraded water quality
5. Depletions of interconnected surface water

Other important objectives of the monitoring network are as follows:

- Demonstrate progress toward achieving measurable objectives established in the GSP.
- Monitor impacts on the beneficial uses or users of groundwater.
- Monitor changes in groundwater conditions relative to measurable objectives and minimum thresholds.
- Quantify annual changes in the overall water budget for the Cuyama Basin.

Adding Wells to Monitor Network

The GSP specifies that the CBGSA will perform monthly monitoring for 100 wells in its monitoring network. An initial budget of \$60,000 was approved to add the first 40 wells to the network. Activities for bringing these wells online for monitoring include:

- Coordination with existing monitoring entities (i.e., USGS, DWR, the four counties).
- Collection of well information and field validation of monitoring sites to determine well suitability.
- Initial water level measurement for each of the 40 wells using manual equipment.

The remaining 60 wells will be added to the Monitoring Network beginning in July/August 2020. The CBGSA will also be working to identify the most cost-effective method for regular monitoring that provides the required quality of measured data.

On December 4, 2019, the CBGSA Board of Directors voted to approve submitting an application to the DWR for three new monitoring wells to be funded and constructed under DWR's Technical Support Services

Program. These wells will measure groundwater levels at key locations in the Cuyama Basin that currently do not have adequate monitoring.

As the CBGSA develops the monitoring network, the data gaps revealed during the development of the GSP will be revisited and re-evaluated in the five-year update of the GSP. The CBGSA will also identify locations for installing monitoring equipment to track Groundwater Dependent Ecosystems in the Cuyama Basin. The plants, animals, and natural communities that rely on groundwater to sustain all or a portion of their water needs are collectively known as GDEs.

Prop 68 Grant Funds Support Cuyama's GSP Implementation

On November 14, 2019, the CBGSA submitted a proposal to DWR for the Prop 68 GSP Development grant. In March 2020, DWR awarded a \$500,000 grant to assist the CBGSA in unfunded GSP development costs. These funds will cover the cost of:

- Supplemental GSP development funding.
- Development of a groundwater extraction fee structure.
- An indirect economic analysis of the Cuyama Basin.
- Initial work to establish the monitoring network.

Groundwater Extraction Fees

Based on the CBGSA fiscal year 2019/2020 budget, the CBGSA Board of Directors set a groundwater extraction fee of \$19 per acre-foot for the calendar year 2020.

An extractor is a pumper of groundwater within the Cuyama Basin groundwater basin boundary as defined by the DWR Bulletin 118. Exclusions include:

- **De minimis users** with wells that produce 1.5 acre-feet or less per year for commercial purposes, or wells that produce less than 2 acre-feet per year for domestic (non-commercial) purposes. De minimis users do not have to pay a fee but must still provide well information to the CBGSA.
- **State and federal lands** – non-commercial well use on State and federal lands is not subject to a fee, but users must still provide well information to the CBGSA.

Groundwater Extraction Fees (continued)

Following the extraction fee payment due date of January 31, 2020, CBGSA staff determined that the majority of known large pumpers had reported water use. The extraction fees collected represented about half of the needed revenue to fund the FY 2019/2020 budget. One of the main issues was the modeling showed projected water use for 2019 at 60,000 acre-feet, where updated information showed water use was actually somewhere between 29,000 and 47,000 acre-feet. To address the funding shortfall, the CBGSA Board approved a supplemental fee to cover the FY 2020/2021 budget using water use for 2019; however, an evapotranspiration analysis will be used to determine the actual net water use in the Cuyama Basin where the first fee relied on self-reported water use.

Going forward, the CBGSA anticipates issuing one fee each year in the spring to cover its administration costs. A public hearing for the upcoming fee will be held on June 25, 2020 and a notice will be distributed to all parcel owners with information on where to access the proposed fee report and hearing participation details. The CBGSA Board is also evaluating additional measures to ensure that future fees are equitable, and this will be discussed with the Board during the FY 2020/2021 year.

GSP Implementation Timeline

	2020				2025					2030					2035					2040
Monitoring																				
Initiate	█																			
New wells	█	█	█																	
Monitoring & reporting	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
Refine water budget & thresholds			█							█					█					█
Pumping Allocation																				
Develop monitoring		█	█																	
Initiate allocation			█																	
Implement and refine				█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
Projects																				
Evaluate feasibility	█	█	█	█																
Construct small/medium projects					█	█	█	█	█	█										
Construct larger projects										█	█	█	█	█						
Public outreach & reporting																				
Five-year evaluation & update					█					█					█					█

How to Stay Involved in GSP Implementation

The Cuyama Basin community has been instrumental in the development of the GSP. During implementation, community members are encouraged to follow and comment on GSP implementation activities via CBGSA Board meetings and the Standing Advisory Committee (SAC) meetings. To keep people informed, CBGSA staff will host occasional community workshops. To learn about meeting times and agendas, visit www.cuyamabasin.org.

Please feel free to contact with any questions or concerns at (661) 477-3385 or via email at tblakslee@hgcpm.com.