

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

East Turlock Subbasin Groundwater Sustainability Agency (ETSGSA) Turlock Subbasin Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP)



Who is the East Turlock Subbasin Groundwater Sustainability Agency?

ETSGSA is a joint powers authority formed by the following public entities: Eastside Water District, Ballico-Cortez Water District, and portions of Merced Irrigation District, Merced County and Stanislaus County. It was formed to comply with State requirements under the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) to develop and implement a GSP, and manage our groundwater resources in a sustainable fashion that avoids potential harm to groundwater resources and users, surface water uses, infrastructure and the environment. Our objective is to operate in an open, fair and inclusive manner to maintain local control of our groundwater resources and avoid State intervention.

When will the Groundwater Sustainability Plan be finished and how can I learn more about it?

Several chapters of the GSP have already been released for public comment and are available at www.turlockgroundwater.org. A full draft GSP will be available November 2021. The final GSP will be adopted by the ETSGSA during a public meeting in January 2022 and submitted to the Department of Water Resources.

How will this impact my ability to use groundwater?

Working together with the West Turlock Subbasin Groundwater Sustainability Agency and technical experts, ETSGSA has confirmed there is an imbalance between pumping and recharge (overdraft) that needs to be addressed to prevent potential future harm and comply with SGMA. This will be accomplished through recharge projects, monitoring, and implementing other measures as needed to bring the groundwater aquifer back into balance over a 20-year period. The other measures being considered include water conservation and land use conversion or fallowing programs, pumping reduction requirements, and adoption of fee and trade programs. The GSA is at the very beginning of tackling this issue, so we don't know yet exactly how it may affect groundwater users, but the GSP will be implemented based on the following principles:

- Much work has been done over the last several years to better understand the groundwater basin, but there is still more information needed that will require collecting more data over time. We know there is groundwater overdraft, but want to make sure we do not create an undue burden for landowners based on incomplete or inaccurate information. Therefore, significant initial efforts will focus on collecting data to help us to better understand what actions are needed.
- Before the GSA takes any action to curtail pumping, we will implement recharge and water supply projects to increase the amount of water available. We will also promote voluntary water conservation and land fallowing programs that can reduce pumping. We will help landowners to connect with resources and programs that can make these options more favorable from a business perspective.
- The GSP will be implemented using an "adaptive management" approach. That means that any action will be based on real time data collected by monitoring the basin, rather than just on forecasts that may or may not prove to be accurate. Actual groundwater level data, weather conditions and aquifer response information will be used to assess how best to manage the groundwater basin, how effective projects, water conservation measures, and land use changes are, and how much pumping reduction will be required to bring the basin back into long-term balance. Pumping reduction, to the extent it is needed, will be phased in over time.
- The GSA will consider establishing incentives and frameworks to help promote sustainable groundwater use and allow operational flexibility, such as allowing "carry-over" pumping from wet to dry years, establishing water markets, and developing fee structures for unsustainable pumping, with revenues used to fund additional projects or procure replenishment water.

When will all of this take effect?

Once the GSP is submitted in January 2022, it will be implemented over a 20-year period and updated every five years to stay on track. We anticipate the following timeline for implementation:

- **Years 1 to 5 (2022 to 2026):** In the first five years we will focus on data gathering, project development and implementation, and possible implementation of water conservation measures and land use change programs. From there we will look at how the subbasin is responding to get a more accurate idea of how much overdraft still needs to be corrected and develop a Demand Management Plan.
- **Years 6 to 10 (2027 to 2031):** During the second five years, we will continue to implement as many projects and water conservation measures as possible, and will phase in pumping reductions over time as needed. At the end of this period, the Demand Management Plan will be revisited and updated.
- **Years 11 to 15 (2032 to 2036):** During the third five years, we will know better how much overdraft remains that needs to be corrected through pumping reduction. We will implement this reduction alongside projects and management actions with the goal of bringing the basin into balance by Year 15.
- **Years 16 to 20 (2037 to 2041):** During the final five-year period, it is anticipated that any final adjustments needed to bring the basin into a sustainable balance will be implemented, and that management of the basin will consist of more routine, year-to-year adjustments.

Is there enough surface water to balance the basin and how will projects be evaluated?

Conjunctive use of surface and groundwater has been hallmark of water management in the Turlock Subbasin, but surface water availability has been limited in the ETSGSA. Several projects have been identified for near term implementation to make surface water available *in lieu* of groundwater pumping and distribute water available during the non-irrigation season for recharge. These projects will rely on existing or currently planned infrastructure, but will not be enough to bring the basin back into balance. A number of other project opportunities are being actively pursued to provide additional *in lieu* or recharge water and help offset any remaining deficit. The cost of these projects will be weighed against their potential benefits to decrease the need for pumping reduction or land conversion, and while it is expected that additional projects can and will be implemented, at this time it does not appear likely that land conversion and pumping reduction programs can be avoided. Decisions regarding these actions will be openly discussed with local growers and other stakeholders with a goal of maximizing local control and infrastructure investments.

How much is this going to cost me?

The full costs of GSP implementation are not known at this time, but preliminary cost estimates for the initial set of projects and for implementation of the GSP are included in GSP. A Proposition 218 property related fee has been approved and will be assessed to fund the ongoing efforts of the GSA. Approval for additional fees or assessments may be sought to fund additional actions or specific projects either directly or through fees on excess unsustainable pumping. The GSA successfully procured grant funding to help offset some of the costs of its initial activities, and will continue to identify and pursue grant funding to help offset future costs.

How can I comment or get involved?

There are several ways interested parties can learn more or get involved. Additional information can be obtained by visiting www.turlockgroundwater.org or sending a letter to 731 E. Yosemite Ave. Suite B #328 Merced, CA 95340. By doing this you can:

- ✓ Sign up as an interested party to receive email or mail notifications;
- ✓ Provide written, on line or in person comments on the draft GSP;
- ✓ Find out about our Technical Advisory Committee or Board meetings and provide comments; or
- ✓ Find out about upcoming public meetings, workshops and hearings for GSP adoption.