



Media Release

State Water Board Takes Action to Protect Groundwater in Kings and Tulare Counties

Tulare Lake Groundwater Subbasin placed in probationary status, a milestone for landmark Sustainable Groundwater Management Act

April 16, 2024

Contact: [Edward Ortiz](#), Public Information Officer

SACRAMENTO – To protect the long-term viability of groundwater supplies and critical water infrastructure for communities in Kings and Tulare counties, the State Water Resources Control Board today placed the Tulare Lake Groundwater Subbasin in probationary status under the landmark [Sustainable Groundwater Management Act](#) (SGMA).

The State Water Board’s decision marks the first time a groundwater basin has been designated as probationary. In recognition of the importance of groundwater to California’s communities, economy and environment, the Legislature passed SGMA in 2014 to address groundwater overdraft and bring basins into balanced levels of pumping and groundwater recharge.

During probation, board staff collect groundwater extraction information and work with groundwater sustainability agencies (GSAs) to improve groundwater sustainability plans (GSPs) so that intervention is no longer needed.

Ninety days after probation begins, most groundwater pumpers in the Tulare Lake Subbasin will be required to begin recording their groundwater pumping, and eventually, [report that information to the board and pay fees](#). Data on where and how much pumping is occurring will provide the board with critical information about how sustainable management can be achieved.

If deficiencies are not addressed within a year, the board could move into the second phase of the [state intervention process](#), called an interim plan. Only during this second phase, after another public hearing, could the board impose pumping restrictions on basins or issue fines for exceeding water allotments.

During today’s hearing, board staff presented findings from their [final report](#) on the Tulare Lake basin, which describes the deficiencies in the basin’s GSP that have led to the probationary designation. Chief among those cited were inadequate measures to



CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

STATE WATER RESOURCES CONTROL BOARD

1001 I Street, Sacramento, CA 95814 • Mailing Address: P.O. Box 100, Sacramento, CA 95812-0100 • www.waterboards.ca.gov



mitigate negative impacts from groundwater overpumping, including a high number of wells (698) projected to be at risk of running dry during drought.

Another negative impact is worsening land subsidence, a phenomenon in which chronic overpumping of water leaves underground aquifers and the land above them susceptible to collapse. Local flood control districts have had to raise the levees protecting the city of Corcoran twice in the last decade to compensate for ongoing subsidence.

“Groundwater supplies in the Tulare Lake basin are clearly at risk, and we are acting today to protect this resource because communities rely on it for basic needs, in particular drinking water,” said Joaquin Esquivel, chair of the State Water Board. “Our goal remains that these basins be managed sustainably at the local level, and we are committed to helping groundwater agencies make that happen by providing data, guidance and support as they improve their plans.”

Groundwater is one of California’s greatest natural resources, making up nearly 40% of California’s total water supply on an average annual basis, but nearly 60% in a critically dry year.

In 2023, the Department of Water Resources (DWR) determined that GSPs for six critically overdrafted groundwater basins, including the Tulare Lake Subbasin, were inadequate under SGMA because they would not bring about sustainable groundwater use by 2040. Following these determinations, as required by the law, DWR referred the six basins to the board for possible state intervention. Overdraft occurs when the average annual amount of groundwater extraction exceeds the long-term average annual water supply to the basin.

In prioritizing the six basins for probationary consideration, the board weighed not only the different degrees of groundwater overdraft in those basins, but also the real and potential impacts of that overdraft on infrastructure and communities, especially communities of color already experiencing disproportionate environmental burdens. Tulare Lake is the first of these basins to be designated as probationary; the board will hold its next probationary hearing, for the [Tule Subbasin](#), in September.

More [information](#) about the board’s implementation of SGMA can be found on its website.

The State Water Board’s mission is to preserve, enhance and restore the quality of California’s water resources and drinking water for the protection of the environment, public health, and all beneficial uses, and to ensure proper resource allocation and efficient use for present and future generations.