



Media Release

Board sets probationary hearing for critically overdrafted Tule groundwater subbasin

Groundwater depletion causing dry well impacts and subsidence that threatens critical infrastructure, including the Friant-Kern Canal

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SACRAMENTO – To protect communities that rely on crucial groundwater resources, and in keeping with its authority under the landmark Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA), the State Water Resources Control Board today [announced](#) a probationary hearing on Sept. 17 for the critically overdrafted Tule subbasin in Tulare and Kern counties. The board also released a [draft staff report](#) for public comment.

During the hearing, the board will determine whether to place the Tule subbasin on probationary status, which could eventually lead to temporary state oversight until new sustainability plans are approved, as required by SGMA.

The Department of Water Resources (DWR) referred six critically overdrafted groundwater basins to the State Water Board for intervention in March 2023. At that time, DWR determined the groundwater sustainability plans for those basins were inadequate because they would not achieve the long-term sustainability that SGMA requires to protect groundwater.

DWR identified several deficiencies in Tule’s plan, including a lack of adequate measures to manage subsidence, or the sinking of land surface when too much water is withdrawn. Among other impacts, subsidence threatens critical infrastructure in the basin, such as the Friant-Kern Canal, which provides water for more 250,000 residents and at least 1 million acres of farmland in the San Joaquin Valley. Another identified deficiency was the percentage of wells in the subbasin – 21% – that could go dry under the plan long-term. Of the 776 wells that could face impacts, 568 are domestic wells.

“The aim of state intervention is to protect the state’s groundwater supplies while facilitating sustainable management at the local level. We will continue working closely with groundwater sustainability agencies in all the referred basins to improve their plans so they can eventually exit the intervention process,” said Eric Oppenheimer, executive director for the board. “A critical part of improving these plans is making sure that they reflect the input and concerns of the people and communities affected by them, which is



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why we encourage everyone who relies on groundwater in the Tule subbasin to participate in our public process.”

The draft report released today describes the basin’s conditions and makes recommendations for addressing key deficiencies in Tule’s sustainability plan. This begins a 60-day public comment period for the board to gather input from stakeholders and others on the report, which will be finalized in time to inform the hearing. Public comment is also welcome during the hearing, before the board makes any decision.

The Tule subbasin is the second basin to be noticed for a probationary hearing under SGMA. The first subbasin noticed for hearing was the Tulare Lake Subbasin in Kings County; that hearing will be held on April 16.

[Additional information](#) about the state intervention process, is available on the board’s [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.