



Media Release

State Water Board Streamlines Permitting Process for Diversions of Floodwater and Other High Flows to Support Groundwater Sustainability

Nov. 14, 2019

Contact: Ailene Voisin

Ailene.Voisin@waterboards.ca.gov

SACRAMENTO – In an effort to expedite its water right permitting process, the State Water Resources Control Board announced today it has [streamlined requirements](#) for applicants seeking to divert surface water to underground storage during floods and other high flow conditions.

The new measures are expected to directly benefit groundwater sustainability agencies (GSAs) and associated local entities striving to comply with the [Sustainable Groundwater Management Act](#) and replenish overdrafted groundwater basins.

The changes, which have no impact on existing laws and regulations, simplify the permitting pathway for capturing water during high flow events and [storing that water underground, a process known as recharge](#). The streamlined approach also reduces application filing fees and annual permit and license costs.

“Achieving groundwater sustainability is one of California’s most pressing water management challenges,” said State Water Board Chair E. Joaquin Esquivel. “With a more variable hydrology expected, it’s critical that we prepare to capture floodwaters and other high flows, increase groundwater recharge, and better prepare for the effects of climate change. These permitting revisions will help make that process more nimble and efficient, while still protecting fish and senior right holders.”

California depends on groundwater for a third of its annual water supply, and significantly more during droughts. Parties who divert to underground storage and choose this less complicated approach must meet certain criteria and comply with a water availability analysis that monitors diversion of high flows during the winter.

Within the December-to-March time frame, applicants can choose between two diversion triggers: (1) when a river or stream’s daily flows exceed the 90th percentile and no more than 20 percent of the total stream flow is taken; or (2) a flood control agency determines actions are needed to protect the public.



The Sustainable Groundwater Management Act, which became law in 2015, empowers local agencies to manage groundwater resources for long-term sustainability. The long-term planning requirement provides a buffer against drought and climate change and contributes to reliable water supplies, regardless of weather patterns.

New groundwater recharge projects will likely be proposed and implemented by many GSAs as part of sustainable groundwater management. The new streamlined recharge permitting measures are designed to help GSAs obtain water right permits faster to help meet timelines for achieving sustainability.

GSAs also are encouraged to pursue “umbrella” permitting to cover dozens and possibly hundreds of diversion locations in a watershed and large areas of use, such as a water district. This makes broadscale recharge, particularly on agricultural lands, more feasible. It allows a water right holder to manage the diversion, storage and extraction of water on a landowner-by-landowner basis, from one high flow event to the next, or from year to year, without additional approvals from the Board. This enhances efficiency in permitting and annual reporting, gaging and measurement requirements, and accounting.

The State Water Board intends to hold an informational item on the streamlined permitting pathway as part of its regularly scheduled [board meeting](#) on November 19th.

Information about recharge and [underground storage](#) can be found on the State Water Board website.

###