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Improving the Lives of Californians: State Marks 10 Years of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act and Progress Made to Protect Water Supplies

Landmark law has driven significant progress to protect drinking water supplies against the impacts of climate change

More work lies ahead to safeguard supplies in groundwater dependent communities

SACRAMENTO – Today marks the 10th anniversary of the [Sustainable Groundwater Management Act](#) (SGMA), a landmark law that is driving reductions in the overuse of groundwater, protecting drinking water supplies, and making communities, agriculture and ecosystems more resilient to the impacts of climate change.

SGMA was signed into law on Sept. 16, 2014, midway through the historic 2012-2016 drought. Driven by the need to address declining groundwater supplies, the law created a statewide framework to protect this critical resource in California, which provides 41% of the state's total supply in a normal year and up to 60% during droughts. About 85% of Californians rely on groundwater for some portion of their water needs.

In the 10 years since its passage, remarkable accomplishments have been achieved under SGMA:

- More than 250 local Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSAs) have been formed to protect drinking water wells, reduce land sinking and improve groundwater supplies.
- These GSAs are implementing over 100 Groundwater Sustainability Plans, using creative solutions like recharging groundwater supplies, limiting usage, and other management actions that will help create a resilient and sustainable water supply for California.

- California is now collecting more groundwater data than ever before, providing a better understanding of groundwater conditions and ultimately leading to better management decisions.
- SGMA has raised public awareness about the importance of protecting groundwater and has encouraged more cooperative management efforts.
- Water supply reliability is improving with efforts to recharge groundwater. In 2023 alone, 4.1 million acre-feet of water were added to underground aquifers through managed efforts.
- The state has invested nearly \$1 billion in SGMA in 10 years.

“Ten years ago, when SGMA became law, all of us took on the responsibility of bringing about sustainable management of our groundwater basins for the benefit of everyone who relies on them,” said Joaquin Esquivel, board chair of the State Water Resources Control Board. “A lot of progress has happened since then to meet this challenge, and we have more work to do to achieve sustainability for California’s groundwater basins.”

“It has been impressive to see that through the tireless efforts of local groundwater sustainability agencies, every ambitious SGMA milestone has been met so far,” said Paul Gosselin, DWR Deputy Director of Sustainable Water Management. “A foundational part of SGMA is that groundwater is best managed locally, by the people that know their groundwater basins and depend on the resource. As a result, over 95% of groundwater pumping is subject to a locally adopted, enforceable groundwater sustainability plan.”

“Improving groundwater management practices to achieve sustainable aquifers is essential for the future of California and the ability of agriculture to continue food production in a hotter, drier future,” said Karen Ross, Secretary, California Department of Food and Agriculture. “The State of California has made significant investments to support local authorities with financial investments, policy development to accelerate groundwater recharge, sharing of data and technical assistance to chart a pathway forward to successfully implement this historic law.”

The state’s goal is to help GSAs reach sustainable groundwater conditions in their basins while maintaining local control, for the benefit of sustainable agriculture, drinking water supplies, and healthy ecosystems.

Under SGMA, local agencies are responsible for the sustainable management of their groundwater basins. However, state agencies – namely DWR and State Water Board – are responsible for ensuring local groundwater management achieves SGMA's goals.

DWR is the primary technical assistance and oversight agency responsible for assessing and evaluating basin compliance with SGMA. The State Water Board acts as the state “backstop” and will temporarily intervene in the management of a groundwater basin when DWR determines that the basin is not in compliance, working with local agencies to resolve failures and end state intervention.

The next 10 years of SGMA will focus on implementing the plans developed so far. Projects and decisions aim to bring California's groundwater basins to sustainable conditions by the early 2040s. Weather extremes, especially drought, make this work even more critical, as the state must store and capture as much water as possible during wet years.

To celebrate this milestone anniversary, DWR will host an in-person and virtual all-day [event](#) on Nov. 18 at the California Natural Resources Agency. Featured speakers and panelists will include DWR Director Karla Nemeth, and DWR Deputy Director of Sustainable Water Management Paul Gosselin, as well as representatives from GSAs, community organizations, state leaders and others in the SGMA community. More information will be announced soon. To receive the latest in groundwater news and updates on 10-Year Anniversary events from DWR, visit the [DWR email subscription page](#) and select the "Sustainable Groundwater Management" topic.

For more information:

- [The Sustainable Groundwater Management Act Water Board webpage](#)
- [More Information and Resources](#)
- [Sustainable Groundwater Management Act DWR webpage](#)
- [DWR SGMA Portal](#)
- [DWR SGMA Data Viewer](#)
- [California's Groundwater \(Bulletin 118\)](#)

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