



# Media Release

## **State Water Board postpones SGMA probationary decision for Kern Subbasin**

***Local agencies have until June to address final deficiencies in plans***

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**SACRAMENTO** – Citing significant progress in the plans of groundwater sustainability agencies to address the long-term viability of groundwater supplies and critical water infrastructure in the Kern County Subbasin, the State Water Resources Control Board today continued its hearing to Sept. 17, 2025, on whether to place the critically overdrafted groundwater subbasin in probationary status under the landmark [Sustainable Groundwater Management Act](#) (SGMA).

As part of the continuance, the board asked the Kern Subbasin’s 20 groundwater agencies to submit their collective revised plans by June 20, 2025, to provide time for adequate board review of updated plans before the September hearing.

Today’s action took place after significant public comment and presentations by State Water Board staff and multiple groundwater agencies during an eight-hour hearing. It is the first time the board has continued a probationary hearing for a subbasin under SGMA. Last year, the board [designated the Tulare Lake subbasin](#) and the [Tule Subbasin](#) as probationary subbasins due to significant unaddressed deficiencies in their groundwater sustainability plans.

During today’s deliberations, the board noted progress in revised plans adopted last December by the Kern Subbasin’s groundwater agencies, specifically in how the plans minimize land subsidence and mitigate dry wells. It also discussed ongoing deficiencies in the plans to address declining groundwater levels and water quality degradation. Ultimately, the board agreed to postpone a decision to allow the agencies until June to resolve these deficiencies.

“There has been substantial progress in the Kern Subbasin toward plans that ensure sustainable groundwater management at the local level. Continuation is not delay, this additional time gives agencies the opportunity to quickly correct deficiencies and do so in closer collaboration with communities in the basin,” said board Chair E. Joaquin Esquivel. “The Kern Subbasin is geologically complex, and the board appreciates the

efforts of groundwater agencies and communities to engage constructively on approaches to remedy problems and protect groundwater resources.”

To date, board staff have conducted a full review of seven draft sustainability plans submitted by the subbasin’s groundwater agencies in May 2024, and a preliminary review of adopted plans submitted in December 2024. During today’s hearing, board staff presented findings from their [final report](#) on these plans, which describes both the progress and deficiencies that remain.

The remaining deficiencies include:

- A lack of information on groundwater monitoring networks.
- A lack of clarity on how subsidence impacts to critical infrastructure will be mitigated.
- Minimum thresholds for groundwater levels that are too low or inappropriate for the geology in certain areas of the subbasin.
- Disproportionate impacts to water quality across the subbasin.

On average, water is being pumped out of the subbasin faster than it is recharged by rain and other sources, causing the aquifer to lose approximately 274,000 acre-feet of water per year. Joint analysis by the board and the Department of Water Resources found that about 215 domestic wells could go dry if recent drought conditions return. Many of these wells are in economically disadvantaged communities.

## Background

SGMA was passed by the Legislature in 2014 to address groundwater overdraft and balance levels of pumping and groundwater recharge in subbasins. Groundwater is one of California’s greatest natural resources, making up nearly 40% of the state’s total water supply on an average annual basis, but nearly 60% in critically dry years. Approximately 85% of Californians rely on groundwater for some portion of their water needs.

To ensure groundwater resources are sustainably managed, SGMA gives the State Water Board authority to protect groundwater resources through the state intervention process when local agencies are unable or unwilling to sustainably manage their groundwater basins.

In 2023, the Department of Water Resources referred [six critically overdrafted groundwater subbasins](#), including the Kern County Subbasin, to the State Water Board for state intervention after determining that groundwater sustainability plans were inadequate under SGMA because they would not achieve sustainable groundwater use by 2040.

After state intervention is triggered in a groundwater basin, the State Water Board considers whether to designate a basin as probationary. Under this designation, the board collects the groundwater extraction information necessary to inform sustainable groundwater management while board staff work with groundwater agencies to address remaining deficiencies in their plans so intervention is no longer needed.

Ninety days after a probation period begins, most groundwater pumpers in the Kern County subbasin would be required to start recording their pumping, and eventually, [report that information to the board](#). Data on where and how much pumping is occurring would provide the board with critical information about how to achieve sustainable management.

In the SGMA process, if deficiencies are not addressed within a year, the board could move into a second phase of state intervention, called an interim plan. During this phase, after another public hearing, the board could impose pumping restrictions on subbasins or issue fines for exceeding water allotments.

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.*