



DELTA-MENDOTA SUBBASIN STAFF ASSESSMENT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

March 2026

SGMA Background

The mission and responsibility of the State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board or Board) is to preserve, enhance, and restore the quality of California's water resources and protect them for all present and future generations. In 2014, the state Legislature passed the historic Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) that established a new framework for how groundwater would be managed locally at the basin scale to achieve long-term sustainability. SGMA authorizes local public agencies to form Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSAs) in groundwater basins and requires that basins designated as high-priority and medium-priority by the California Department of Water Resources (DWR) be managed by Groundwater Sustainability Plans (GSPs). These GSAs are responsible for the sustainable management of their groundwater basins; however, state agencies are responsible for ensuring local groundwater management achieves SGMA's goals.

Under SGMA, DWR is responsible for reviewing GSPs to determine if local actions will be adequate to achieve the sustainable use of groundwater. If DWR finds a basin's GSP or GSPs are unlikely to achieve sustainable groundwater management, DWR will issue an inadequate determination. This determination will initiate the State Water Board's state intervention process, which could result in the State Water Board temporarily managing and protecting groundwater resources until local agencies are able to do so. Following an inadequate determination by DWR, State Water Board staff will work with the GSAs to correct the deficiencies identified in the GSAs' plan or implementation of the plan. If the State Water Board determines the GSAs adequately addressed groundwater management issues, the Board may release a subbasin from the State Water Board process and return it to DWR's jurisdiction. Otherwise, the State Water Board may, through a noticed public hearing process, designate the basin as "probationary" under SGMA and collect groundwater pumping information and fees from

extractors in the basin. After one year of probationary status, the Board may develop and adopt an interim plan that directly manages pumping in the basin. State intervention is in addition to local management and intended to be temporary. The goal of the state intervention process is to ensure the sustainable use of groundwater and to return a basin to local management as soon as local actions are sufficient to achieve sustainability. Section 1 of this State Water Board Staff Assessment (Staff Assessment) contains more detail on the state intervention process.

Delta-Mendota Subbasin

The Delta-Mendota Subbasin (subbasin) is located in the western portion of the San Joaquin Valley (Figure 1), in portions of Fresno, Madera, Merced, San Joaquin, San Benito, and Stanislaus counties, and contains the cities of Dos Palos, Firebaugh, Gustine, Los Banos, Mendota, Newman, and Patterson.

Since time immemorial, the following California Native American Tribes have had cultural, traditional, or ancestral connections to the Delta-Mendota Subbasin: Amah Mutsun Tribal Band, Amah Mutsun Tribal Band of Mission San Juan Bautista, Big Pine Paiute Tribe of the Owens Valley, Big Sandy Rancheria of Western Mono Indians, Bishop Paiute Tribe, Buena Vista Rancheria of Me-Wuk Indians, Calaveras Band of Mi-Wuk Indians, California Valley Miwok Tribe, Chicken Ranch Rancheria of Me-Wuk Indians, Cold Springs Rancheria of Mono Indians of California, Confederated Villages of Lisjan Nation, Costanoan Ohlone Rumsen-Mutsen Tribe, Costanoan Rumsen Carmel Tribe, Dunlap Band of Mono Indians, Fort Independence Indian Community of Paiutes, Guidiville Rancheria of California, Indian Canyon Mutsun Band of Costanoan, Lone Band of Miwok Indians, Jackson Rancheria Band of Miwok Indians, Kitanemuk & Yowlumne Tejon Indians, Lone Pine Paiute-Shoshone Tribe, Mono Lake Kootzaduka'a Tribe, Muwekma Ohlone Tribe of the SF Bay Area, Nashville Enterprise Miwok-Maidu-Nishinam Tribe, North Fork Mono Tribe, North Fork Rancheria of Mono Indians, Northern Valley Yokut/Ohlone Tribe, Pakan'yani Maidu of Strawberry Valley Rancheria, Picayune Rancheria of the Chukchansi Indians, Salinan Tribe of Monterey and San Luis Obispo Counties, Santa Rosa Indian Community of the Santa Rosa Rancheria, Southern Sierra Miwok Nation, Table Mountain Rancheria, Tamien Nation, Traditional Choinumni Tribe, Tule River Indian Tribe, Tuolumne Band of Me-Wuk Indians, United Auburn Indian Community of the Auburn Rancheria, Wilton Rancheria, Wuksachi Indian Tribe/Eshom Valley Band, and Xolon-Salinan Tribe.¹

The Delta-Mendota Subbasin is managed by 7 GSA Groups, comprised of 23 GSAs, which include: the Aliso Water District GSA Group, the Farmers Water District GSA Group, the Fresno County Management Areas A and B GSA Group, the Grassland GSA Group, the Northern Delta-Mendota GSA Group, the Central Delta-Mendota GSA

¹ Native American Heritage Commission, Personal Communication, February 6, 2026

Group, and the San Joaquin River Exchange Contractors GSA Group. The primary uses of groundwater within the subbasin are for irrigated agriculture, drinking water, and wildlife habitat. During most years, agriculture accounts for more than 85% of groundwater use in the subbasin.² The subbasin is critically overdrafted, which means that groundwater is pumped out of the subbasin faster than it is recharged by rain and other sources. On average, the amount pumped from the subbasin in a year is 140,000 acre-feet greater than the amount recharged.³ Overdraft can cause the land surface to sink, potentially damaging infrastructure and reducing aquifer storage. In addition, overdraft threatens groundwater levels and drinking water quality and could have disparate impacts on communities that rely on shallow wells. Due to historic and political factors, many of these communities are economically disadvantaged and communities of color. The subbasin has an estimated population of 129,666 people as of 2022, with the majority of the population reporting as Hispanic or Latino (74.7%) and white (18.4%).⁴ The average annual household income within the subbasin in 2022 is \$70,064, which is significantly less than the state average of \$101,066.⁵

Issues with the 2022 Groundwater Sustainability Plans

The state intervention process for the Delta-Mendota Subbasin was initiated in March 2023 when DWR determined the subbasin's six 2022 GSPs were inadequate and identified multiple deficiencies in the GSPs (Inadequate Determination). DWR identified issues regarding the lack of coordination among the subbasin's six GSPs, as well as local agencies' plans for managing the chronic lowering of groundwater levels, land subsidence (land sinking due to groundwater pumping), degradation of groundwater quality, and depletion of interconnected surface waters being inconsistent with SGMA and the GSP Regulations. State Water Board staff reviewed the 2022 GSPs and determined that implementing the 2022 GSPs would result in uncoordinated implementation as well as additional groundwater level declines, potential impacts to drinking water wells and interconnected surface water, and further degradation of groundwater quality.

2024 Groundwater Sustainability Plan Improvements

The GSAs released a single revised draft GSP in May 2024, which they adopted with slight revisions in July 2024 (2024 GSP). State Water Board staff evaluated the 2024 GSP to determine if identified deficiencies were resolved.

² Water Year 2019–Water Year 2024 Delta-Mendota Subbasin Annual Reports

³ 2024 Delta-Mendota Subbasin Groundwater Sustainability Plan, p. 303

⁴ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Data (2018–2022)

⁵ Ibid.

The GSAs made significant progress with the 2024 GSP and substantially resolved deficiencies. Through the 2024 GSP, the GSAs show a greater commitment to protecting drinking water users and improved groundwater management. Some of the improvements the GSAs made in the 2024 GSP include:

- Reducing pumping by setting limits for groundwater extractors through allocations in each GSA Group.
- Developing a proactive response to potential impacts from declining groundwater levels, land subsidence, and degradation of groundwater quality via the GSA Group-specific pumping reduction plans.
- Expanding the frequency and scope of constituent sampling in monitoring wells to improve preparedness for addressing potential groundwater quality concerns.
- Establishing a mitigation program for drinking water wells that may be adversely impacted by declining groundwater levels or groundwater quality degradation.
- Making significant progress in evaluating impacts to interconnected surface waters by incorporating a model-estimated depletion rate and committing to resolve data gaps.

Staff Recommendations and Next Steps

State Water Board staff concludes the GSAs amended the GSP such that a probationary designation of the Delta-Mendota Subbasin is unnecessary and recommends the Board return the subbasin to DWR's jurisdiction for continued evaluation of local management under SGMA. Section 1.2.1 of the Staff Assessment includes more information about returning the subbasin to DWR's jurisdiction.

GSAs must continue to evaluate their GSP as they work toward achieving sustainability. The GSP will be periodically reviewed once a basin is returned to DWR's jurisdiction. Section 4 of the Staff Assessment includes recommendations for the Delta-Mendota Subbasin GSAs to consider including in future GSP revisions to support improved groundwater management in the subbasin.

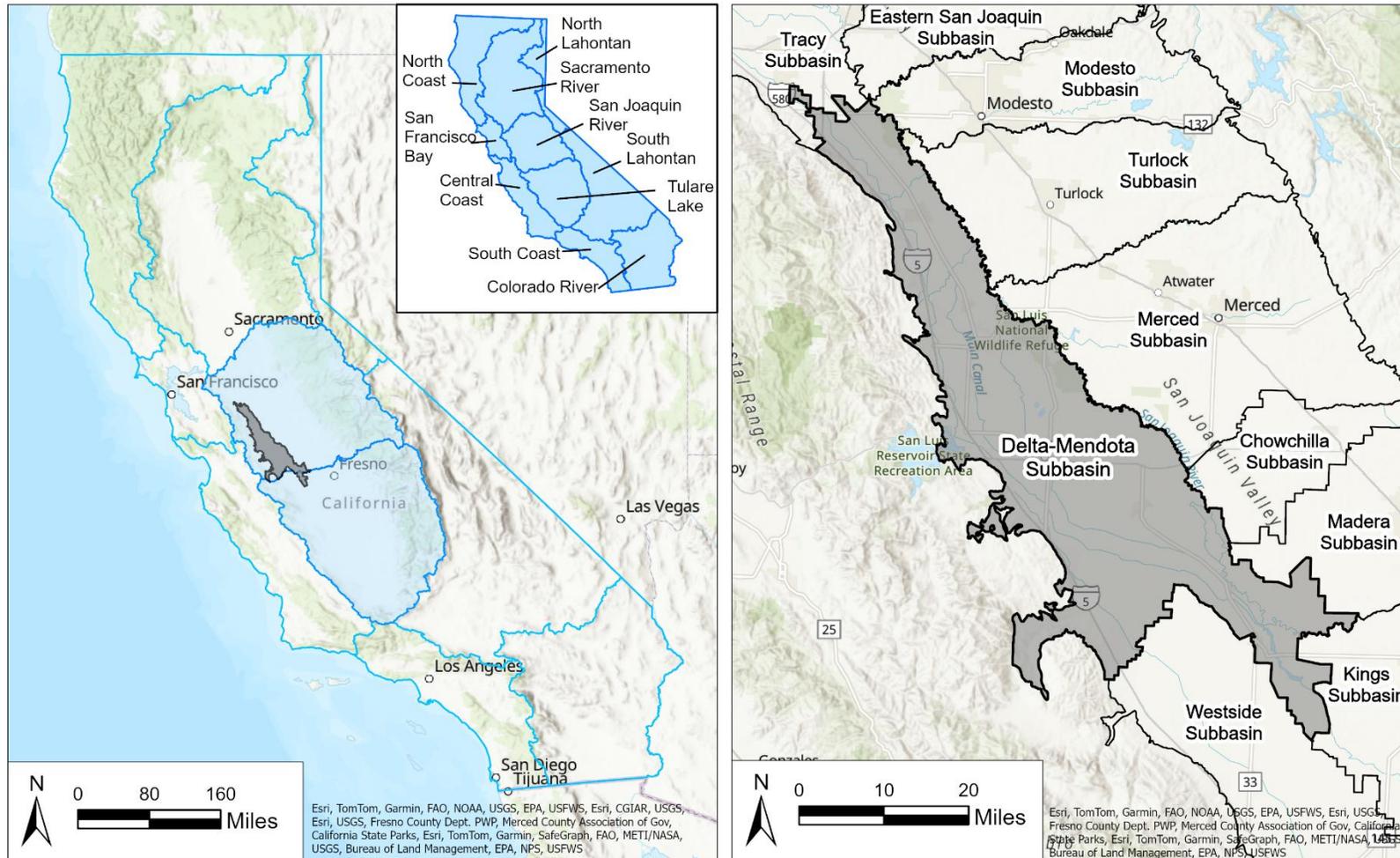


Figure 1
Overview of the Delta-Mendota Subbasin

*Delta-Mendota Subbasin Staff Assessment
 March 2026*

- Delta-Mendota Subbasin
- Hydrologic Regions

