

Sustainable Groundwater Management Act: Tule Subbasin

Proposed Resolution 2026-XXX

April 21, 2026

Item No. 4



Office of Sustainable Groundwater Management

A photograph of a large concrete pipe discharging water into a body of water. The pipe is surrounded by rocks and reeds. The water is splashing as it enters the water. The background shows a grassy area and a path.

Staff Presentation

1. Tule Subbasin Background

2. Review and Evaluation

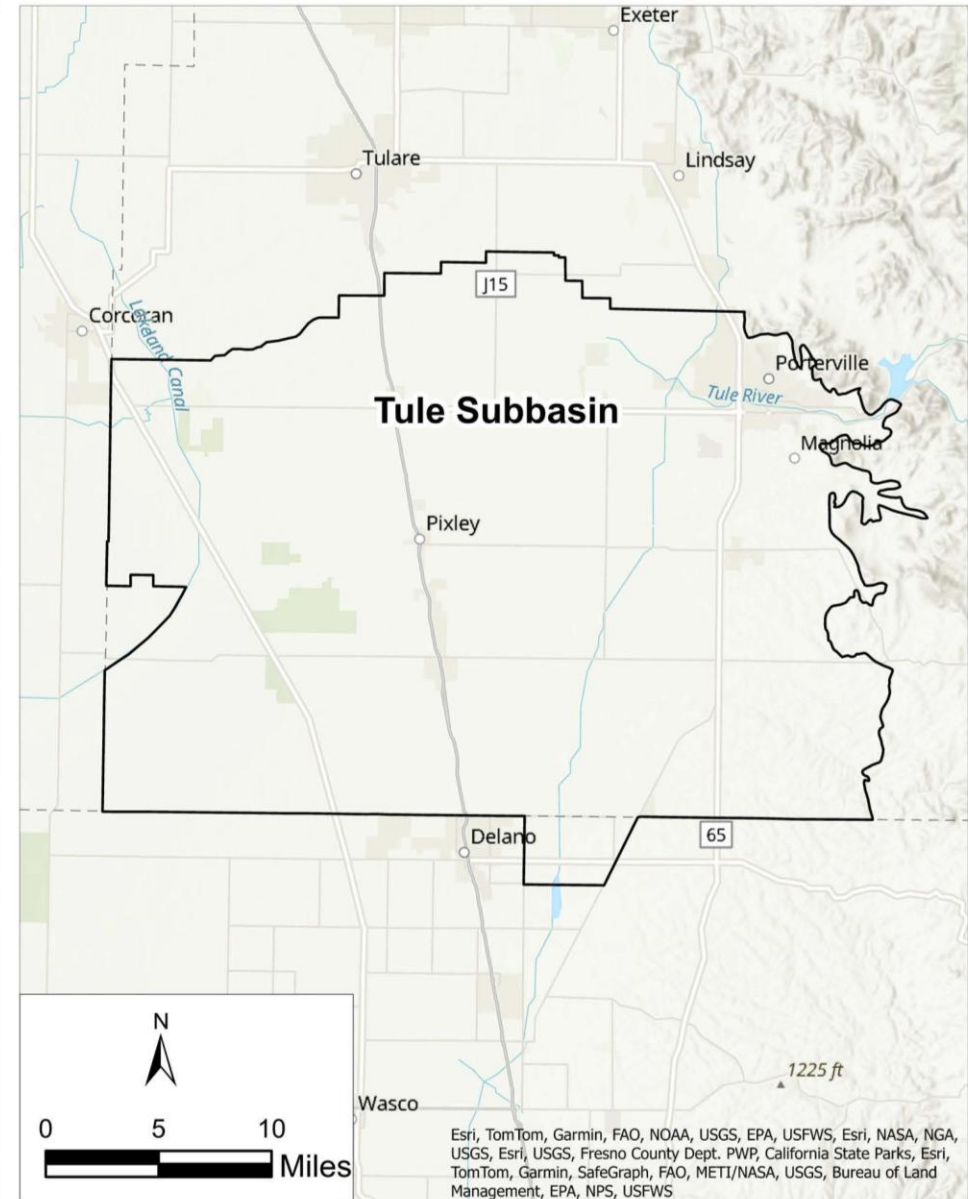
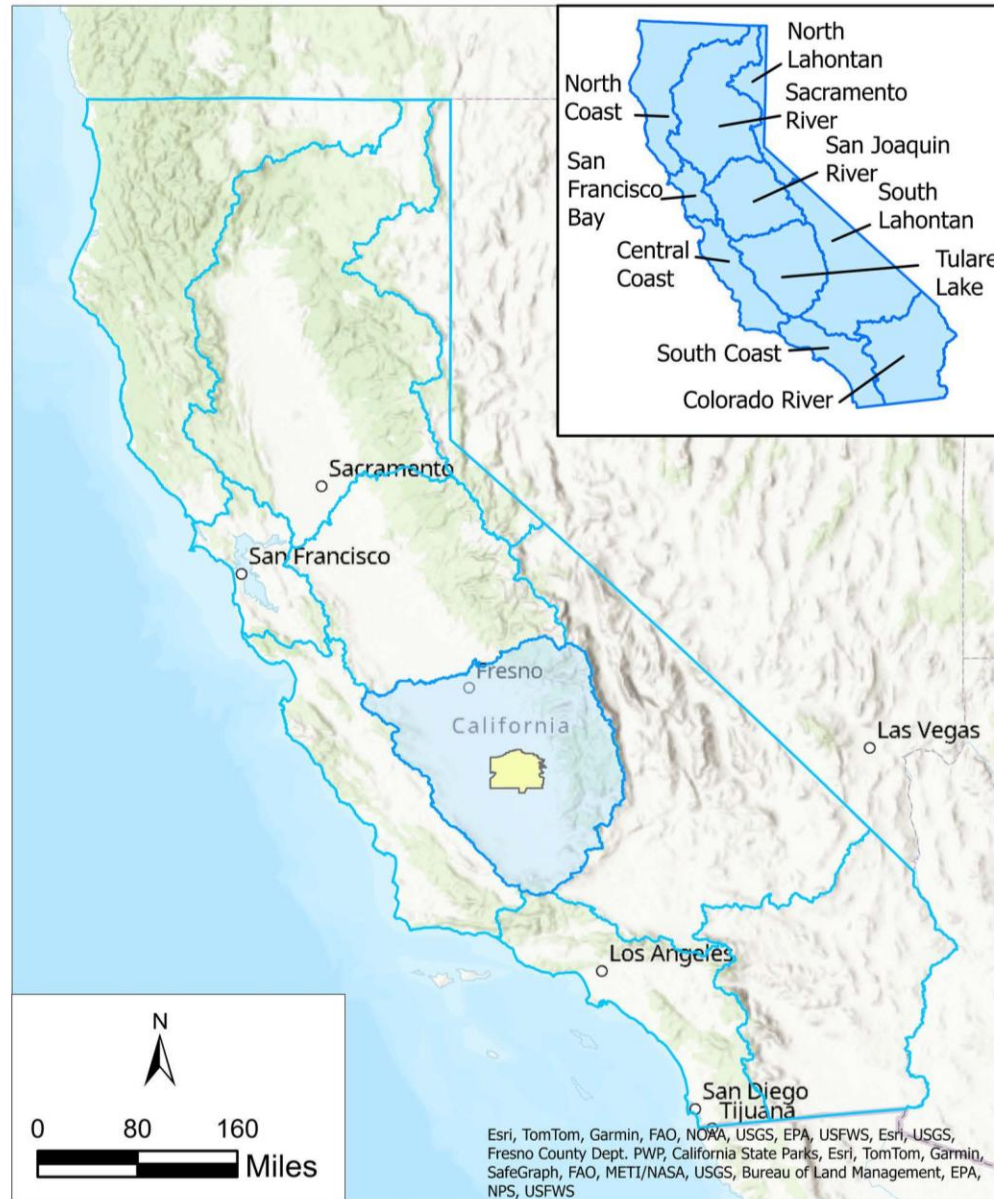
3. Staff Recommendations to the Board

4. Next Steps

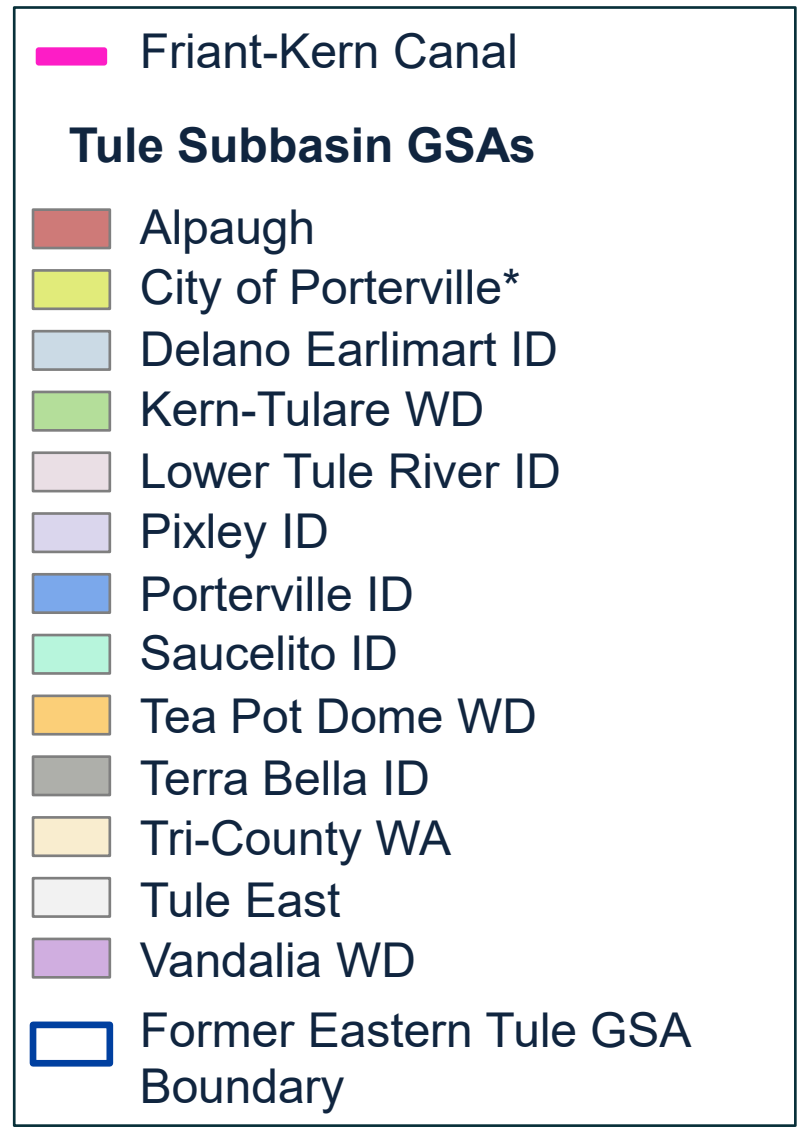
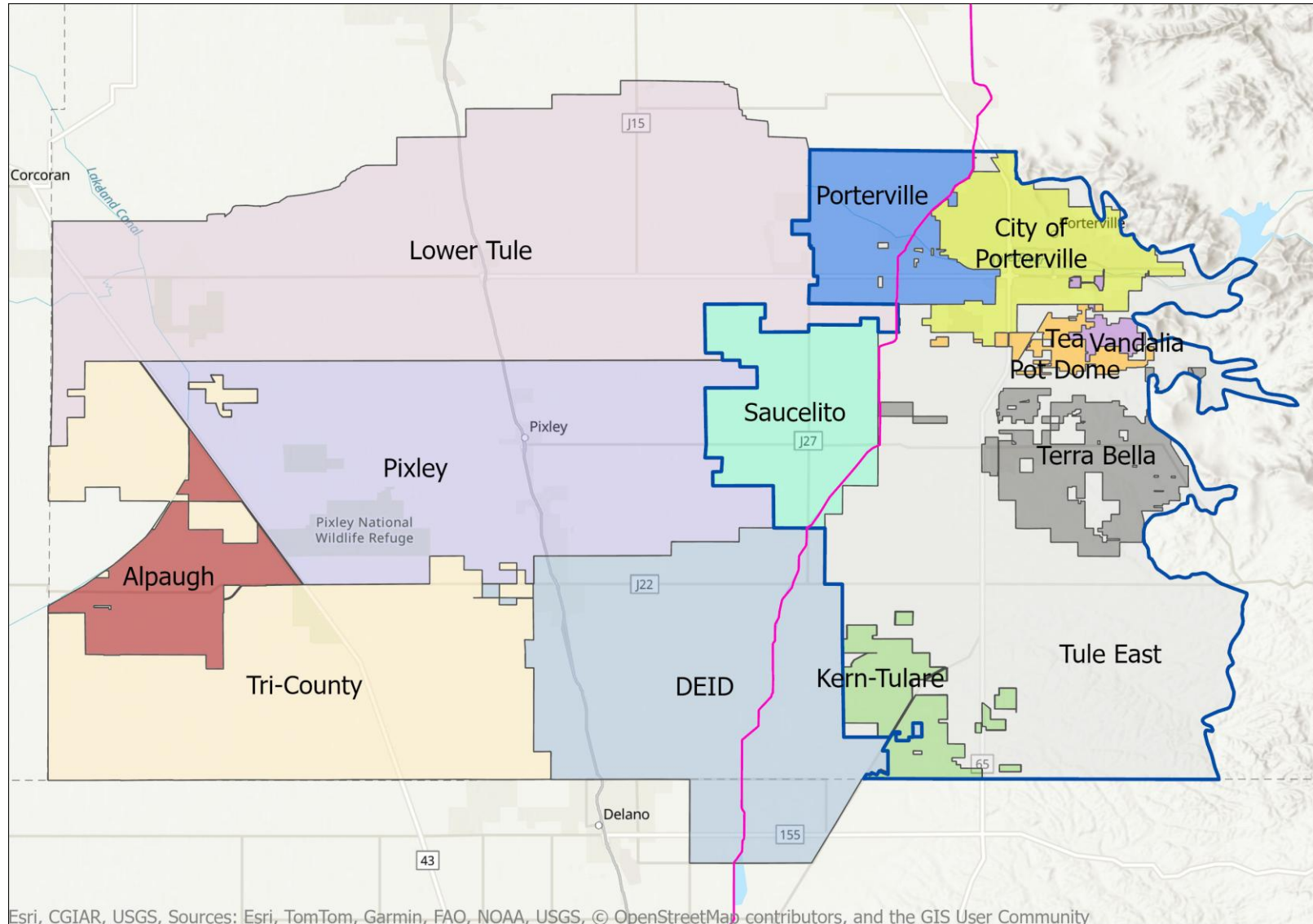
Tule Subbasin Background



The Tule Subbasin Is on Probation



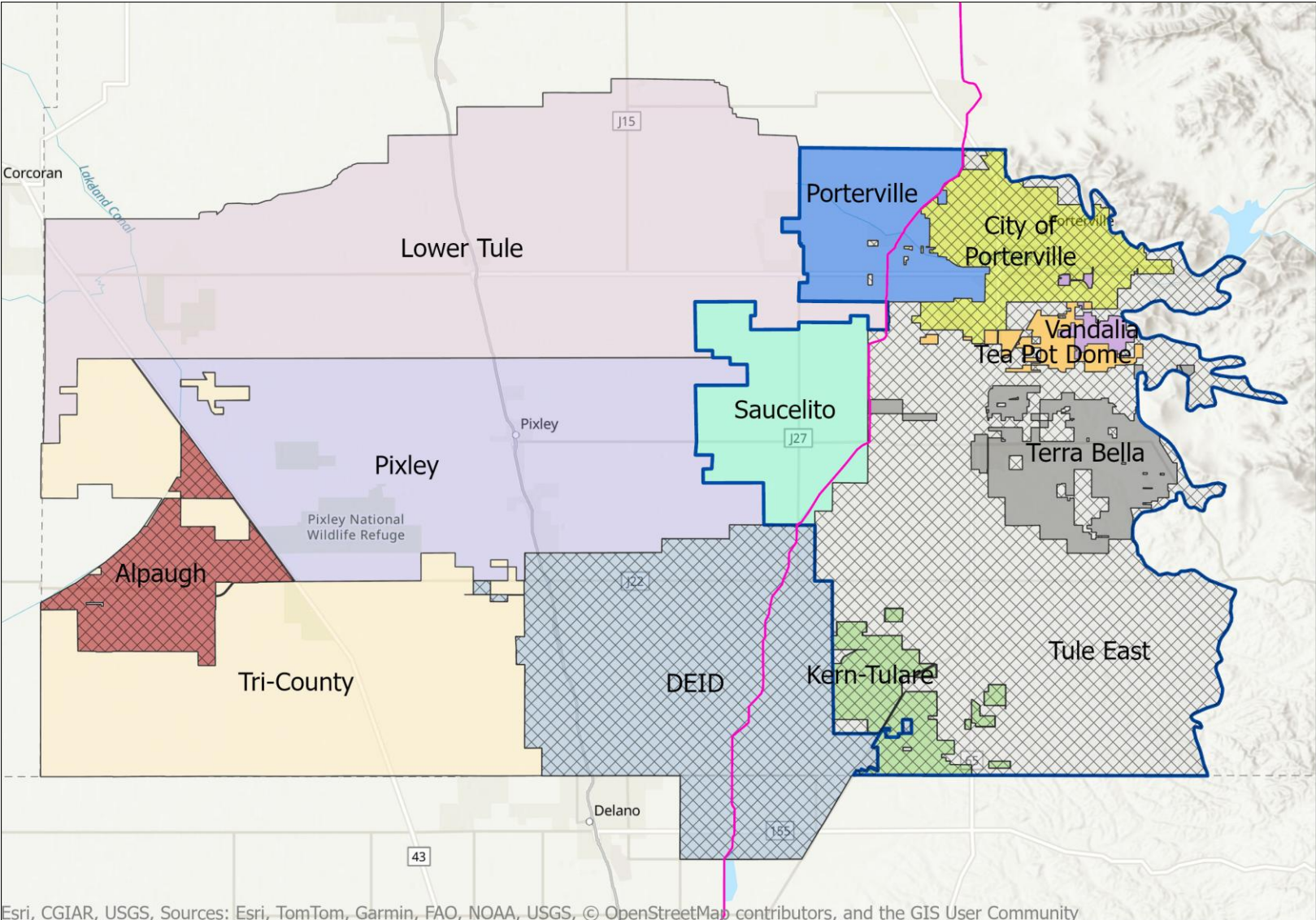
Several New GSAs Formed in 2025



Esri, CGIAR, USGS, Sources: Esri, TomTom, Garmin, FAO, NOAA, USGS, © OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community

* Recently joined the Tule East GSA on 3/11/2026

Eight GSAs Requested Reporting and Fee Exclusions in 2025

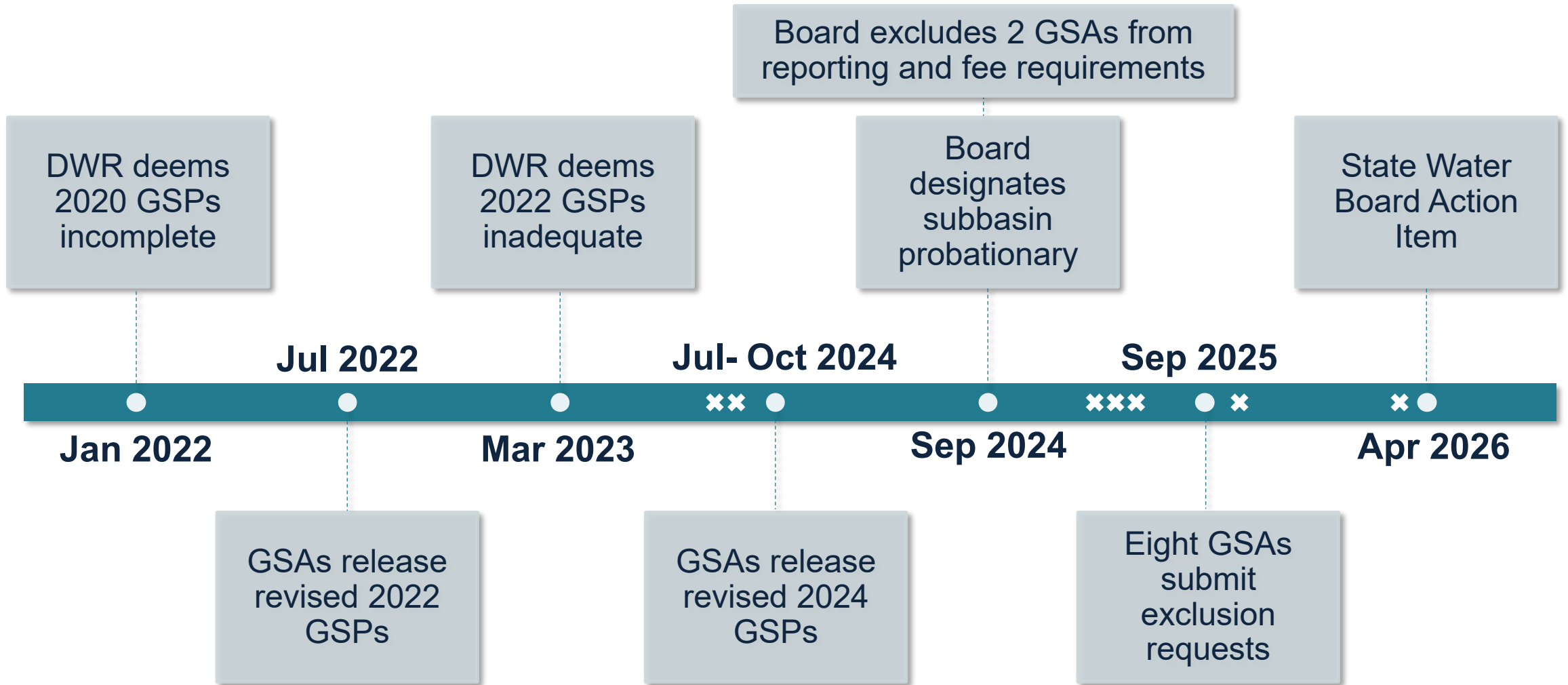


- Friant-Kern Canal
- Tule Subbasin GSAs**
- Alpaugh
- City of Porterville*
- Delano Earlimart ID
- Kern-Tulare WD
- Lower Tule River ID
- Pixley ID
- Porterville ID
- Saucelito ID
- Tea Pot Dome WD
- Terra Bella ID
- Tri-County WA
- Tule East
- Vandalia WD
- Former Eastern Tule GSA
- No New Exclusion Request (Fall 2025)

Esri, CGIAR, USGS, Sources: Esri, TomTom, Garmin, FAO, NOAA, USGS, © OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community

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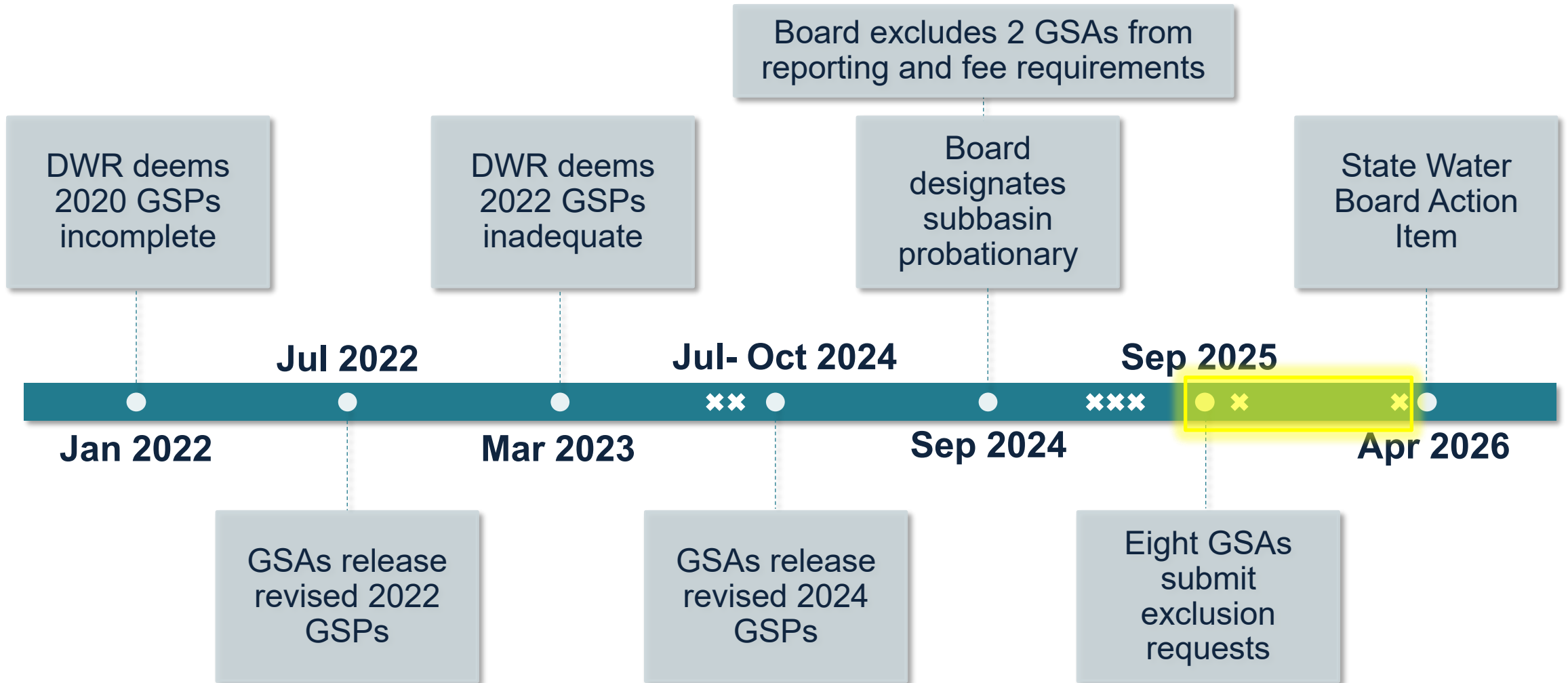
Tule Subbasin State Intervention Timeline



Staff Review & Evaluation



Tule Subbasin State Intervention Timeline



Staff Requested Key Information to Demonstrate Adequate Groundwater Management

Jul 14, 2025
Initial request

GSPs and any other materials to support requests for exclusions by September 2, 2025 (extended to Sep 9, 2025)

Aug 1, 2025
Follow-up

Information to demonstrate how each GSP intends to use the science in the BMP to approach subsidence

Aug 8, 2025
Response to request for clarification

- **Identify critical head levels as indicators of subsidence risk**
- **Expand the monitoring network**
- **Increase the frequency of groundwater level measurements**
- **Assess impact of conditions and actions on subsidence outcomes**

Information Submitted by GSAs to Demonstrate Adequate Groundwater Management (Sep 2025)

Lower Tule,
Pixley,
Tea Pot Dome,
Vandalia

- Cover Letter, Table of GSP deficiencies & 2025 updates
- Revised GSP Sections 3–5
- GSA Policies, Mitigation Plan, SHE Agreement
- GWQ RMS Coverage Map & Chemographs
- Summary of Implementation Actions & Implementation Milestones
- Water Budget Analyses & Updated Water Budget through 2024* (Tea Pot Dome)
- Settlement Agreement with Friant Water Authority** (Tea Pot Dome and Vandalia)

Tri-County

- Cover Letter summarizing eligibility for exclusion
- 2025 Draft-Final GSP (two versions)
- 2025 Draft-Final GSP Appendices
- Exclusion Request Letter

Saucelito,
Terra Bella,
Porterville

- Exclusion Request Letter (as a Technical memorandum)
- GSA resolution
- Rules and Regulations
- Well Location Map (only Terra Bella)

Information Submitted by GSAs to Demonstrate Adequate Groundwater Management (Dec 2025)



Annual Water Budget Data

Annual Water Budget Data from WY 1987 through 2024



Mitigation Program Information

Clarification on what mitigation plans are implemented in each GSA

Summary of mitigation claims:

- Total number of claims in 2024–2025
- Type of claim (e.g., dry well, water quality, subsidence impact)
- Outcome (accepted, denied, status if relevant)



Groundwater Allocation, Well Registration and Metering

Requirements and Compliance Rates

Over-pumping due to noncompliance

Clarification on whether allocations are enforced for unregistered wells

Staff Reviewed Several Components

Groundwater Budget

- Cumulative water budget (AF/A) across three time periods
 - 1987–2024
 - 2015–2024
 - 2020–2024
- Changes over time

Management Actions Compliance

- Requirements and compliance with:
- Well registration
 - Metering requirement
 - Allocation

Land Subsidence

- Magnitude and extent of subsidence
- Subsidence management actions
- Progress toward goals
- Minimum thresholds vs. critical head

Mitigation Plans

- Individual GSA mitigation programs
- Draft subbasin mitigation plan
- Remaining gaps and implementation needs

Basin Level, GSA Level, and Coordination

The Subbasin is Critically Overdrafted

GSA	Cumulative Balance AF/A (1987–2024)	Cumulative Balance AF/A (2015–2024)	Cumulative Balance AF/A (2020–2024)
Lower Tule	-17.10	0.42	0.45
Pixley	-50.03	-10.83	-5.28
Tri-County	-25.91	-6.77	-4.80
Tea Pot Dome	-12.99	-1.76	-1.49
Terra Bella	12.25	6.86	1.65
Porterville	15.21	11.00	6.04
Saucelito	-10.39	-2.89	-2.40
Vandalia	6.84	8.51	2.43

Half of the GSAs show persistent overdraft.

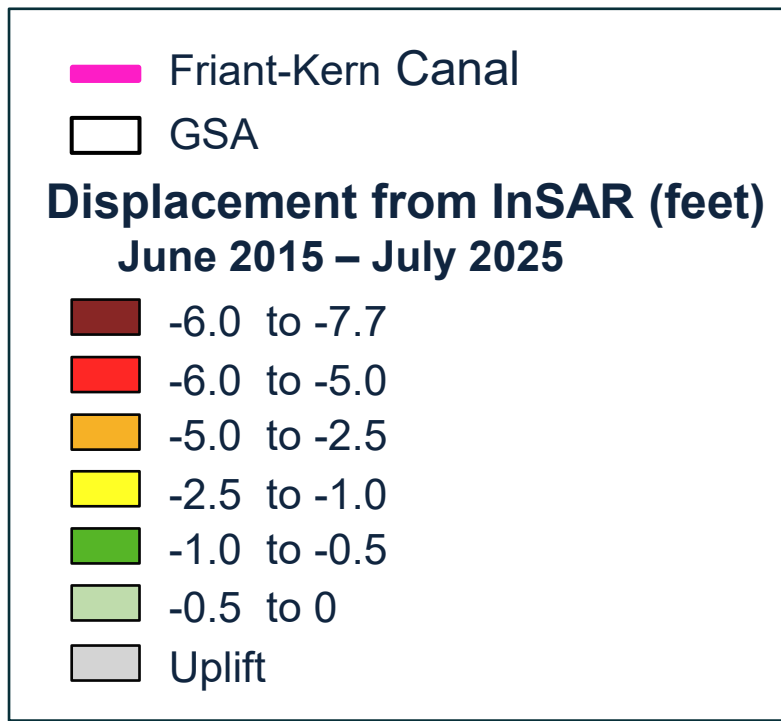
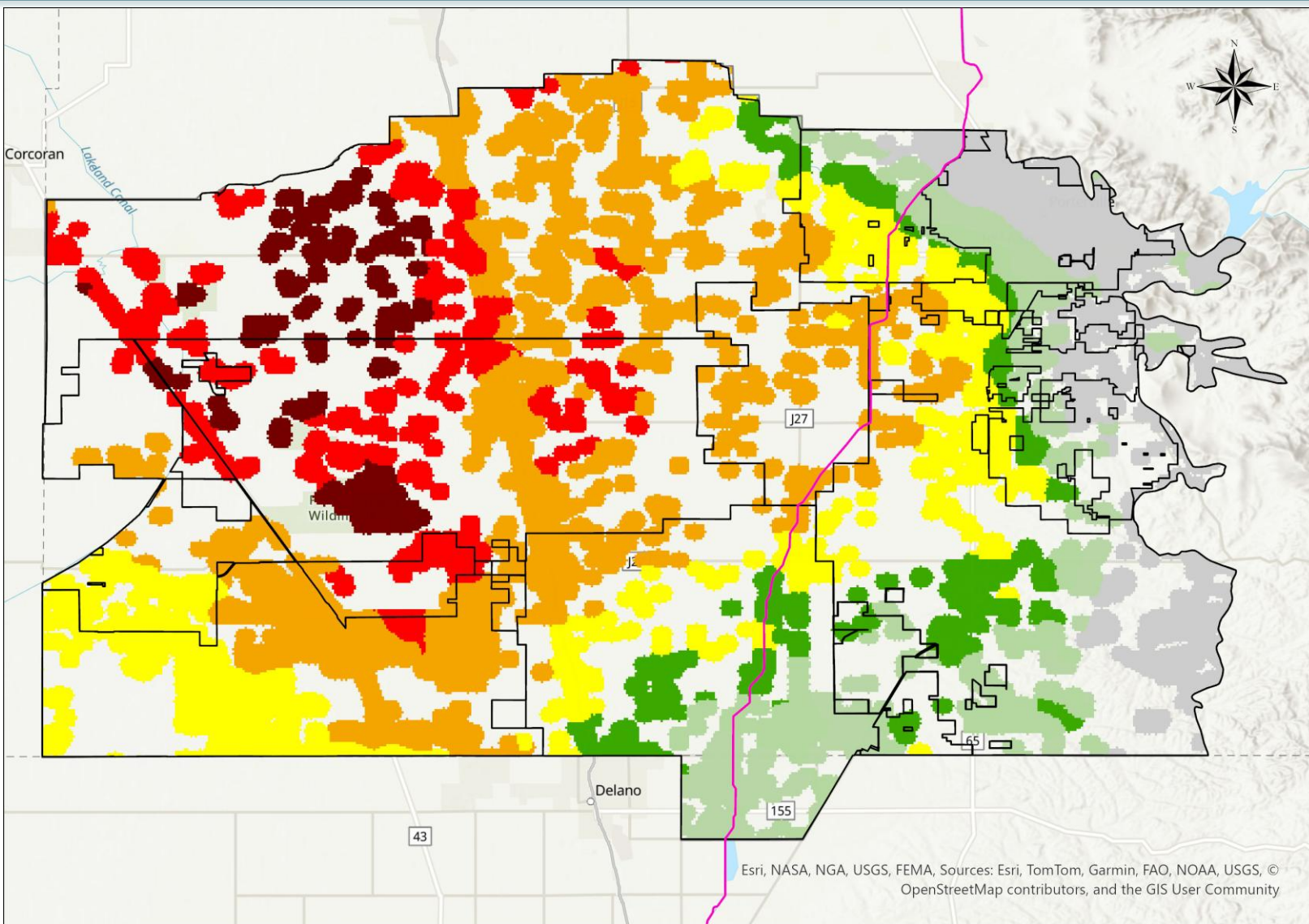
Compliance with Management Actions is Unclear

GSA	Well Registration	Metering	2024 Allocation
Lower Tule	94%	49%	96%
Pixley	96%	53%	91%
Tri-County	85%	Not provided	93%
Tea Pot Dome	Not required	Not provided	98%
Terra Bella	100%	100%	Not provided
Porterville	Not provided	Not provided	Not provided
Saucelito	75%	53%	Not provided
Vandalia	Not required	Not required	94%

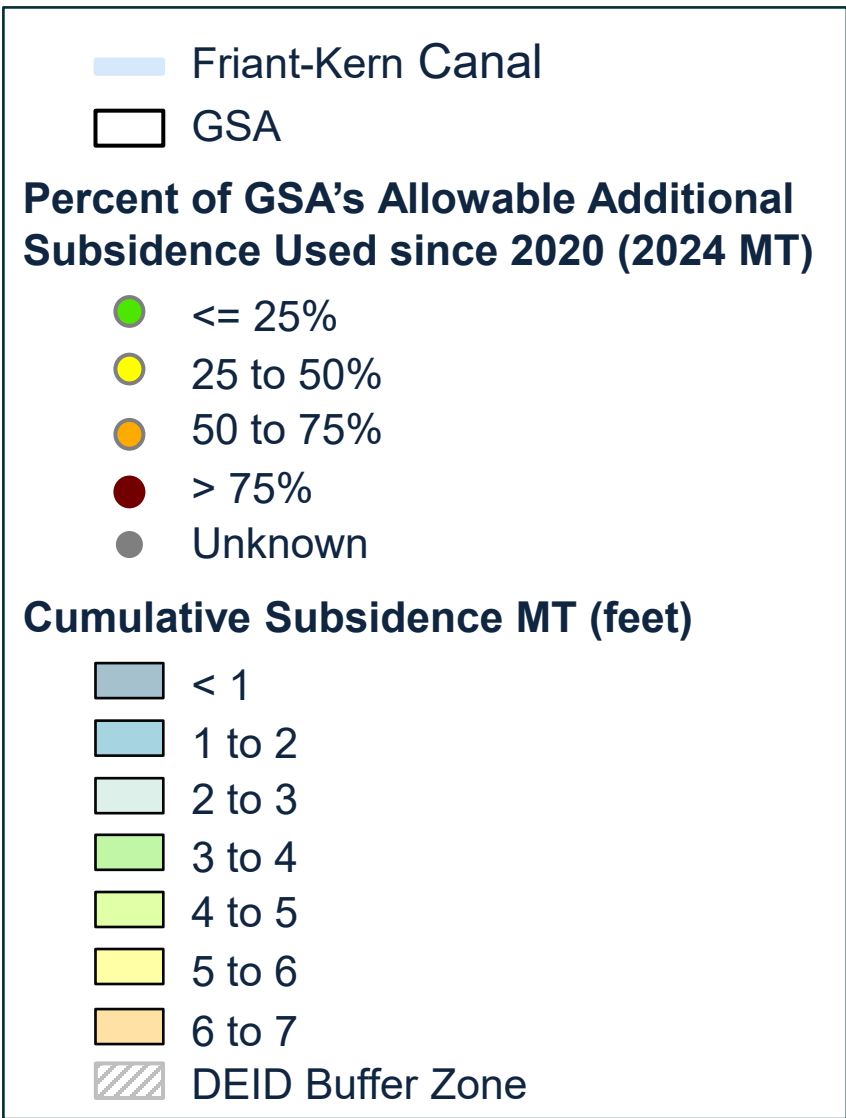
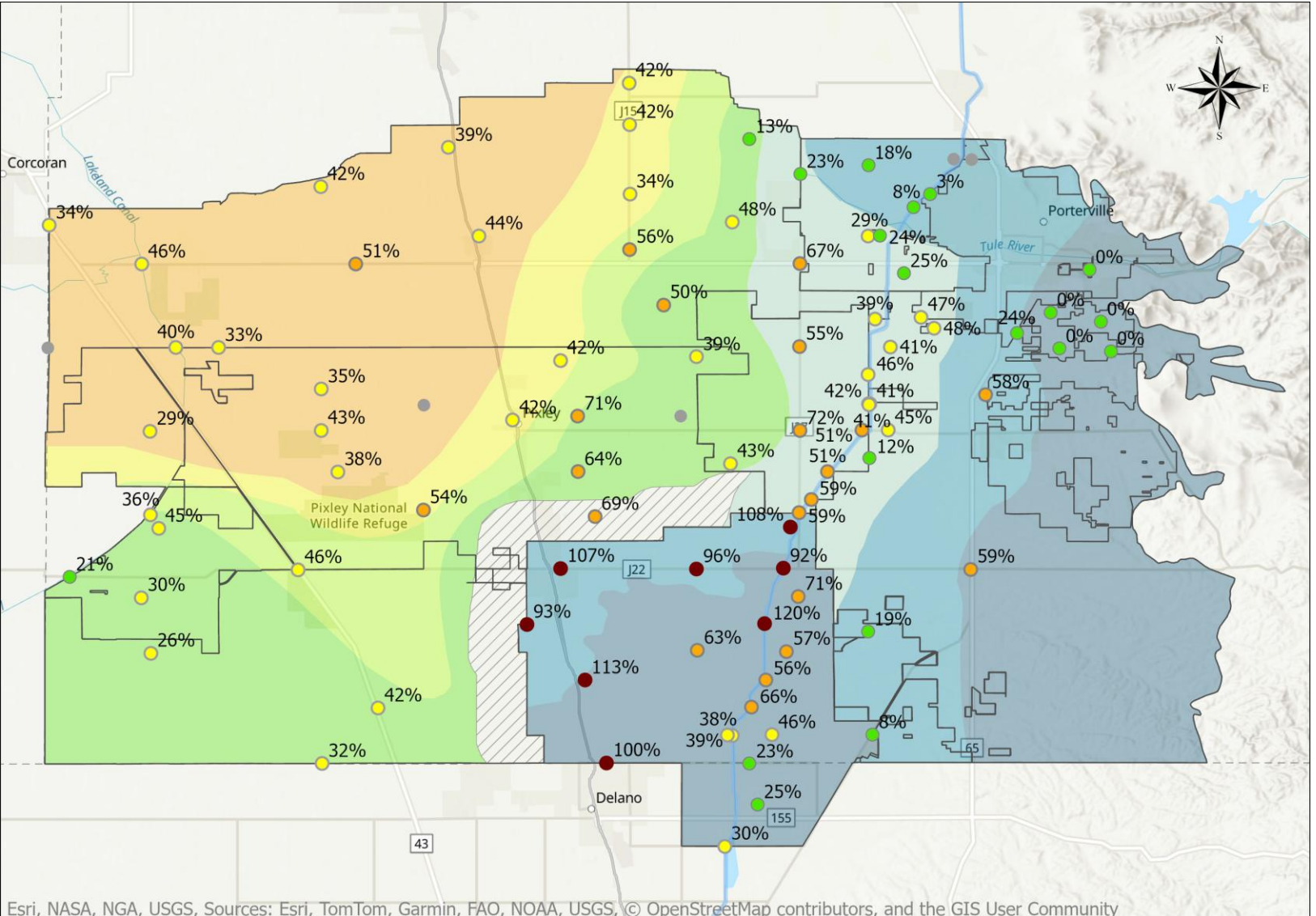
Compliance rates indicate how well GSAs track and manage groundwater pumping.

Subsidence in the Subbasin is a Concern

The highest total subsidence recorded in California since 2015 (7.7 ft) occurs in Lower Tule.



GSA's Subsidence Targets May Not be Achieved



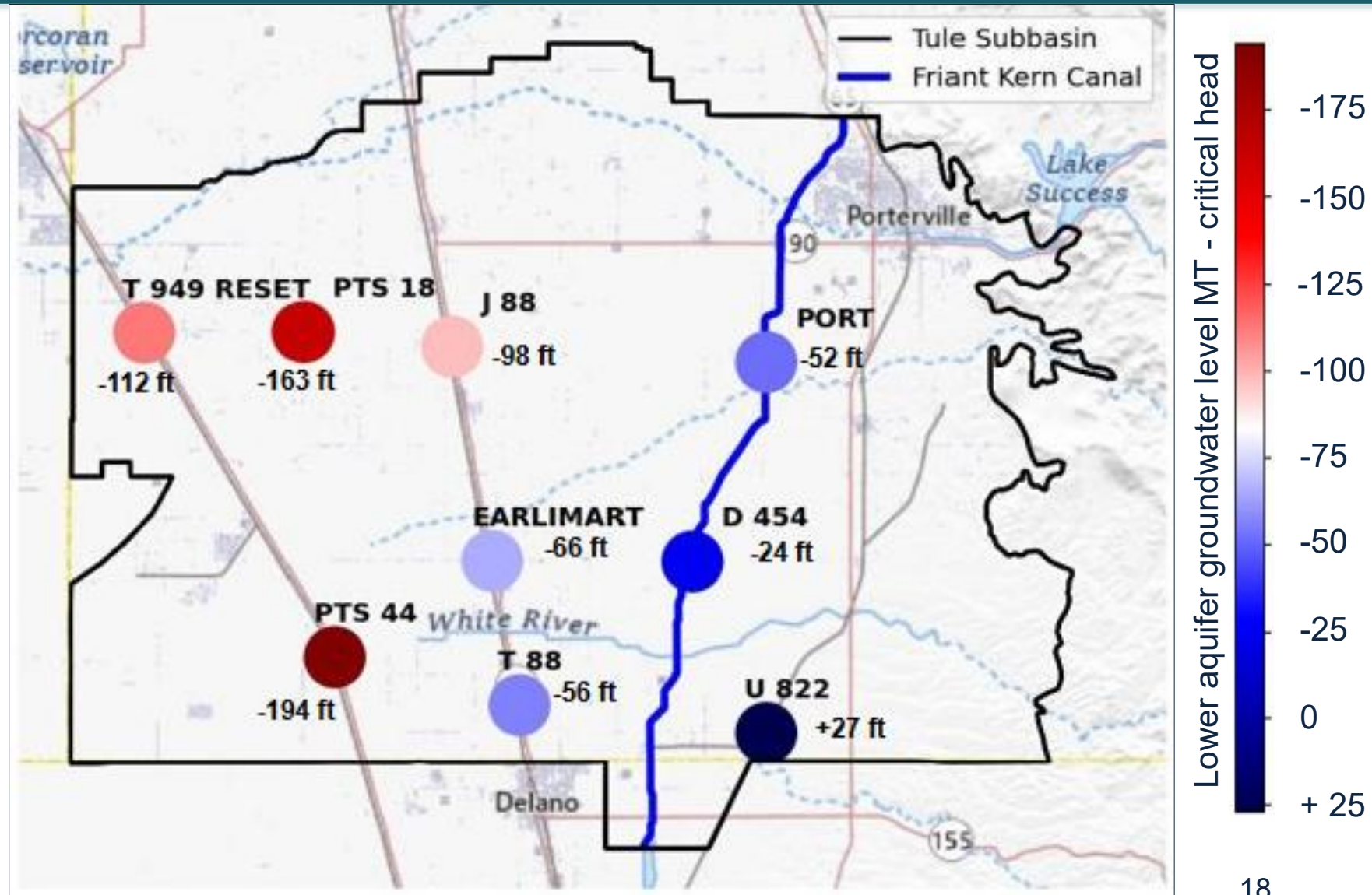
Esri, NASA, NGA, USGS, Sources: Esri, TomTom, Garmin, FAO, NOAA, USGS, © OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community

Data Source: Minimum Threshold values obtained from the 2024 Groundwater Sustainability Plans (GSPs).

Many Minimum Thresholds Established by the GSAs are below Estimated Levels to Slow Subsidence

Lower aquifer:

- MT is above estimated critical head in only 1 site
- Groundwater level MTs need to rise 24–194 feet to reach critical head
- 2024 average groundwater levels are 13–93 ft below critical head at 5 of 9 sites



Current Mitigation Efforts Differ across the Subbasin

**Draft Tule Subbasin Mitigation Plan
To be adopted by all GSAs**

**GSAs Following 2022
Mitigation Framework**

Saucelito

Porterville

Terra Bella

**GSAs Following Individual
Mitigation Programs**

Lower Tule

Pixley

**Tea Pot
Dome**

Vandalia

Tri-County

Mitigation Plans Leave Major Gaps



**Restrictive
Eligibility
Criteria**



**Financial
Barriers to
Claims**



**Incomplete
budgeting**



**Slow
Emergency
Water Response**



**Infrastructure
Mitigation**



**Unclear
Governance and
Decision-Making**

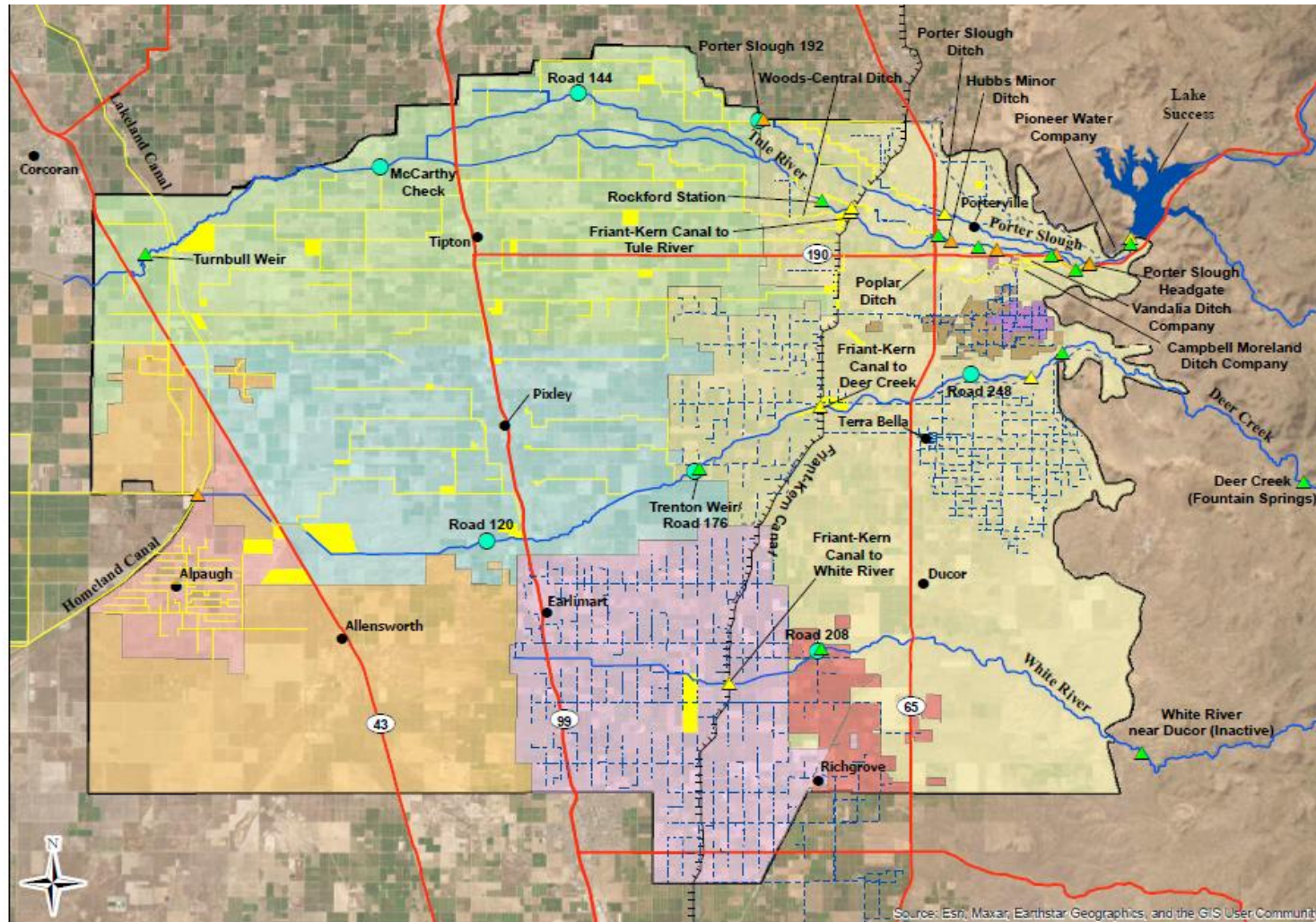


**Incomplete
Mitigation
Programs**



**Inconsistent
Mitigation
Programs**

Coordination Needed Across the Basin to Exit Probation



- Coordinate actions to meet basin-wide sustainability goals
- Develop consistent implementation approach
- Align mitigation programs and eligibility

Staff Recommendations for the Exclusion Requests



Board Has Discretion on “Adequate Management”

The Board has discretion to determine what constitutes adequate management for purposes of exclusion from reporting and fees and to determine whether to apply the exclusion if adequate management is occurring. (Wat. Code, § 10735.2(c)(1).)

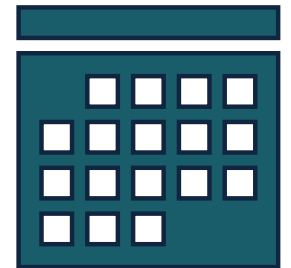
Board staff has improved its approach to evaluating "adequate management" requests and making recommendations to the Board in light of SGMA's key goals and timelines.

Staff Report and Public Engagement



The “Staff Review of Requests for Exclusion from Probationary Reporting and Fees” was released for public comment on March 19th.

Public comments were due on April 20th.



Staff Recommendations for Board Action



**No New Exclusions
from Reporting and
Fees Recommended**



Next Steps

Actions Are Now in Progress



Register wells & report pumping volumes

Deadline: May 1, 2026



Issue invoices

Anticipated (estimate): June 2026

Fees due (estimate): July 2026 (30 days after invoices are issued)



Ongoing engagement

Board staff to continue engaging with GSAs and pumpers



Interim Plan development

Board staff begins scoping



Data-driven actions

Use reporting data to inform Interim Plan actions (e.g., reporting requirements, pumping limits, etc.)

The State may Develop an Interim Plan

Can be adopted if, after a year from the probationary designation, local agencies have not remedied the deficiencies that resulted in designating the basin a probationary basin.

Interim Plan



**Actions &
Timeline**



**Monitoring &
Reporting**



**Water Right
Priority
Consistency**

Required consultation with DWR

A Timeline Is Established with an Opportunity to Exit Probation



**Pumping data
evaluation &
sustainable
yield
calculation**



**Interim Plan
development**



**Public
Meetings and
Engagement**



**Notice and
Hearing
Process**



**Target Hearing
Date
End of 2027**

Continued coordination with GSAs

**If GSAs resolve deficiencies,
they may exit probation before interim plan adoption.**

The Interim Plan Establishes Key Components

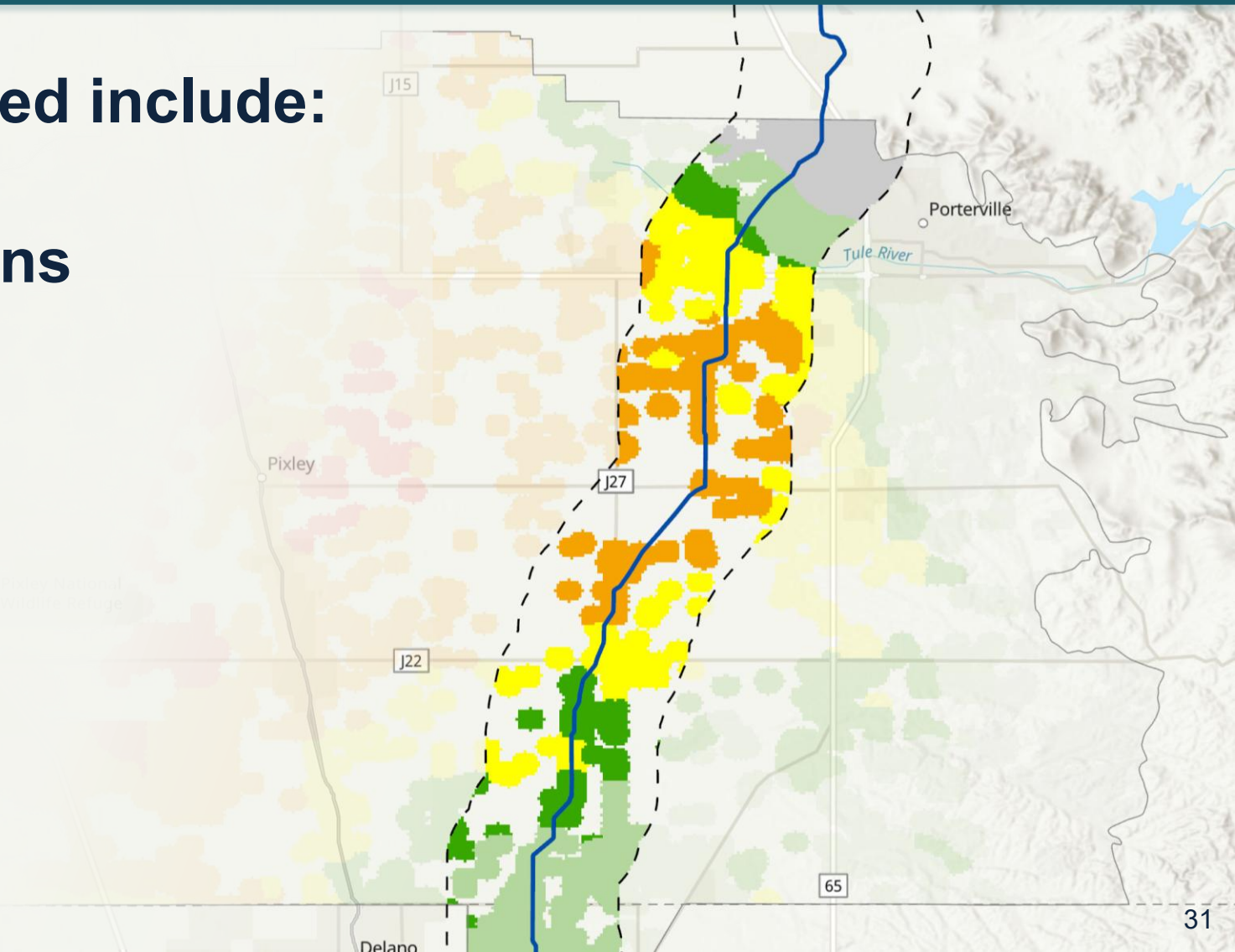
- **Determines Interim Plan Supply**
- **Incorporates effective GSP elements**
- **Adds monitoring where needed**
- **Increased fees**
- **Continued public access to groundwater pumping information**



Options for Implementation May Include Pumping Restrictions

Some options to be considered include:

- Phased pumping reductions
- Pumping moratorium considerations
- Periodically reassess pumping (for example, every ~2 years)



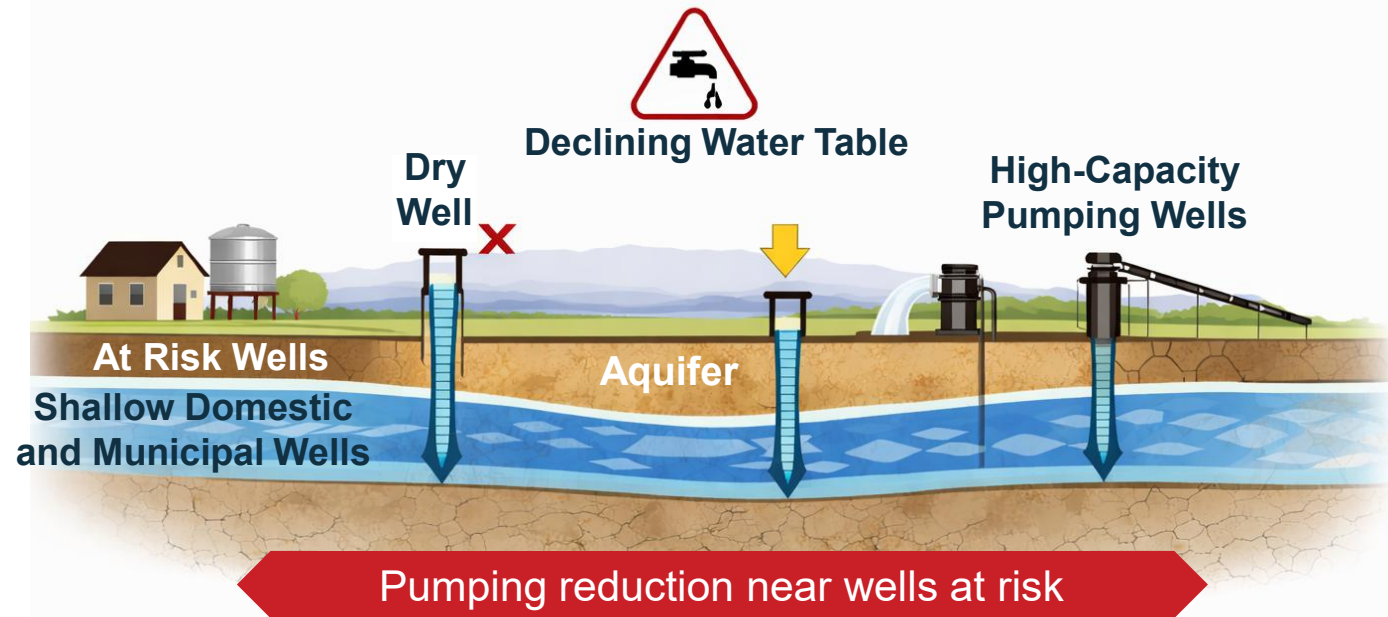
Options for Implementation May Include Protecting Drinking Water Supplies

Some options to be considered include:

- Identifying wells at risk of going dry
- Reducing pumping near wells at risk
- Ongoing development:
 - Risk definitions
 - Mitigation strategies

WELL IMPACT ZONE

Identifying Wells at Risk of Going Dry



GSAAs need to continue their efforts for the basin to exit probation



Do not dissolve GSAs

Essential that GSAs work together to make progress towards sustainability.



GSAs actions reduce need for interim plan

Less need for restrictive interim plan measures (higher fees, pumping reductions, mitigation measures).



Continue implementing plans

Local implementation is more efficient: GSAs can implement solutions faster, cheaper, and more effectively than the Board.



GSAs are critical for the exit strategy

They develop the plan to transition out of the interim plan and probation.

Staff Recommendations for Board Action



**No New Exclusions
from Reporting and
Fees Recommended**

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