

**Napa Valley Groundwater Sustainability Plan Public Meeting**  
**September 29, 2021**  
**Summary of Questions and Comments**

**Drought**

*Question: Several observations seem relevant to the GSP. My well off of Simmons Creek has gone dry this summer. Reports suggest that the creek has gone dry for first time in 100+ years. It seems that many vineyards are using trucked water. We are running out of water. How does the GSP address this?*

Response: The GSP will create definitions of when the subbasin is reaching critical impacts. It will also provide thresholds indicating that action needs to be taken to prevent the subbasin from reaching those critical levels. And it includes a range of actions that can be taken by the GSA to respond with once those thresholds are reached. We have to have this framework in place to be able to comprehensively and scientifically manage groundwater throughout the Napa Valley, and to be able to carry out actions in a way that is legally defensible and protective of everyone's rights.

Trucked water comes from different sources. Some of it comes from the Oroville and Shasta reservoirs, brought in through the State Water Project. In other cases, it may come from groundwater. This is an issue may be looked at more closely or may need to be regulated in the future.

*Question: It seems like we are in an overdraft condition. The Napa River is dry. The GSPAC and the GSP should acknowledge that. We need to admit reality when it comes to the current groundwater situation.*

Response: We are currently in an extreme drought and the GSPAC considers the situation to be very serious. We are working on steps to ensure groundwater sustainability right now. The committee considers the situation to be very serious right now.

*Question: We don't know how much groundwater we have; not now, not next year, and not in the future. As a result, wouldn't it be wise to apply a moratorium on new development until we know much water is being used?*

Response: The GSP includes current estimates of groundwater storage levels, how much water is used, how much water is recharged every year. That's all important to be able to bracket this question. If we wait until we know everything with certainty, we may wait too long to take action to prevent any problems from becoming worse.

The Board of Supervisors just appointed a Housing Element Advisory Committee. We are required to update the County Housing Element every 8 years. The State and Association of Bay Area Governments has set a countywide goal of providing more than 3,800 new homes by 2031. The County doesn't have the option of halting growth, we are required to plan for new

development. We need to provide housing for the people who work here but can't afford to live in Napa, or the families who move here in the future, and for the families of our children. Stopping growth is the easy answer. It's not that simple. Protecting the subbasin for all beneficial users includes future generations and those who choose to move here.

Question: *Is there any recharge infrastructure associated with or being proposed in the GSP?*

Response: The GSP proposes several projects and management actions, including managed aquifer recharge as one of the tools to increase groundwater supply. This involves developing projects to enhance rates of groundwater recharge using existing sources of water such as unallocated winter streamflow and runoff generated within the Subbasin.

Observation: *Consider Napa Co Ag Commissioner as entity that may support the GSP gather information about agricultural wells.*

Observation: *Encourage public disclosure and promote DWR's dry reporting website.*

## **Groundwater Dependent Ecosystems**

Question: *How are the needs of groundwater dependent ecosystems (GDEs) considered? What metrics are used to define GDEs?*

Response: Groundwater dependent ecosystems are plants and animals that rely on groundwater. In some areas of the Napa River and its tributary streams, groundwater flows into the river and provides a water source for GDEs. SGMA requires that we ensure that the management of the subbasin is not adversely affecting groundwater in those areas and harming those ecosystems. The GSP considers where GDEs are located based on mapping from the Nature Conservancy and the Department of Fish and Wildlife, and additional guidance from the State. We use data on the rooting depths of riparian vegetation and compare it with groundwater levels in these riparian areas.

Question: *What is the controversy on the GSPAC with respect to GDEs?*

Response: The debate primarily centers on the best measures to use when defining impacts to groundwater dependent ecosystems related to flow from the aquifer into the rivers and streams. Developing suitable policies on the issue of groundwater-surface water interactions is one of the most important challenges to be addressed in crafting a GSP. To their credit, our GSPAC members have been working for several weeks to understanding supporting information, consider the range of views of their colleagues, and devise a suitable policy response. We anticipate receiving the latest thinking at our upcoming meeting in October and are hopeful that it will earn broad based support from the GSPAC.

Observation: *One way to look at the current context is that we are all part of a groundwater dependent ecosystem.*

## **Groundwater Rights**

Question: *Can you clarify what is meant by the fact that the GSP will not impact water rights?*

Response: The GSP will not impact legal rights to water. However, it may affect whether you can use that right. For example, this year, Napa County received only about 15% of its allocation from the State Water Project due to drought. This doesn't mean the rights are cancelled, it just means we can't access the water that was allocated.

Question: *What rights do you have if you have a well and are using groundwater?*

Response: In California, all water use is regulated by the state. Water rights give holders the right to use the water, but they do not own it. Overlying basin rights give land owners the right to use groundwater where their land overlies the aquifer. They would be able to withdraw water but, under the GSP, the GSA has the authority to regulate how they draw that water including how much water they may use and what it is used for.

## **Groundwater Use**

Question: *Is it possible that hillside wineries would take groundwater from the Napa Valley Subbasin?*

Response: Napa Valley and the surrounding areas have some of the most complicated geology on earth due to the tectonic uplifting of seabed floors into the valley as well as the volcanic and thermal activity that you see in the geysers and hot springs. Many of the hillsides have pockets or sub-aquifers that are connected to the valley subbasin. Others are fairly confined by hard rock or more impermeable rock. Given this complexity, it's hard to generalize as to whether wells on the hillside are pumping groundwater from the subbasin. Depending on how deep you go, it's possible.

Question: *What does the GSA intend to do to make use of water more effective?*

Response: The GSP includes draft actions to ensure groundwater sustainability including using water more effectively in agriculture, landscaping businesses, cities, and homes. Other potential actions include requirements in building codes for water efficient appliances to reduce home/business use.

## **New Development**

Question: *How will the GSP impact new development of hotels, wineries, homes, etc.?*

Response: While SGMA is not a land use planning statute, it is reasonable to anticipate that requirements for new development will increase under the GSP. We will be looking more closely at groundwater availability, particularly during the current drought. While most new development within the subbasin occurs within the town and cities and does not largely rely on groundwater sources, we may need to limit the amount of groundwater that can be allocated for groundwater dependent new development to ensure sustainable management. Unfortunately, we may not have enough groundwater to meet all desires.

Question: *Are there required setbacks from creeks and rivers for well drilling?*

Response: Currently there are no required setbacks from creeks and rivers for groundwater wells. However, a setback requirement is among several tools that the GSPAC is considering reducing the impact of groundwater pumping on depletions of interconnected surface water.

## **Plan Process**

Question: *How does DWR/the GSA define success?*

Response: Success for the GSA is the development and implementation of a plan that ensures sustainable management of groundwater in the Napa Valley Subbasin over the next 50 years. Success for DWR is to effectively support GSAs to sustainably manage their groundwater basins.

Question: *Why are we just starting to have public meetings now? Sonoma County has been having public meetings for years. Is Napa County playing catch up with respect to complying with SGMA?*

Response: Each groundwater basin is different and each GSA has established its own approach to developing a plan and reaching out to the public. Napa County has been studying and managing groundwater for over 30 years, including the creation of a public Groundwater Resources Advisory Committee 10 years ago. The Napa County GSA has established a very broad-based Groundwater Sustainability Advisory Committee that is representative of the full range of groundwater users in Napa County. The GSPAC has met 17 times over the past two years. All meetings are open to the public. Sonoma County is using a slightly different model.

Question: *What is DWR looking for in a plan? What can we learn from plans that have already been approved by DWR?*

Response: To date more than 20 plans have been submitted from critically over drafted basins. Four have been reviewed by DWR and two were approved. We are going through the approved plans to see what we can learn to try and incorporate trends and issues so that we can produce a document that will be acceptable to DWR. Plans that do not respond fully to the full set of Undesirable Conditions, even with interim measures, have not been favorably reviewed. Plans that specifically target and commit to future adaptive management with expanded data collection and monitoring have fared better.

Question: *What would happen if DWR does not accept the GSP?*

Response: DWR has three choices under SGMA: the agency can designate GSPs as approved, incomplete or inadequate. If DWR determines that a GSP is incomplete, the GSA will have 180 days to revise the plan and resubmit it to DWR. If the GSP is designated as inadequate, it will be referred to the State Water Board which will consider whether to intervene to directly manage groundwater in the subbasin.

## **Subbasin Boundaries**

*Question: Why are only users in the Napa Valley Subbasin subject to regulation and not users in the hillside when some hillside water does recharge the subbasin?*

*Response:* The focus on the Napa Valley Subbasin is not the County or the GSA's decision. The subbasin boundary was drawn by the state of California. The county is required to prepare a GSP for this defined geographic area.

*Observation: The draft GSP may not be sufficiently comprehensive, as it does not address issues in the watershed and/or other parts of the County.*

## **Threshold Indicators**

*Question: Why are we using lagging sustainable indicators and not leading indicators?*

*Response:* SGMA defines a set of interlocking measures to anticipate, avoid, and address undesirable results. While the concept of leading and lagging indicators may apply in other contexts (such as performance of the US economy), that is not the formulation envisioned by SGMA. As a forward-looking planning effort, SGMA seeks to avoid undesirable results by asking managers of groundwater basins to understand the hydrology of these basins and craft policies and guidelines to sustain groundwater. The key terms at work in GSPs are Minimum Thresholds, Measurable Objectives, and Undesirable Results, as well as Projects and Management Actions.