



# Highlights Stakeholder Assessment

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To the Eastern San Joaquin (ESJ)  
Groundwater Sustainability Work  
Group(GSW)

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# Stakeholder Involvement



The Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) sets forth requirements for local groundwater management.

## SGMA Requires

- Groundwater users help to plan for and preserve shared natural resource.
- That Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSAs) prepare a list of interested parties and consider their interests in the agency's groundwater sustainability plan (GSP).
- GSAs obtain and consider groundwater user ideas before the development of the GSA and GSP.



# Assessments

## Identify

- Problems and opportunities
- Decisions to be made
- Key issues requiring stakeholder concurrence
- Preferred communication approaches
- Preferred planning approaches and solutions

Who: People that need to be engaged/informed and to what extent

What: Objectives and issues important to participants

Where: Place based, including virtual locations (on-line support)

When: Timing

Why: Validation that this particular audience, objectives and approach will support successful GSA formation

How: Methods

The Situation Assessment was conducted to inform Eastern San Joaquin GSP development and broader SGMA activities

**GOAL:**

Determine what is required for community acceptance and support.

# Interview Process

23 GSW members invited to participate in interviews:

- 16 interviews conducted
- 17 people interviewed

Interviews conducted between 8/23/18 – 12/8/18

- From 45 – 90 minutes each in duration
- In-person and phone interviews

# Questions

- 17 questions covered
  - Roles
  - Groundwater Authority (GWA)  
Governance
  - Decision-making
  - Work Group Outreach and Meetings
  - Public Involvement
  - Knowledge of SGMA
  - GSP Content
  - GSP Implementation

# Results





# PROCESS: OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT

For the first part of the interview, participants were asked about aspects of process – or the “how” behind different activities:

- **Work Group formation**
- Overall planning to date
- **GWA governance**
- Decision making
- **Opportunities for input**
- Work Group meetings and materials
- **Outreach and communication**



# Work Group Formation

Participants learned about Work Group formation by:

- Hearing about it from someone else (5)
- Receiving an invitation email (4)
- Involvement with related activities (7)

Several participants expressed that the initial outreach did not seem well-planned. Many organizations were not initially contacted about formation of the Work Group and that the application date had to be extended.

Three Work Group members felt that the process would have benefitted from having stakeholders involved early on, to inform the Stakeholder Engagement and Public Outreach Plan.

# Work Group Perspectives

Participants became involved with the Work Group:

- To represent a particular perspective
- To contribute to a deliberative, equitable process
- Due to being “volun-told” to participate

Half of the respondents expressed concerns that the Work Group effort was about “checking boxes” and would not involve meaningful contributions to the GSP.

Members reported feeling most knowledgeable about SGMA generally, with an average or more basic understanding of GSA and GSP requirements.

# Meeting Presentations

Meeting presentations were characterized as thorough and well prepared, providing the right level of detail for technical content.

Several participants remarked that technical materials, studies and referenced reports need to be posted online to help process and respond to technical information.

Three Work Group members sought more information about the deliverables to be developed, and the timeline for those work products, as well as more detail on water use and local conditions.

Several respondents believed that presentations should provide the basis for discussion, beyond providing information. Discussion should focus on those topics where the GWA is seeking input.

# Meeting Discussions

Members value Work Group meeting discussions as an opportunity to share and hear perspectives. About 2/3 of the respondents felt that more time was needed for discussion and reflection, although not necessarily by lengthening meeting time.

One respondent suggested that the flow of the meetings could be improved, by providing responses to the comments and questions raised at the previous meeting.

Meeting dynamics can sometimes result in louder voices controlling the conversation. Some members indicated that the facilitators step in when the dialog digresses, others see the facilitators as steering away from difficult questions or conversations.



# Suggestions for Strengthening the Work Group Process

Increase discussion time, by providing shorter recaps and by highlighting the content of presentation slides.

Ensure that everyone gets to speak, Provide some flexibility in meetings to follow group discussions.

Involve decision-makers in Work Group meetings.

Post related technical materials, studies and reports.

Send meeting materials as attachments, with user-friendly software (e.g. Word)

Improve the quality of handouts, especially maps.

# Decision Making & Input Process



# Decision Making & Input Process

GSW members have different understandings about the decision-making roles and processes. While most report that the GWA will make the final decisions, it's not clear how the exchange of ideas occurs between the GWA, AC, consultants and Work Group.

Most respondents expressed that GSW responsibilities are not well defined, and that it's not clear how input from Work Group will responded to or used. There are also questions as to whether input from different sources (advisory committee, Work Group members, ag) is weighted differently.

Several respondents sought an expansion of GWA composition beyond water delivery interests, to include environmental and EJ interests – and more diverse representation in the decision-making process.

# Suggestions for Improving GSWG Relevance to GWA

Most members want clarification on how GSW comments will be incorporated into GSP development

Specifically, the GWA should identify the topics they would like the Work Group to focus on. Members are interested in what the GWA like to know.

Define the mission, deliverables and timeline for the Work Group. Clarify what outside input is being sought.

Increase the diversity of representation within the overall decision-making process.



# Public Outreach

Members believe that many water users, who could be impacted by the GSP, are not aware of this process. The sense is that outreach to the broader public is lacking.

# Public Outreach/Workshop

As an example of public outreach, some members provided the following comments on the August 29<sup>th</sup> public workshops.

One respondent said it wasn't clear how the August public workshop was helpful for those who weren't aware of this effort.

It was observed that the meeting room for the workshop itself was small and very noisy. It was necessary to yell, just to talk to those staffing the work stations. No presentation was provided to orient participants to the process, and participants were encouraged to "just ask questions."

One member noted that public workshops are often not well attended. Other approaches may be more effective for outreach, such as inserts in utility or tax bills, speaker bureaus, and newsletters. Also, the website is not very user-friendly and could be redesigned.

# Suggestions for Enhancing Public Outreach

Make it easy for people to track with this. Information should be understandable – explain the legislation, what it looks at, and the timeline.

Use a variety of approaches to share information and distribute the draft GSP

Record and post meetings of the GWA and technical Advisory Committee

Build capacity for outreach by the respective GSAs.

# GSP DEVELOPMENT AND PLAN CONTENT

For the second segment of the interview, Work Group members were asked about

- Expectations and any specific issues or interests related to GSP development
- Priorities for GSP content
- Thoughts on GSP implementation



# Expectations for GSP Development

Several members emphasized that the GSP must coordinate with existing jurisdictional plans and requirements.

One respondent specified three main issues that set the context for water management in the ESJ basin: unimpaired flows, SGMA and the Delta proposals.

The majority of members spoke about the need for verifiable data, with measurements for water use and water extraction across all sectors. One person advocated for a conceptual model and water budget at the boundary level for each GSA.

Several respondents mentioned that if current impairments can be offset, the GSP should discuss how to sustain groundwater resources into the future. The plan could be used to get ahead of the curve, while conditions aren't that bad.

# Data on Resource and Management Conditions

Members identified data important to GSP development:

- actual occurrence of subsidence and associated geology
- **pumping depths, costs, rates and cones of depression**
- pumping practices and consequences (e.g. more pumping on weekends, when electric rates are lower, can drop water levels up to 25')
- **access to potable water**
- groundwater quality (salinity, other contaminants)
- **groundwater recharge and substitution**
- system dynamics in the basin: age of water at depth, tertiary flows, conditions at basin margin, influence from factors outside basin boundaries, recharge patterns

# Priorities for GSP Content

Member suggestions for GSP content focused on several themes:

Management actions need to address the resource conditions in each sub-basin – the same approaches won't work in all areas.

Smarter, more creative solutions are needed to avoid redirected impacts and unintended consequences. Look at strategies being used elsewhere.

Groundwater quality must be considered, including saltwater intrusion, salinity and other contaminants. Contaminants of Emerging Concern (CEC) could affect use of treated wastewater for recharge.

Use GIS layers to make information user-friendly for decision-makers. Provide map of recharge areas, including green infrastructure options.

# Considerations for Implementation

A comprehensive implementation approach needs to address all issues, with enough flexibility to adapt to unforeseen circumstances.

**Buy-in and support will be needed. A stakeholder or advisory board should be convened when the GSP is submitted, to review and inform implementation.**

Land use is a local issue and a big item. Changes in net demand have real impacts downstream. Approvals for well permits could be evaluated in terms of the water budget.

**Coordination agreements, data management and sharing protocols, and monitoring requirements will be essential for implementation.**

Groundwater recharge will need to be an element of any implementation efforts.