



County of Monterey

Item No.

Board Report

Board of Supervisors
Chambers
168 W. Alisal St., 1st Floor
Salinas, CA 93901

Legistar File Number: WRAG 24-033

March 19, 2024

Introduced: 2/29/2024

Current Status: Agenda Ready

Version: 1

Matter Type: WR General Agenda

Consider receiving an update on the Monterey County Water Resources Agency's Groundwater Extraction Management System and discuss options on how to expand that system consistent with the Sustainable Groundwater Sustainability Act requirements related to collecting and monitoring groundwater data; and provide direction to staff.

RECOMMENDATION:

Receive an update on the Monterey County Water Resources Agency's Groundwater Extraction Management System and discuss options on how to expand that system consistent with the Sustainable Groundwater Sustainability Act requirements related to collecting and monitoring groundwater data; and provide direction to staff.

SUMMARY/DISCUSSION:

BACKGROUND:

The Monterey County Water Resources Agency (Agency) began collecting groundwater extraction data through the Groundwater Extraction Management System (GEMS) program in 1993. All well owners, agricultural and urban, with wells having a discharge pipe diameter of at least 3 inches, in an Agency defined area ("Zones 2, 2A, & 2B"), are required to register and annually self-report extraction data and water conservation information to the Agency through a dedicated web portal. The GEMS program was established by 3 ordinances, 3660, 3717, and 3718, adopted by the Agency. The GEMS program supports two other ordinances, 3851 and 3886, that implement Agricultural and Urban Water Conservation Plans, respectively. The Agency estimates annual self-reporting compliance in the mid-ninety percent range. The Agency aggregates data to monitor changes in regional groundwater usage and track implementation of Best Management Practices and publishes its findings in an annual report.

In 2014, the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) became law. The aim of SGMA is to establish a statewide framework to manage groundwater sustainably over the long-term. SGMA directed the Department of Water Resources (DWR) to identify and prioritize groundwater basins throughout the state. High and medium priority (Priority) basins, as defined by DWR, were required, with few exceptions, to establish Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSAs), to develop Groundwater Sustainability Plans (GSPs), and to manage their basins to sustainability by 2040 or 2042, depending upon Priority, and for 30 years thereafter. DWR identified 5 basins and 8 subbasins within Monterey County. Of these, only 3 are not considered Priority. The remaining basins and subbasins are managed by 6 GSAs: Arroyo Seco, City of Marina, County of Monterey, Marina Coast Water District, Monterey Peninsula Water Management District, and the Salinas Valley Basin (SVB).

All the GSAs are dependent upon collecting and monitoring groundwater data related to their respective jurisdictions to inform their GSPs and gauge sustainability in the future. The SVB is responsible for managing 6 subbasins and has 6 approved GSPs it is working towards implementing. Although the Agency's GEMS monitoring data was vital in the preparation of the SVB's GSPs, the 6 subbasins, which were established by DWR, do not align entirely with the Agency's GEMS Zones, which means there are gaps in the monitoring network that need to be filled to inform the first five-year evaluations of the SVB's GSPs in January 2025 and 2027. In addition, the SVB received a "Recommended Corrective Action" from DWR to provide more information on groundwater level impacts to domestic well owners. In order to address the Corrective Action, the SVB requires more precise data about the location and depth of wells.

To this end, the Agency and SVB have been meeting together and with other agencies with responsibility over groundwater, the County of Monterey's Health Department and the Central Coast Water Quality Preservation, Inc., as well as stakeholders, to explore how to ensure effective and efficient expansion of well registration and the GEMS program, the consolidation of existing well data, and the potential to improve existing groundwater monitoring efforts through cooperation and potential consolidation of work. This memorandum provides some insight into those discussions and offers some recommendations for future action.

PROPOSED GEMS EXPANSION:

The map, attached as Exhibit A, illustrates the areas where expansion of the GEMS program will need to occur to meet the near-future data needs of the SVB. To address gaps in the monitoring network that need to be filled to inform the first five-year evaluations of the SVB's GSPs, wells outside of the existing GEMS program that are not "de minimis" will need to begin collecting groundwater extraction data effective November 1, 2024. The new requirement will trigger an effort to collect, manage, analyze, aggregate, and disseminate relevant information. There are basically three ways for this effort to be undertaken:

- 1) The Agency expands its current GEMS program to include the new areas currently not reporting;
- 2) The Agency transfers its GEMS program to the SVB for all future administration; or
- 3) The SVB develops a GEMS like program to address the areas currently not reporting.

While the focus of this discussion is the expansion of GEMS to meet the near-future informational needs of the SVB, the Agency and SVB are considering merging GEMS expansion and Well Registration into one program. In addition, there may be opportunities in the future to improve existing groundwater monitoring efforts through cooperation and potential consolidation of work such as groundwater quality monitoring and data management. Future efforts by the Agency may include providing services to other GSAs and agencies in the County that rely upon groundwater monitoring and data management to meet their respective regulatory responsibilities.

GROUNDWATER MONITORING OBJECTIVES:

- Effectively fill data gaps to improve planning and reduce uncertainty.
- Improve monitoring efficiency through communication, coordination, potential consolidation.
- Ensure cost effective, quality data and valued service.
- Promote stakeholder engagement and satisfaction.

- Support, inform, and demonstrate groundwater sustainability by 2040 or 2042.

WELL REGISTRATION:

In response to DWR's "Recommended Corrective Action", the SVB is proposing registration of wells not currently in the Agency's data base. Since 1973, pursuant to Monterey County Code Chapter 15.08, as amended, all well construction, repair, and reconstruction permits have been issued by the Health Department, which currently holds records of over 15,000 wells County-wide.

However, these well records can be incomplete or outdated, especially with regard to ownership, location data, and current well status; therefore, a system of registration will need to be developed to complete or update the record of wells within the 6 subbasins. Furthermore, the Agency's prior registration efforts have been focused on wells required to report to GEMS, which has a less expansive monitoring area and does not include wells with discharge pipes smaller than 3 inches in diameter. New well registration requirements will require all wells to register going forward, though "de minimis" wells will need not report extractions.

AUTHORITY (Agency):

The Monterey County Water Resources Agency Act (Agency Act) establishes broad authorities for the Agency to manage water within the County of Monterey, including to "carry on technical and other necessary investigations, make measurements, collect data, make analyses, studies, and inspections pertaining to water supply, water rights, control of flood and storm waters, and use of water both within and without the Agency relating to watercourses or streams flooding in or into the Agency." To achieve these goals, the Agency is further authorized to adopt, by ordinance, reasonable regulations to implement the Agency Act, and may specify in any ordinance that a violation of the ordinance is an infraction.

AUTHORITY (SVB):

The Salinas Valley Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency was formed in accordance with the requirements of California Water Code Sec 10723 et seq. SVB is a joint power authority that was formed for the Salinas Valley Groundwater Basin in accordance with the requirements of California Government Code Sec 6500 et seq. The JPA signatories are all local agencies with water or land use authority that are independently eligible to serve as GSAs: County of Monterey, MCWRA, City of Salinas, City of Soledad, City of Gonzales, City of King, Castroville CSD.

The purpose of SVB is to cooperatively carry out the requirements of Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) including but not limited to, serving as the GSA for the Salinas Valley Groundwater Basin and developing, adopting, and implementing GSPs that achieves groundwater sustainability in the Basin, all through exercise of powers granted to a GSA by SGMA and those provided by Joint Exercise of Powers Act. Pursuant to California Water Code sections 10725.8 and 10927, the SVB has the authority to monitor and report groundwater elevations within its jurisdiction and, with the exception of de-minimis users, require the use of any groundwater extraction facility to be measured by a water-measuring device or methodology satisfactory to the SVB, and require the owner of a groundwater extraction facility to file an annual report.

RECOMMENDATION:

Consider options for GEMS expansion and Well Registration that meet the needs of the Agency, the

Legistar File Number: WRAG 24-033

SVB, and are supported by the stakeholder community. Staff of the Agency and the SVB needs to continue making progress in order to meet the milestones and comply with SGMA.

OTHER AGENCY INVOLVEMENT:

Salinas Valley Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency, County of Monterey Environmental Health Bureau

FINANCING:

Costs associated with the various Expansion options has not yet been developed.

Prepared by: **DocuSigned by:**

Ara Azhderian, General Manager, (831)755-4860
1F182FFB49A2435...

Attachments:

1. Exhibit A: Map of Expansion Areas.