PETALUMA VALLEY GROUNDWATER SUSTAINABILITY AGENCY

Community Engagement Plan for the Implementation of the Groundwater Sustainability Plan

2025-2030

Purpose, Outcomes & Goals

The purpose of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA), signed by Governor Brown in 2014, is to ensure local sustainable groundwater management in medium- and high-priority groundwater basins statewide. California's Department of Water Resources has determined that three Sonoma County basins are subject to SGMA Implementation:

- Petaluma Valley basin
- Santa Rosa Plain subbasin
- Sonoma Valley subbasin

This Community Engagement Plan applies only to the Petaluma Valley Groundwater Sustainability Agency, although many outreach activities will be coordinated with the other Sonoma County basins.

The Petaluma Valley basin achieved the first SGMA milestone by creating a Groundwater Sustainability Agency (GSA) by June 30, 2017. The Petaluma Valley GSA is governed by a Board of Directors which receives feedback and input from a diverse, stakeholder-based Advisory Committee.

The second major SGMA milestone was the adoption of a Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) in December of 2021. The GSP is prescribed by SGMA and accompanying regulations. The Petaluma Valley Subbasin GSP was approved by the Department of Water Resources (DWR) in January 2023.

The third major SGMA milestone is the implementation of the GSP is to achieve and maintain the sustainability of the groundwater basin by 2042. The Community Engagement Plan provides guidance for working with and incorporating input from Sonoma County's diverse stakeholders. The plan defines goals, outcomes, tools and strategies for outreach and engagement.

To achieve and maintain sustainability, the GSP includes several projects and management actions (see Section 6 of the GSP for a full description). The GSP also includes an implementation plan, which is fully described in Section 7, and can be summarized as follows:

- Adoption and implementation of a financing plan;
- Identifying and filling data gaps so that the GSA better understands what is happening in the basin;
- Monitoring the basin conditions in order to identify trends and possible areas of concern or improvements;
- Annual reporting to DWR and a five-year update of the GSP that will incorporate new information;

- Planning for and developing projects and actions that will address existing and potential future problems with groundwater levels, quality and other indicators of basin problems; and
- Educating people about the groundwater basin and engaging stakeholders in opportunities to understand and improve basin problems.

Outcomes: The desired outcome for this Community Engagement Plan is to achieve Milestone Three (GSP implementation to attain sustainability) by working with and incorporating input from Sonoma County's diverse stakeholders to address implementation issues.

Plan Goals: SGMA requires the GSA to consider the interests of all beneficial uses and users of groundwater, and encourage involvement of diverse social, cultural, and economic elements of the population within the Basin.

The goals of the Community Engagement Plan are to:

- Enhance understanding and inform the public about water and groundwater resources in the basin.
- Engage a diverse group of interested parties and promote informed community feedback throughout the GSP implementation process.
- Coordinate communication and involvement between the GSA and other local agencies (including other GSAs), elected and appointed officials, tribal governments, and the General public.
- Employ a variety of outreach methods that make public participation easy and accessible.
- Hold meetings at times and venues that encourage broad participation.
- Respond to public concerns and provide accurate and up-to-date information.
- Manage the community engagement program in a manner that provides maximum value to the public and efficient use of GSA and local agency resources.

Time Period: The Community Engagement Plan is intended to cover communication and outreach for the period between July 2025 and June 2030.

Interested Parties and other stakeholders

SGMA lists interested parties who the GSA must consider when developing and implementing the GSP, including:

- Agricultural users of water
- Domestic well owners
- Municipal well operators
- Public water systems
- Land use planning agencies
- Environmental users of groundwater
- Surface water users
- The federal government
- California Native American tribes
- Disadvantaged communities (including those served by private domestic wells or small community water systems).

Appendix A includes a list of interested parties and stakeholders in Petaluma Valley basin. Representatives of most of the interested parties are on the GSA Board or Advisory Committee. Local stakeholders that can be affected by decisions made by the GSA include businesses, schools, land stewardship organizations, and state government agencies.

Outreach Roles

The GSA Board, which is comprised of elected and appointed officials representing land-use agencies and entities responsible for water supply and management will make the ultimate decisions on funding options and implementation of specific projects and management actions. As required by the Joint Powers Authority agreement that created the GSA, the GSA Board will consider the recommendations of the Advisory Committee, which is comprised of representatives from stakeholder groups.

With regards to outreach, the Board is responsible for:

- Adopting and overseeing the implementation of the Community Engagement Plan
- Receiving public comments made in writing and at Board meetings;
- Considering the recommendations of the Advisory Committee.

In addition, the Board may choose to play a more active role in outreach through communication with the public, stakeholder groups and the entities it represents.

The Advisory Committee, which is comprised of members appointed by the GSA Board and entities that comprise the GSA, is charged with actively engaging with the public for input and feedback. This charge can be carried out through various mediums and a variety of activities, but generally includes:

- Advising staff in the drafting of the Community Engagement Plan;
- Actively engaging, educating and seeking input from the represented stakeholder groups on issues before the GSA;
- Sharing input and feedback with the full Advisory Committee meeting; and
- Making recommendations to the Board.

The Petaluma Valley GSA Board, the GSA Advisory Committee and GSA staff are committed to keeping the public informed, providing the public with balanced and objective information to assist the public in understanding SGMA, available options and recommendations. The Board, Advisory Committee and staff will listen and consider public input when evaluating options and making decisions. Input can be made during public comment periods at Advisory Committee and Board meetings, and through the GSA website.

True engagement requires policymakers and the public to not only talk, but to also listen. The Petaluma Valley GSA asks all participants – whatever their role – to follow these rules of engagement:

- Be a good listener. Listen to what is being said, find out why it is being said.
- Be respectful to all participants.

Community Engagement Plan

To truly engage the public when implementing the GSP project and management actions, the GSA will strive to meet these overall objectives:

- Educate the public in compelling ways. Communicate what may often be complex concepts in simple and compelling ways with graphics and examples.
- Ensure inclusion. Identify and engage local community groups to partner or assist in reaching out to economically, socially and culturally diverse communities.
- Manage expectations. The GSA and the GSP are not designed to solve all water problems in the basin. Develop materials and messages that clearly communicate the goal of the GSA and the GSP.
- Show how the input received has been incorporated into the process. Demonstrating to the public how their ideas have been reflected in the planning process is an important piece to the puzzle.
- Remain focused on results. Understand objectives of each public meeting and facilitate the achievement of those objectives.

The Community Engagement Plan is comprised of two categories of activities: Ongoing and project- or program-specific.

Ongoing activities are the "housekeeping" tasks of the GSA outreach, including website maintenance and updates, updates to the interested parties list, social media posts, updating fact sheets and FAQs, and issuing press releases about community meetings.

Project or program-specific engagement activities are developed to meet the outreach goals of each project or program and could include meetings and communications with affected neighbors or specific stakeholders and project-specific fact sheets, media releases and social media posts.

The goal of outreach for the first five years of GSP implementation will be educating and engaging the general public, stakeholders (including disadvantaged communities and tribes), the Advisory Committee and Board on the technical, fiscal and beneficial aspects of implementing the GSP. This phase will include a mix of communication tools, to be used in a variety of forums, including community meetings.

This plan is intended to be adaptive, with outreach staff working with the Advisory Committee (or a working group) to incorporate tools and techniques that worked well on prior projects and modifying or eliminating tools that failed to engage stakeholders.

Community engagement in areas of chronic decline or other indicators of undesirable results: The GSP Implementation may reveal that some areas of the subbasin are experiencing chronic problems of groundwater level decline, saltwater intrusion or some other indicator of concern, which could result in activities or policies that impact well owners in the affected zone. The Advisory Committee and staff will strategically employ communications tools outlined in this plan to conduct outreach to these specific areas using multiple platforms including but not limited to community events, outreach via existing organizations, public workshops, email correspondence, direct mail and social media.

Communication Forums & Communication Tools

Governance Agencies Briefings: Board members will brief their councils or boards regularly on GSA activities and will work with GSA staff to provide additional briefings on sensitive or important topics.

Stakeholder Briefings: Advisory Committee members will meet with and communicate regularly with organizations comprised of the stakeholder groups they represent. To avoid overlap and mixed messages, briefings will be coordinated with outreach staff.

Community Events: Community events are an opportunity to educate specific stakeholder groups through materials and informal conversations.

Disadvantaged Communities Outreach: Disadvantaged communities are specifically called out in SGMA as an interested party. The "A Portrait of Sonoma County: 2021 Update" highlights the disparities between the average Sonoma County resident and the average Latino resident and other minority groups. The report also highlights the disparities by geographic area, including within the three basins. Previous assessments of engaging Sonoma County's Spanish speaking community recommend using "food, faith and festivals" as opportunities to educate and interact with people on critical issues. Connecting with communities through existing organizations and through community events, churches and schools, provides an opportunity share information and solicit feedback on rate/fee options and GSP elements.

Spanish-language media is another method of reaching the Spanish-speaking community. To date, the GSA has participated in several Spanish-language radio programs discussing groundwater. This tool will continue to be used by the GSA to provide information to stakeholders on specific programs and projects.

Tribal outreach: SGMA also requires communication with and inclusion of California Native American tribes. During GSA formation, the County of Sonoma formally reached out to tribes within the basin to invite participation. As the GSA entered the implementation phase, a letter from the GSA chair was sent to tribal leaders to reassess interest.

Public Meetings/Hearings. Public meetings or hearings are formal opportunities for people to provide official comments on programs, plans and proposals. SGMA requires that a public meeting be held prior to the adoption of a fee and public hearings for the adoptions of GSP elements and the final plan. There are also constitutional requirements for public hearings for some fee/rate options. Public meetings and hearings are an important forum for people to share viewpoints and concerns, but often occur at the end of a process, when only one option is under consideration. The GSA will hold required public meetings and hearings but will also use less informal public workshops (described below) to solicit feedback and information early in the process.

Public Workshops. Public educational workshops provide less formal opportunities for people to learn about groundwater, SGMA, financing options, and GSP elements. Workshops can be organized in a variety of ways, including open houses, world cafes and traditional presentations with facilitated question and answer sessions. To solicit feedback from people who may not be comfortable speaking in public, workshops can include small group breakout discussions, "dot" voting, comment cards and other techniques. Whatever format of workshop is used, it will be designed to maximize opportunities for public input.

Public Notices. Should the GSA Board decide to take action on an item that is required to be publicly noticed, the GSA must provide a written statement describing the manner in which interested parties may participate in the development and implementation of the item. The statement must be provided to all the cities within the basin and to the County of Sonoma. As outlined in this Community Engagement Plan, there will be a variety of opportunities for people to participate, including workshops, public hearings, providing comments at Board and Advisory Committee meetings and through written comments.

Direct Mail. Public notices, project announcements and invitations to participate in GSP programs may be disseminated via targeted, direct mail campaigns to reach groundwater users regarding implementation activities and programs.

Individual Conversations. To garner feedback and help build trust, Staff and Advisory Committee members may reach out to individual well owners and interested parties for one-on-one conversations regarding implementation actions, program participation, and policy considerations.

Interested Persons List. SGMA mandates the creation of an Interested Persons List. Since 2017, the GSA has maintained a list of people who are interested in receiving information and updates. The list currently includes approximately 680 people within the Petaluma Valley basin. Monthly email updates are sent to the Interested Persons list, along with special updates on specific meetings and events.

Informational Materials. Developing a variety of informational materials is critical to the successful education and necessary to circulate consistent, accurate information. Outreach staff, with the input of the administrator, plan manager and the Advisory Committee, will develop materials, as needed, including at least the following:

Periodic Updates

- Talking Points: Clear, concise messages to be used by Board and Advisory Committee members and staff when communicating with media, organizations and stakeholders.
- Milestone Fact Sheets: For the rate/fee study and implementation of GSP elements.
- Slide Decks: Develop instructional slides with graphics and language for presentations both in person and online.
- Flyers and graphics: language and graphics on handouts and shareable digital media that provide simple, easy to digest descriptions of projects and programs with words and images
- Frequently Asked Questions: FAQs will be issued on the rate/fee study, projects and programs and for specific stakeholders, including private well owners.
- Newsletter Articles: A short paragraph (50-100 words) that Advisory Committee members can insert into organizational newsletters. These brief articles can also be published in the Sonoma County Water Agency's e-newsletter, which has a broad distribution.
- Newspaper editorials: Authored by outreach staff and Board or Advisory Committee members for submittal to local news sources.
- Briefing Packets: For milestone briefings. Packets will include standard talking points, PowerPoint presentations, and other materials to assist in educational outreach and for soliciting feedback.

Website. The GSA website, PetalumaValleyGroundwater.org, is a hub for the distribution and archiving of meeting and communication materials as well as a repository for annual reports and studies. Outreach staff update the subbasin website monthly. The website also provides pages that outline programs for public participation and a blog with current updates and feature articles about GSA Implementation projects and programs.

Social Media. Existing Sonoma County Groundwater profiles on Facebook and Instagram platforms will be utilized to share news and events. Video content is posted on YouTube.

Surveys. Online tools, such as Survey Monkey, will be used periodically to gather stakeholder ideas and to provide feedback on key issues.

Media Plan. Outreach staff will work with the administrator to develop press releases as needed and for milestones and community meetings. The press releases will be distributed to local and regional media and Legislative and Congressional representatives.

Appendix A:*

Consideration of Interests, as required by SGMA

* This list is not exhaustive or exclusive.

Cities, County

- City of Petaluma
- County of Sonoma

Tribal Stakeholders / AB52 Contact List

- Cloverdale Rancheria of Pomo Indians
- Kashia Band of Pomo Indians of the Stewarts Point Rancheria
- Dry Creek Rancheria of Pomo Indians
- Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria
- Guidiville Indian Rancheria
- Lytton Rancheria Band of Pomo Indians
- Middletown Rancheria of Pomo Indians
- Mishewal-Wappo Tribe of Alexander Valley
- Muwekma Ohlone Indian Tribe of the SF Bay Area
- Pinoleville Pomo Nation
- Robinson Rancheria of Pomo Indians
- Yocha Dehe Wintun Nation

Federal Government

- National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration/NMFS
- US Army Corps of Engineers
- Natural Resource Conservation Service
- US Fish & Wildlife Service
- EPA

Public Water Systems

- City of Petaluma
- Sonoma County Water Agency

Agriculture

- Sonoma County Farm Bureau
- Community Alliance of Family Farmers
- Western United Dairymen's Association
- Sonoma County Winegrape Commission
- Sonoma County Vintners

- Barn & Ranch Owners of Northern California (BRONC)
- North Bay Agricultural Alliance
- Sonoma Resource Conservation District
- Sonoma County Growers Alliance
- Sonoma Valley Farmers Guild (formerly the Grange)
- Sonoma County Food System Alliance/ Ag Innovations

Organizations Representing Environmental Uses of Groundwater

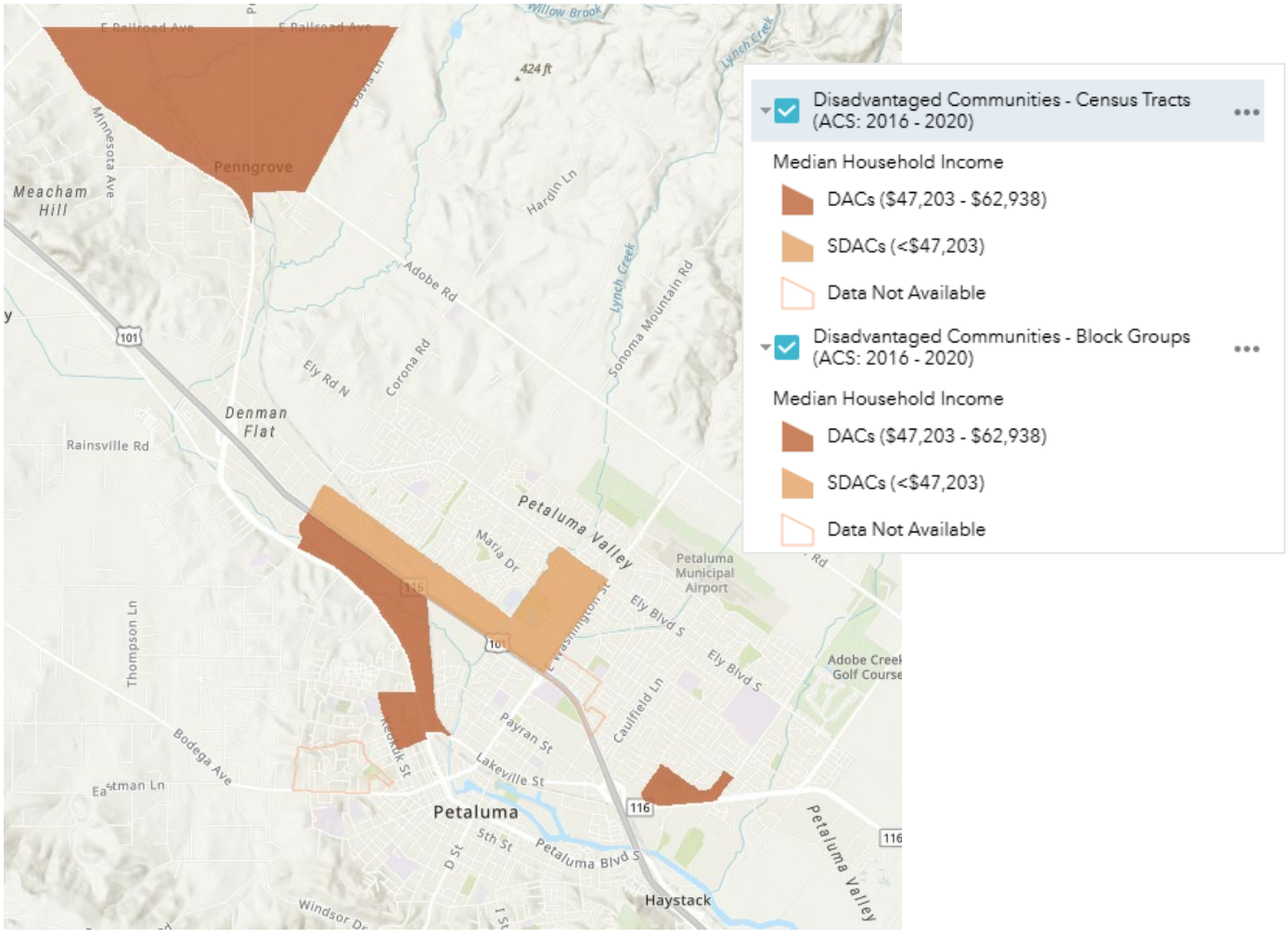
- Sonoma County Water Coalition
- Sonoma County Conservation Action
- Friends of Petaluma River
- Petaluma Wetlands Alliance

Well Owners (including domestic well owners – via list of parcels in unincorporated areas)

Mutual & PUC-Regulated Water Systems (within the basin)

- Penngrove Water Company

Disadvantaged Communities (as identified by on the CA Dept. of Water Resources Disadvantaged Communities Mapping tool: https://gis.water.ca.gov/app/dacs/ - map below)



Other Interested Parties

** While not required to be engaged under SGMA, these stakeholders will be included in the outreach program. This list is not exhaustive or exclusive.*

- Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation & Open Space District
- Sonoma County Planning Commission
- North Bay Watershed Association/Russian River Watershed Association
- School districts
- Regional Water Quality Control Board

Business / Developers

- Sonoma County Alliance
- North Bay Association of Realtors
- Economic Development Board
- Chambers of Commerce
- Citizens & Community Organizations
- Daily Acts
- League of Women Voters
- Democratic and Republican clubs
- Rotaries
- Kiwanis
- Sons of Retirement – Petaluma (Elks)