

## Board Meeting Recap: March 2020

### SMGWA Board Reviews Groundwater Quality Goals

Santa Margarita Groundwater Agency held its first-ever all-remote-access meeting Thursday, March 26, 2020, due to the Santa Cruz County Shelter-in-Place Order amidst to the coronavirus outbreak. About 30 people, including SMGWA board members, attended.

The informational session for this meeting focused on groundwater demand projections, building the foundation to move on to the next sustainability indicator – groundwater level – and groundwater quality, state-required elements of the Sustainable Management Criteria (SMC) within the Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP). The presentations were led by Georgina King of Montgomery & Associates and Piret Harmon, General Manager of the Scotts Valley Water District.

The presentation covered significant and unreasonable conditions, measurable objectives and undesirable results for water quality. King summarized that “significant and unreasonable” water quality conditions occur if SMGWA projects, or management activities cause, an increase in the concentration of constituents (chemical components) in groundwater that lead to non-compliance with drinking water standards. This could create adverse impacts on beneficial users or uses of groundwater or surface water. Diminished water supply or undue costs for mitigating such negative impacts are examples of additional adverse impacts that could occur.

King explained it’s important to understand that SMGWA is only responsible for adverse effects on water quality conditions caused by agency projects and management actions. For example, if SMGWA recommended, and partner agencies moved forward with, injecting treated water into the aquifer, this action should not have a negative impact on water quality.

Increasing water quality testing through more-frequent sampling from municipal wells, as well as adding sampling from monitoring wells, would help track water quality impacts as basin sustainability projects are implemented.

Because the majority of the basin’s beneficial users are municipal and domestic water use, King recommended SMGWA use current drinking water standards as the agency’s water quality desired result. This water quality level also would need to be adequate for fish habitat. She also made specific recommendations for measurable objectives for constituents found in groundwater in the basin. Generally, the recommendations are to use the average concentration of constituents from the last 10 years as the goal, with the understanding that some are naturally occurring and variable. If the concentration of constituents caused by human activities did increase as a result of SMGWA activities, this would be an undesirable result and a significant impact on basin water users.

The final GSP for the Santa Margarita Basin is due to the State Department of Water Resources in January 2022.

Due to COVID-19 and the current Shelter-in-Place order for Santa Cruz County, the next SMGWA Board of Directors meeting also will be via remote access only. That meeting will be held Thursday, April 23 at 5:30 p.m. More information at smgwa.org.



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