

Got Groundwater?

Comments Due Sept. 21 on Draft Plan for Sustainability

Perhaps you've noticed the new booth at the Scotts Valley farmers' market, with a sign saying Santa Margarita Groundwater Agency.

This is a relatively new government agency, mandated by the state after severe drought years, and covering Scotts Valley and San Lorenzo Valley.

Chris Perri, Scotts Valley Water District, chairs the board. Gail Mahood, San Lorenzo Valley Water District, is vice-chair; Jack Dilles, Scotts Valley City Council, is secretary.

Directors are: Edan Cassidy, well owner representative; Doug Engfer, City of Santa Cruz Water Department; Manu Koenig, Santa Cruz County supervisor; Jeff Koopman, well owner representative; Bruce McPherson, Santa Cruz County supervisor; Dale Pollock, Mt. Hermon Association; Mark Smolley, San Lorenzo Valley Water District; Ruth Stiles, Scotts Valley Water District.

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I pay my water bill to SV Water District. How does Santa Margarita Groundwater Agency affect residents of Scotts Valley?

Santa Margarita Groundwater Agency was formed in response to the state's 2014 Sustainable Groundwater Management Act, which gave authority and responsibility for managing groundwater resources to local agencies.

Santa Margarita Groundwater Basin is the main water source for communities in Scotts Valley and the rest of North Santa Cruz County. Scotts Valley Water District, along with the San Lorenzo Valley Water District and County of Santa Cruz, is one of the member agencies and is actively participating in the development of a Groundwater Sustainability Plan for approval by the California Department of Water Resources.

Scotts Valley Water District has been involved in management of the groundwater since early 1990s and is committed to ensuring the health of the groundwater basin.

So SMGWA includes private well owners? How many are there?

The 11-member Board of Directors includes one representative from Mount Hermon Association and two private well owners who represent a diverse group of stakeholders: small water systems, industrial use, private domestic wells and other non-domestic private groundwater users.

About 29,000 people reside in the basin and 5,300 of them receive their water from non-municipal sources (1,300 in Mount Hermon Association, 1,000 in small water systems and 3,000 from 777 domestic private wells).

Water Supplier	Groundwater Use (Acres Feet)
San Lorenzo Valley Water District (SLVWD)	993
Scotts Valley Water District (SVWD)	1,211
Mount Hermon Association	129
Private Domestic Wells ²	233
Other Non-Domestic Private Groundwater Users ³	145
Small Water Systems	78
Quail Hollow Quarry	25
Total	2815

Does anyone know how much water is pumped that way?

Compare that to the pumping for water through Scotts Valley Water District.

Public water systems and larger private pumpers are required to measure and report their pumping. Below table has the total annual groundwater use by category.

SLVWD also uses surface water and the number in the table represents only their groundwater pumping; domestic private well use is estimated.

Why is the Santa Margarita Groundwater Agency hosting a community event on Saturday, July 31?

The main focus since 2017 has been a development of its Groundwater Sustainability Plan.

At its July 22 meeting, the Board of Directors reviewed the final draft and opened the 60-day public comment period. The event on July 31 provides a chance for community members to learn about the plan and better understand what influences long-term groundwater sustainability in the region.

The event also connects short-term drought impacts to future groundwater management solutions that will make the region more resilient during dry times.

If the agency is working on sustainability, what does that mean?

More requests to use less water?

Achieving groundwater sustainability is a multifaceted process that includes individual actions, such as efficient use of water, as well as large-scale supply projects.

One of the foundational activities is establishing a better system for monitoring the health of the basin and having a consolidated data management system.

Some of the projects and management actions that are under consideration and might be implemented in the future are: Reduction of water losses, expanded storm-water infiltration, conjunctive use of surface and groundwater, optimizing use of recycled water, aquifer replenishment with surface water and purified wastewater recharge.

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Coming Together a Year Later

By Bruce McPherson, Supervisor, Fifth District

As we approach the first anniversary of the CZU Lightning Complex Fire, it's hard to imagine any other year in recent memory that tested the resilience of our County so deeply.

The fact that we weathered the most devastating fire in our history in the middle of a pandemic is hard to believe. But we did — and we continue to work through the process of recovery one step at a time.

Community members have planned an event called "Coming Together A Year Later" at the Brookdale Lodge, 11570 Highway 9, starting at 6 p.m. Aug. 18. The evening will feature opportunities to participate in community art and see an art installation called "From the Ashes" by Lille Aeske, as well as enjoy music by Wolf Jett and Post Folk Revivalists.

I will be there along with other County representatives and members of the Long-Term Recovery Group that is working with fire survivors to provide financial assistance and other resources.

Meanwhile, rebuilding efforts are under way, with at least 21 single-family dwelling sites able to break ground in addition to the nearly 300 building permits issued to date for other structures covering 235 individual parcels.

The County's dedicated Recovery

Permit Center has also issued nearly 700 pre-application clearances for three health and safety categories: fire access, septic standards and geologic hazards.

With the possibility of debris flows, the latter of those clearances has proven to be a challenge for some survivors.

In response, the Board of Supervisors approved a deferral process in late June for survivors to choose to evaluate geology after a building permit is issued, and the Board will consider a further exceptions process this fall.

Meanwhile, the County is undertaking a flood study of the fire zone, funded by Community Foundation Santa Cruz County to get a better handle on risk levels. We hope the study will reduce the number of parcels that need to be further evaluated.

In addition to the fire recovery work, the County is still managing the local response to COVID amid an increase of cases stemming from the Delta variant of the virus. The fact that there is a more contagious strain nearly 18 months into the pandemic underscores the importance of administering as much of the vaccines as possible.

As of late July, about 56 percent of county residents are fully vaccinated, and it is our hope that more will avail themselves

of the vaccine in coming months to slow the spread of the disease and support our local economy as it continues to recover.

In Scotts Valley, there is an upcoming closure, not an opening. That is worth noting. The Scotts Valley Branch Library is expected to close July 31 for renovations that are part of the systemwide Measure S funding approved by voters in 2016. The improvements — which will include seismic retrofitting, new carpet and paint, as well as reworking the entrance, children's area, and fireside room — are expected to be completed in the spring of 2022.

In other Scotts Valley news, I want to congratulate City Manager Tina Friend on her new job as city manager in coronado, near San Diego, which she will begin in September. Tina has done a great job at the helm of Scotts Valley, shepherding the city through some very difficult financial challenges, which were improved by the passage of Measure Z in March 2020 to increase sales tax and avoid significant budget cuts. Her professionalism and creativity will be missed at City Hall and throughout the community.

Lastly, I am excited about the upcoming Scotts Valley Art, Wine and Beer Festival on Aug. 21 and 22. It will be great to gather with community members again and enjoy arts and crafts, along with locally made wine and beer. The event presented by the Scotts Valley Chamber of Commerce



Brookdale Lodge

at a new location, Siltanen Community Park, will also feature a car show and a bunch of great music.

I hope to see you there and that you enjoy the rest of summer.

To buy tickets for the Art, Wine and Beer Festival visit svartfestival.com. ■

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I always appreciate hearing the community's ideas on how we can support you. District 5 residents can send any comments or questions to me at bruce.mcpherson@santacruzcounty.us or 831-454-2200.

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With the agency working on a groundwater plan, how far along is it?

The draft document is available for public review. Comments are due Sept. 21, and input is welcome.

Visit www.smgwa.org to view the plan and provide comments

What strategies are in the plan so far?

Section 4 describes a range of potential projects and management actions designed to allow the basin to reach and

maintain sustainability over the next 50 years (2022-2072).

The primary groundwater condition these activities aim to improve is lowered groundwater levels in one of the Basin's primary aquifers (Lompico).

A few potential projects were used in the Santa Margarita Basin Groundwater model to simulate future groundwater conditions, based on climate change assumption. Several projects have the added benefit of creating supplemental drought supply to improve water supply reliability

for SLVWD, SVWD and City of Santa Cruz. Not all projects and management actions are needed to attain sustainability, but they provide possible options in the event that backup projects are needed.

What's the deadline to finish the plan?

The final plan is expected to be adopted by the end of year and must be submitted to the state Department of Water Resources by Jan. 31, 2022.

Who has to approve it?

The state Department of Water Resources will have two years from the date

of submission to evaluate the plan and designate it as approved, incomplete or inadequate.

Agencies with approved plans will continue to implement their plan. Agencies must provide annual reports and five-year updates to the state.

Agencies with incomplete plans are given up to 180 days to revise and resubmit.

Plans designated as inadequate will be referred to the State Water Board to consider intervention. ■

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