



## **Groundwater Sustainability Plan Frequently Asked Questions**

### **Q: What is a Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP)?**

A: A Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) outlines how a basin and/or Groundwater Sustainability Agency will avoid the adverse effects of groundwater overdraft and achieve sustainable levels of groundwater. The GSP includes a physical description of the groundwater management area including groundwater conditions, a water budget, sustainability criteria, a monitoring program, and projects and measurable objectives to become sustainable by 2040.

### **Q: Why did South Fork Kings GSA develop a GSP?**

A: The GSP is a requirement of the 2014 Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA). The State law requires all high- and medium-priority basin Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSAs) to develop and implement a GSP. The South Fork Kings GSA lies within the Tulare Lake Subbasin, designated by the State as a high-priority and critically overdrafted subbasin. The five Tulare Lake Subbasin GSA's, including the South Fork Kings, coordinated to develop and submit a single GSP covering the entire subbasin.

### **Q: How did GSP development take into account the interests of all stakeholders?**

A: The South Fork Kings GSA held numerous public meetings and actively solicited feedback from stakeholders throughout the GSP development process. This included Board Meetings, Tulare Lake Subbasin landowner and community workshops, and surveys. The full GSP draft was made available to the public for a review and comment period. Comments were considered and the GSP was adopted at the January 26, 2020 Board Meeting. South Fork Kings GSA will continue to consider any and all input from stakeholders through implementation.

### **Q: Who determines whether South Fork Kings GSA's GSP is sufficient?**

A: Upon receiving the GSP on January 31, 2020, the CA Department of Water Resources posted the Tulare Lake Subbasin GSP on its Groundwater Portal for an additional public comment period concluding May 15, 2020 (the initial 75-day comment period was extended due to COVID-19). DWR has two years from the submittal date to review the GSP to determine whether it meets the requirements of SGMA.

### **Q: When does the South Fork Kings GSA have to start implementing the GSP?**

A: Implementation started immediately upon submittal of the GSP to the CA Department of Water Resources (DWR) on January 31, 2020. This will be done through implementing management actions, projects and programs identified in the GSP. The South Fork Kings GSA is prioritizing filling groundwater extraction data gaps and developing projects for groundwater recharge.

### **Q: Does the GSP take away the ability of growers to pump groundwater if we enter a period of drought?**



A: The South Fork Kings GSA Board will prioritize project implementation that will increase water supply in wet years to offset groundwater overdraft. The sustainable management criteria in the GSP include a range called “operational flexibility.” This allows fluctuating groundwater levels as long as levels recover and improve over the long run. However, under the SGMA law the South Fork Kings GSA has the power to limit groundwater pumping to achieve sustainability. If groundwater pumping continues to decrease groundwater levels at an unsustainable rate, South Fork Kings GSA may consider limiting pumping.

**Q: How much groundwater overdraft does the South Fork Kings GSA need to correct to reach sustainability?**

A: The South Fork Kings GSA must correct an estimated 38,000 acre feet of annual overdraft occurring within its service area.

**Q: How is sustainability measured?**

A: Sustainability under SGMA requires avoidance of six “undesirable results”. Undesirable results are significant and unreasonable effects caused by groundwater overdraft. There are five applicable to the South Fork Kings GSA. The GSP establishes measurable objectives and minimum thresholds to avoid these five undesirable results: chronic lowering of groundwater levels, reduction of groundwater storage, degraded water quality, land subsidence, and surface water depletion from interconnected streams.

**Q: What are some strategies the GSP outlines to achieve sustainability?**

A: The GSP outlines potential projects and management actions to mitigate the estimated 38,000 acre feet of annual overdraft occurring in the South Fork Kings GSA. Projects and management actions will work together to both increase water supply and reduce water demand. Project and management actions may include groundwater recharge methods, education and outreach on conservation practices, and a groundwater allocation and credit program.

**Q: Will I be required to put a meter on my well?**

A: Installing meters on wells is not a requirement at this time. A metering policy may be considered at a later time if supply side solutions are not adequate to reach sustainability goals. A metering policy would be required if the South Fork Kings GSA Board determines a groundwater credit and trading program is needed to meet sustainability.

**Q: Why are groundwater allocations considered as a GSP management action?**

A: Groundwater allocations will be considered if projects and initial management actions are not enough to mitigate groundwater overdraft. Groundwater allocations are a necessary component of implementing a groundwater credit and trading program if the Board determines it is needed to meet sustainability.

**Q: Does the GSP limit how much I can pump?**

A: The South Fork Kings GSA has the authority under SGMA to limit groundwater pumping to achieve sustainability. It is the priority of the South Fork Kings GSA to first implement water supply enhancing projects before considering pumping restrictions. If pumping restrictions must



be implemented to achieve sustainability, a groundwater credit and trading program may accompany the restrictions to provide flexibility to landowners.

**Q: Who will implement and require management actions?**

A: The South Fork Kings GSA Board will consider potential management actions included in the GSP as needed. The South Fork Kings GSA, a public agency, is the local implementation authority for the landowners within its service area boundaries. It is strongly encouraged stakeholders and landowners are involved in GSP implementation to provide input as decisions on groundwater management are made.

**Q: If I own land in different areas of South Fork Kings GSA, will I have to follow different rules?**

A: All landowners within the South Fork Kings GSA will be treated equitably. If you own land in different regions of the agency, you currently will not be required to follow different management policies.

**Q: How will the Tulare Lake Subbasin coordinate to achieve Subbasin-wide sustainability?**

A: Within the Tulare Lake Subbasin GSP, each GSA developed its own proposed projects and solutions specific to their unique challenges. As required by SGMA, the South Fork Kings GSA is working alongside the Tulare Lake Subbasin GSAs to align sustainability goals.

**Q: Will there be any incentives programs available to landowners who implement GSP programs down the road?**

A: Incentives will be considered to encourage landowner participation in South Fork Kings GSA's management actions. There are no specific programs in place at this time. Any number of incentives will be considered by the South Fork Kings GSA Board as appropriate during the entire period of GSP implementation.

**Q: What should landowners do now during the next 1-5 years to be prepared for GSP implementation?**

A: The best way landowners can prepare is to stay engaged with the South Fork Kings GSA's activities. Landowners can stay up to date by signing up for the Interested Persons email list online at [www.southforkkings.org](http://www.southforkkings.org), attending Board meetings and public workshops, and by expressing priorities, ideas, and input on project and management action decisions.

**Q: Will there be any other costs to landowners beyond the \$9.80/acre Prop 218 assessment?**

A: Moving forward over the next 20 years, the South Fork Kings GSA will continue to apply for grant funding to cover as many costs as possible. The South Fork Kings GSA will likely consider additional funding mechanisms, such as pumping fees, to cover the anticipated costs of developing and constructing specific projects and implementing management actions.

**Q: What happens if sustainability is not achieved?**

A: The CA Department of Water Resources (DWR) requires GSAs to submit annual reports to DWR each April 1 following adoption of a GSP. The annual reports provide information on groundwater



conditions and implementation of the GSP for the prior water year. If DWR finds groundwater is not adequately being managed in the Tulare Lake Subbasin, the GSA may be subject to intervention by the State Water Resources Control Board. Under State intervention, the State could designate the basin as probationary and intervene to directly manage groundwater extractions and impose stringent fees to recoup its costs of intervention without the benefit of local projects.