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South Fork Kings GSA
Groundwater Allocation Policy

(Revised 8/27/25)

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1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The South Fork Kings Groundwater Sustainable Agency (SFK GSA or GSA) is located within the Tulare Lake Subbasin (Subbasin) which has been designated by the California Department of Water Resources (DWR) as high priority groundwater basin that is subject to critical conditions of overdraft. SFK adopted a Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) consistent with the Sustainable Management Groundwater Act (SGMA) to address undesirable results including chronic lowering of groundwater levels and land subsidence. A management action in the GSP includes establishing groundwater extraction allocations based on the Subbasin's sustainable yield in order to mitigate the undesirable results while projects are being developed and implemented.

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This Groundwater Extraction Allocation Policy (Policy) is part of the projects and management actions (PMAs) being implemented to achieve sustainability of the Subbasin and does not determine or alter water rights under common law or any provision of law (Water Code §10720.5(a)). The Policy is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Water Code Section 10728.6 and CEQA Guidelines Sections 10561(b)(3), 15307 and 15308.

2. PARCEL QUALIFICATION

Parcel Eligibility for Sustainable Yield Allocation

Allocation of sustainable yield to an individual parcel is based on the number of total acres for that parcel as registered with Kings County. Parcels that are eligible for a sustainable yield are described as follows:

- Parcels of 5 acres or larger, except those owned by government entities, are qualified to receive an allocation of a portion of the total SFK GSA sustainable yield. Qualified parcels must be registered in the SFK GSA parcel database and provide an inventory of wells on the parcel. Landowners may combine parcels to meet the 5 acres requirement. Parcels that are not registered in the SFK GSA parcel database will not receive a sustainable yield allocation and will be subject to a stop pumping notice if they are shown to be irrigated utilizing remote sensing data (i.e., Land IQ).

- Parcels of 5 acres or less receive a de-minimis allocation of 2 AF/year, unless they are registered as a qualified parcel. A parcel of 5 acres or less must register as a qualified parcel if it contains an extraction facility that pumps more than 2 AF/year.

Parcels in other GSAs within the Tulare Lake Subbasin or other groundwater basins cannot be designated as qualified parcels within SFK GSA.

Parcel Eligibility for Transitional Allocation

The transitional allocation is considered a buffer that allows landowners who have existing irrigated lands to continue pumping at successively lower pumping rates towards the sustainable yield allocation. The transitional allocation decreases to zero by 2040 and landowners will only be able to pump up to the sustainable yield allocation after 2040.

Parcels that are eligible for a transitional allocation include all parcels that were shown to be irrigated anytime between 2015 through 2024 based on Land IQ Crop Data. Landowners denied eligibility may appeal to the decision to the SFK GSA Board.

3. ALLOCATION METHODOLOGY AND 2026-2030 AMOUNTS

Section 3 summarizes specific allocation policies and procedures for the period 2026-2040, including specific allocation amounts for each year.

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Determination of Sustainable Yield

Sustainable yield is the total groundwater pumping in acre feet per year (AF/y) that will maintain the basin in a sustainable condition after the year 2040. This value is based on a projected future groundwater balance derived from a groundwater model of the Tulare Lake Subbasin developed in 2020 (Wood, 2020). A new model is in development that may update this value. This model may be used to adjust the allocations in the future. The sustainable yield methodology and amounts will be periodically evaluated and are subject to adjustment.

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The total estimated sustainable yield from the 2020 Wood Model was projected at approximately 350,000 AF/y. This value was derived from a historical analysis of pumping and other hydrogeologic factors over a base period of 1997-2016. The model predicts that, at this level of pumping, the total change in aquifer storage becomes zero and groundwater levels stabilize to an equilibrium level. The sustainable yield is distributed to all qualified parcels as a unit allocation in AF/Acre. The sustainable yield allocation was based on dividing the sustainable yield of the Subbasin across the entire acreage of the Subbasin and was calculated to be 0.66 AF/ac.

The sustainable yield will be allocated annually. Landowner's sustainable yield allocation may be carried over for the next four (4) calendar years, subject to a 5-year rolling retirement. Under

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exceptional circumstances, an extension may be granted at the sole discretion of the SFK GSA Board.

The sustainable yield is available in both the B- and C-zones. However, a sustainable yield value was not assigned at this time to the A-zone as the information to determine this amount is not currently available. Instead, the A-zone is assigned a total pumping value inclusive of all pumping. Once additional information is available, a sustainable yield value will be assigned to the A-zone.

The sustainable yield may be used by a landowner on any registered parcel owned by the same landowner. In addition, the sustainable yield is transferable to any other registered qualified parcels within the SFK GSA without penalty. The sustainable yield may be transferred outside of the SFK GSA only if all the following conditions are met:

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1. The Sustainable Yield can only be transferred into the GSAs bordering SFK within Tulare Lake Subbasin, the Westlands Water District GSA, or North Fork Kings GSA.
2. All transfers must be registered with and approved by both SFK GSA and the receiving GSA. At a minimum, the registration process will involve identification of compliance with all requirements for both GSAs.
3. The parcel receiving SFK GSA sustainable yield must be contiguous to a registered parcel within SFK GSA. In addition, both the parcel within SFK GSA and the receiving parcel must be part of the same farm unit.
4. Only the sustainable yield amount for the registered parcel within SFK that directly borders the surrounding GSA is eligible for transfer. The sustainable yield for other parcels owned by the same landowner is not eligible for transfer outside SFK GSA.
5. The well that where the pumping is actually occurring must be metered and meter data is required to be reported to both GSAs.
6. The parcel receiving SFK GSA sustainable yield must be in active agricultural production during the time the water transfer occurs.
7. Under no circumstances can transferred water be moved more than one mile from the SFK GSA boundary.
8. The SFK GSA may revoke, at its sole discretion, the ability to transfer water out of the GSA if the pumping well is located in an area subject to actions identified in the Management Plans.

Determination of Transitional Pumping

Transitional pumping is a declining block of total groundwater pumping (in AF/y) that that reduces overdraft from its current value to zero by 2040. It is anticipated that the transitional pumping will decrease in five-year blocks. The SFK GSA recognizes that some landowners require transitional water to achieve sustainability by 2040. Therefore, transitional water will be allocated to landowners eligible to receive sustainable yield.

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Only landowners that are in full compliance with SFK GSA policies and regulations and whose accounts are in good standing will receive a transitional allocation. Transitional water must be used in the year it is allocated and does not carry over year to year nor is the water transferable. In addition, transitional water may only be put to beneficial use within the boundaries of the SFK GSA.

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Transitional allocation is only assigned to the B- and C-zone and is not assigned to the A-zone. As noted above, the A-zone will be assigned a total pumping value inclusive of all pumping. As additional information is available, a transitional pumping value may be assigned to the A-zone at that time.

The SFK Board will set the transitional allocation amount at the July meeting before each water year. For Water Year 2026, the transitional amount is set at the following amounts:

Table 1
Transitional Allocation
WY 2026

Aquifer	Transitional Allocation (AF/ac)
A-Zone	0
B-Zone	2.0
C-Zone	1.34

4. ANNUAL PUMPING LIMITS AND FEES

The Sustainable Yield Allocation and Transitional Pumping amounts will be allocated annually but are intended to remain consistent for five-year periods. The entire five-year allocation is not available at the beginning of the period but rather allocated each year. SFK GSA may modify the groundwater allocations at any time as additional data is available and/or to prevent or minimize undesirable results.

The groundwater allocations will be enforced on an annual basis. In any given year, landowner pumping is monitored quarterly using Land IQ data on evapotranspiration for each qualified parcel, and estimated surface water deliveries to each parcel. Landowners with meters may submit quarterly pumping reports as a substitute for the Land IQ analysis. An annual groundwater pumping report based on Land IQ data will be produced for each landowner at the end of the year. Landowners with meters may also contest the Annual Land IQ pumping report and appeal to the GSA Board to reconcile their accounts at the end of each calendar year.

Table 2
Annual Groundwater Allocation

2026 – 2040

Aquifer	Sustainable Yield (AF/ac)	Transitional Allocation (AF/ac)	Total Allocation (AF/ac)
WY26-WY30			
A-Zone	-	-	3.00
B-Zone	0.66	2.00	2.66
C-Zone	0.66	1.34	2.00
WY31-WY35			
A-Zone	-	-	3.00*
B-Zone	0.66	1.33	1.99
C-Zone	0.66	0.89	1.55
WY36-WY40			
A-Zone	-	-	3.00*
B-Zone	0.66	0.67	1.33
C-Zone	0.66	0.44	1.10
WY41 (+)			
A-Zone	-	-	3.00*
B-Zone	0.66	-	0.66
C-Zone	0.66	-	0.66

* A-zone allocation is shown as a consistent value to set an initial value. The allocation may be modified as additional data is available and/or to prevent and minimize undesirable results

Landowners can elect to pump groundwater from any aquifer up to the totalized allocation amount listed for the respective aquifer (see Table 2). However, groundwater pumping cannot exceed the combined total cap of 3.0 AF/ac annually for water Years 20026 through 2030. Should a landowner have sufficient landowner developed credits, then the combined total cap is increased up to 4.0 AF/ac annually for water Years 20026 through 2030. The total combined pumping cap is expected to decrease over time.

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Pumping Fees

The pumping fee for the sustainable yield and transitional allocations will be set by the SFK GSA Board annually by July 1. The fees will be set separately for sustainable yield, Transitional Tier 1 pumping and A-zone pumping.

Landowners who pump above their total allocation in the B- or C-zone are subject to an additional overdraft penalty (referred to as Tier 2 pumping) of $500 per AF for the amount of pumping above

their sustainable yield plus Transitional Allocation and landowner developed credits. In addition, the next year allocation will be reduced by the amount of the overage for that zone.

Exceedance of the annual allocation for the A-Zone will be treated as Tier 2 pumping and will be subject to an additional overdraft penalty of $500 per AF and a reduction in the next year allocation equal to the amount of exceedance.

5. LANDOWNER DEVELOPED CREDITS

Landowner developed credits will be generated through landowner water banking or recharge projects or other approved projects that help mitigate one or more undesirable results in the SFK GSA. Recharge and banking projects must comply with the "Groundwater Recharge Policy". All landowners developed credit will be maintained in SFK water accounting program.

In order to protect the Subbasin from undesirable results, a percentage of any landowner water banking or recharge projects will remain with SFK. The amount of leave behind is defined in the "Groundwater Recharge Policy".

Landowner developed credit transfers between landowners of qualified registered parcels must be documented and in accordance with the adopted policy.

All transfers purchased from outside of SFK boundaries must be approved by both GSAs with jurisdiction and comply with all relevant regulations of both GSAs.

6. TRANSFERS

Qualified parcels may receive credit if there is an allocation transfer from another parcel within SFK GSA. The allocation for the receiving parcel will increase, while the allocation for the donor parcel will decrease. Parcels that receive a sustainable yield allocation but do not irrigate that acreage may transfer that allocation to other acreage within the SFK GSA. This will enable landowners who fallow some of their parcels to move allocation for that year to parcels that are actively irrigated. The receiving acreage will still be subject to potential curtailments as described in the Management Plans. Any proposed transfer of allocation must be submitted for approval by SFK GSA. Only sustainable yield and recharge credit are eligible for transfer; transitional allocations are prohibited from being transferred across water accounts.

7. WATER USE

The default priority of water use is listed below. Effective precipitation will always be the first water utilized, however the account owner may chose the priority for items 2 through 6. The landowner must notify the GSA to change the priority of use. The priority of use order can only be revised once per water year. That revised order will become the default for the landowner until they notify the GSA again.

1. Effective Precipitation

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2. Sustainable Yield Carryover
3. Sustainable Yield Allocation
4. Landowner Developed Credit
5. Transitional Groundwater Tier 1
6. Transitional Groundwater Tier 2

Effective precipitation is meant to represent the water that remains available for use after accounting for runoff, infiltration, and evaporation. For the purpose of this policy, effective precipitation is the amount of water stored in the root zone. Determining effective precipitation is challenging across large areas due to complex interactions between soil characteristics, topography, air temperature, humidity, and air speed.

USDA defines effective precipitation as 80% of total precipitation as a simplified formula for irrigation planning. This value does not account for crop and soil specifics. Considering that the sustainable yield value already accounts for deep percolation, the USDA formula is likely overestimating the effective precipitation. SFK GSA will utilize the UDA formula to calculate effective precipitation on a monthly basis. The effective precipitation value will be utilized in the calculation to convert evapotranspiration to pumped groundwater. If the effective precipitation is greater than evapotranspiration for that month, the remaining effective precipitation will be zeroed out and does not carryover.

8. ALLOCATION CURTAILMENT

Under specific circumstances, acreage may be subject to curtailment of the approved pumping allocation and require further reduction in pumping below the Table 2 amounts in accordance with Water Level, Subsidence or Water Quality Management Plans.

9. SGMA PENALTIES AND CIVIL REMEDIES

Any landowner or operator who violates the provisions of the herein Policy and Procedures is subject to the criminal and civil sanctions set forth in SGMA. SFK GSA may commence or sustain any civil action or proceeding, either at law or in equity, to enforce any of the provisions of the GSPs, or any policy and procedures promulgated therefrom, or to enjoin or restrain any violation thereof, or to collect any sums of money, including penalties, fees, charges and/or assessments, on behalf of the SFK. The provisions of this Section are to be supplementary and complementary to all of the provisions of SGMA, other state law, and any law cognizable at common law or in equity; and nothing herein shall be read, interpreted or construed in any manner so as to bar or limit SFK GSA from seeking any remedy to which it may otherwise be entitled.

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10. ENFORCEMENT POLICY AND APPEALS

Any penalties or fines imposed will be determined by the SFK GSA Board. Landowners and others subject to this policy may appeal decisions directly to the SFK GSA Board.

11. ACTION AGAINST SFK

Nothing contained in the herein Policy shall constitute a waiver by SFK or stop SFK from asserting any defenses or immunities from liability as provided in law, including but not limited to those provided in Division 3.6, Title 1 of the Government Code.

12. DEFINITIONS

a. "2018 -2024 Land IQ Crop Data" means crop and vegetation data generated between 2018 through 2024 from satellite and aerial imagery, land cover classification and analysis, and crop and vegetation mapping.

b. "Carryover" means the sustainable yield allocation amount remaining unused from a given year that may be used in subsequent years, subject to limitations. Sustainable yield carryover will be retired after 5 years on a rolling basis.

c. "Civil penalty" means a penalty payment per acre-foot for groundwater extraction above the sustainable yield.

d. "De minimis extractor" means a person who extracts two acre-feet or less per year. For the purpose of this Policy, a parcel with less than 5 acres of land is considered to host a de minimis extractor unless it is demonstrated otherwise (e.g. extractions exceed two acre-feet per year or for non-domestic use. (See, Water Code §10721(e).)

e. "Extractions" means removing groundwater through groundwater extraction facilities for reasonable and beneficial use(s).

f. "Good standing" means a landowner who has complied with any and all policies, procedures and ordinances of SFK, is current on all fees and penalties, and is not subject to any unresolved violation, late fee, penalty or lien.

g. "Groundwater" means water beneath the surface of the earth within the zone below the water table in which the soil is completely saturated with water. (Water Code §10721(g).)

h. "Groundwater extraction facility" means a device or method for extracting groundwater from within a basin. (Water Code §10721(h).)

i. "Imported Water" means any water, surface or groundwater, that enters into SFK GSA boundaries from an external source for direct irrigation.

j. "Irrigated lands" means lands irrigated by groundwater using a groundwater extraction facility for the active production of plant crops or livestock for market and uses incidental thereto. The 2018-2024 Land IQ Crop Data will be initially used to determine whether a parcel contains irrigated lands for the purpose of this Policy.

k. "Landowner developed credit" means an amount of water credited to a landowner account for a water project or projects that have been developed by a landowner and have been determined by SFK (through the process outlined in the

Groundwater Recharge Policy) to help mitigate one or more undesirable results within the Tulare Lake Subbasin. Projects must be in accordance with the Groundwater Recharge Policy.

l. "Leave behind" means the portion of water from an approved recharge project that is dedicated to sustainability and is therefore not credited to the landowner's account or sustainable yield carryover. The specific percentage is defined in the SFK Groundwater Recharge Policy

m. "Farm Unit" means a defined area of land that is managed as a single agricultural operation under single ownership or lease, receiving water through a common delivery system..

n. "Transitional Groundwater Tier 1 Allocation" means an allocation available to qualified irrigated lands allowing groundwater extraction above the sustainable yield allocation, subject to the Tier 1 civil penalty.

o. "Transitional Groundwater Tier 2" means groundwater extraction exceeding a landowner's combined Sustainable Yield Allocation (including carryover), applicable Landowner Developed Credits, and Transitional Groundwater Tier 1 Allocation, which is subject to Tier 2 civil penalty.

p. "Qualified registered parcel" means land qualified to receive a sustainable yield allocation because the land meets the following criteria: (a) is a registered parcel; and (b) is in good standing with SFK.

q. "Qualified irrigated land" means land qualified to receive Transitional Tier 1 Groundwater Allocation because the land meets the following criteria: (a) is a registered parcel; and (b) contains irrigated lands based initially on the 2018-2024 Land IQ Crop Data.

r. "Registered parcel" means a parcel, 5 acres or larger, registered in the SFK's water accounting program.

s. "Sustainable yield" means the maximum quantity of water, calculated over a base period representative of long-term conditions in the basin and including any temporary surplus, that can be withdrawn annually from a groundwater supply without causing an undesirable result. (Water Code §10721(w).)

t. "Sustainable yield allocation" means the maximum quantity of groundwater extraction allotted to landowners of a qualified registered parcel based on the methodology derived from 2020 Wood model.

u. "Tier 1 civil penalty" means the civil penalty amount due by a landowner or operator of qualified irrigated land at a rate to be determined by the SFK GSA Board for groundwater extraction corresponding to the Transitional Tier 1 Groundwater Allocation.

v. "Tier 2 civil penalty" means the civil penalty amount due by a landowner of qualified irrigated land at a rate of $500/acre-foot for any groundwater extraction defined as Transitional Groundwater Tier 2.

w. "Transfer" means groundwater allocation or landowner developed credit sold or

otherwise acquired from one landowner and applied to the account of another qualified registered parcel(s) within the same subbasin and GSA jurisdiction.

x. "Undesirable result" means one or more of the following effects caused by groundwater conditions occurring throughout the basins: (a) chronic lowering of groundwater levels; (b) significant and unreasonable reduction of groundwater storage; (c) significant and unreasonable seawater intrusion; (d) significant and unreasonable degraded water quality; (e) significant and unreasonable land subsidence; and/or (f) depletions of interconnected surface water.