Implementing SGMA in Sonoma County

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Sonoma County Water Agency Service Area

Special District:
- Wholesale Water Supply
- Flood Control
- Sanitation
- Energy Production

- Board of Directors Same People as Sonoma County Board Supervisors
- Lead Agency for Two Groundwater Management Programs
Groundwater Plays Important Role in Building Resiliency

Sonoma County Water Agency Transmission System - Connecting Surface & Groundwater

Alexander Valley Study
Completed 2006

Sonoma Valley Study
Completed 2006

Santa Rosa Plain Study:
Completed 2014

Petaluma Valley Study
Initiated Sept 2014

Overarching Goal: Proactive Management of Surface Water & Groundwater Resources to Promote Reliability for All Users
Water Wells in the Santa Rosa Plain

Santa Rosa Plain Estimated Groundwater Demands by Use Type: Average for 1976-2010 (USGS, 2014)

- Agriculture: 50%
- Rural Domestic: 32%
- Municipal Supply: 18%
Basin Advisory Panel Recommended Management Strategies

- **CONSERVATION** of Urban, Non-Urban, & Agriculture
- **RECYCLED WATER** use to offset groundwater pumping
- **GROUNDWATER BANKING** Russian River winter-time water to recharge groundwater basin
- **STORMWATER** to recharge groundwater

**MONITORING**
Sonoma County -
Roles of Organizations

- **Cities**
  - Land Use
  - Local Water Supply Planning
  - Regulatory Authority

- **County**
  - Land use in Unincorporated Areas
  - Regional Water Supply Planning (General Plan)
  - Regulatory Authority

- **Water Agency**
  - Wholesale Supply – Many (not all) Cities & Water Districts
  - Regional Planning
  - No Regulatory Power

- **Other Users – Agriculture & Domestic Well Owners**

- **Environmental Use – Stream Flows to Support Fisheries**
Basin Prioritization and Considerations in Sonoma County

- 3 of 14 basins are currently subject to SGMA requirement to prepare Groundwater Sustainability Plans
- Two basins have AB 3030 groundwater management plans
- Groundwater level declines in Sonoma Valley & history of litigation in Santa Rosa Plain
Some of Our Hurdles ...

- Developing governance structure(s)
  - Three basins need Sustainability Plans
  - Basins overlap political boundaries of cities, water districts, County & SCWA
  - Overlap depends on basin boundaries

- Involving agriculture, rural well owners & environmental groups

- Increased coordination with land use agencies

- Funding & resources
Developing Governance for Multiple Basins

Options for Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSAs)

- **Disaggregated: Separate basin-specific GSAs**
  - Most direct & simplest form of representation
  - Possible funding competition between basins
  - Less efficient administration & regional issues

- **Centralized: One County-wide GSA**
  - Coordinate regional issues (e.g., land use, well permitting)
  - More efficient administration, reduce competition among basins
  - Cumbersome GSA board representation

- **Hybrid: Use County-wide resources with basin-specific management decisions**
  - Realize benefits of both disaggregated & centralized structures
  - Complex: Is it possible?
Involving Agriculture, Rural Well Owners, & Environmental Groups

- Most groundwater used by agriculture & rural well owners
- There are no active agricultural water districts/irrigation districts
- Thousands of rural well owners; no organized representation
- Groundwater supports baseflow/habitat along many streams
- Existing agricultural and environmental groups are not eligible to be a GSA - don’t meet definition of “local agency” per SGMA
  - Opportunity for agriculture, rural well owners and environmental organizations to participate in advisory panels as determined by GSA entities
Land Use Coordination
- Well Permitting & Regulation

• SGMA requires information exchange & strongly encourages improved coordination between land use planners and groundwater managers

• Effective coordination will depend on how well local agencies and staff can work together

• County Well Construction Ordinance is currently being revised

• GSAs have authority to regulate well spacing - how does this relate to county well permitting authorities?

• Well permits are currently ministerial – will this need to change under SGMA?
Funding & Resources

• Significant costs to begin implementation & form GSAs

• Staff resources will be stretched thin – technical & legal

• Past funding model which relied primarily on funding from urban users likely not sustainable

• In the longer term - will fee authorities specified by SGMA be considered by local decision makers?
Moving From AB3030 to SGMA

• Current programs are consensus-based and non-regulatory

• Despite history of litigation, AB3030 plans have successfully encouraged diverse constituencies to work together. Will collaboration under existing groundwater management plans continue?

• How will coordination amongst public agencies work under SGMA?

• Watershed or basin boundaries?

• Defining sustainable yield for each basin and setting measurable objectives.
Moving Forward: Implementation of SGMA in Sonoma County - First Steps

SCWA – County Workgroup to report to BOD/BOS in March

- Governance principles
- Options for governance
- Recommended facilitated process for development of GSA(s)
- Outreach plan
- Costs and resource requirements
Opportunities - Leveraging Existing AB3030 Plans and Resources

• Increased eligibility for current and future State funding programs

• Significantly advance the region’s ability to comply with SGMA by:
  o Establishing robust data collection and monitoring program
  o Promoting, studying and implementing initiatives aimed at sustaining the basin’s groundwater resources
  o Fostering stakeholder coordination activities

• Opportunity for local decision makers to retain ability to manage Sonoma County’s groundwater resources moving forward
Opportunities - Increased Coordination of Land Use and Resource Managers

• Planning agencies and groundwater managers increasingly utilize consistent and coordinated information about land use and groundwater.

• GSP process can improve consistency between general plans, specific plans, urban water management plans and groundwater sustainability plans.
Opportunities - Sustainable Groundwater Management
Benefits all Users

- Ecosystems
- Agricultural Irrigation
- Businesses
- Municipal
- Rural Residences