

Protecting Our Groundwater:

Will the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) improve or harm my drinking water?

What is Groundwater? Groundwater is water that is stored underground beneath our feet. We depend on it to drink, bathe, grow food, and more. Without proper care, our groundwater can become contaminated and depleted.

Why is groundwater so important to us?... And what is SGMA?

- Groundwater levels have consistently dropped due to overuse— taking too much water out without enough going back in. This is called overdraft, and happens most during drought with less rain and snowmelt.
- The 2012-2015 drought had big impacts throughout our state, resulting in dry wells and sunken earth (or land subsidence).
- In response, the **Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA)** was introduced in 2014 to protect groundwater.

Why should I care or be involved?

- We still have time to help make the plans for our groundwater better!
- The people in state agencies who review these plans and decide if they're acceptable or not need to understand that there are REAL people like you who depend on the water from private wells and small water systems, who will be affected.
- We have the opportunity to protect our water and that of future generations!
- It's crucial that drought relief resources respond to our drinking water needs, and your presence and your stories make sure the local groundwater sustainability Agency (GSA) is making decisions with you in mind.

How can I get involved?

- Use our Drinking Water Tool to find out more about your local GSA and drinking water in your area. <https://drinkingwatertool.communitywatercenter.org/your-water/>
- CWC staff can help you attend GSA meetings virtually or in person.
- Use this document as a tool moving forward with questions to ask your GSA.

How will SGMA affect my drinking water?

- SGMA is a law that aims to protect our groundwater within the next 20 years by preventing 6 Undesirable Results, including low groundwater levels and contaminated groundwater.
- Local water agencies (called GSAs) define what sustainability is for our groundwater quality and water levels through their plans that are required by SGMA.
- GSAs can and should include *Drinking Water Well Impact Mitigation Programs* in their plans to protect drinking water wells.
- SGMA applies to ALL beneficial users who rely on the basin for groundwater, including community members who are drinking water users.
- EVERYONE is able to participate in plans and meetings to achieve sustainable groundwater conditions in their basin. Decisions made during public meetings will protect or threaten your drinking water.

What are the impacts if plans are unchanged?

- When the first plans, primarily in the Central Valley, were submitted at the beginning of 2020, we saw that they are NOT going to protect drinking water users. This is unacceptable.
- One report shows that up to 12,000 wells could go dry according to the plans, and up to 127,000 Californians could lose their access to safe, clean and affordable water. It is crucial that we stand up for drinking water.
- GSAs must avoid and mitigate drinking water well impacts, so that our communities can be resilient even in times of drought.

KEY TERMS:	
<u>Groundwater</u>	Water from rain and snow melt that accumulates in the soil and forms sponge-like pockets underground. These underground pockets provide a large source of water for drinking, bathing, and irrigation.
<u>Overuse</u>	This happens when too much groundwater is used, especially during drought years, and could cause smaller drinking water wells to go dry or become contaminated.
<u>Land Subsidence</u>	When groundwater is overused, the underground pockets in the soil become dry and collapse. This causes land on the surface to irreversibly sink and damage buildings or infrastructure.

<u>Undesirable Results</u>	Plans are required to avoid “6 undesirable results” these are: (1) Lowering of Groundwater Levels, (2) Reduction of Underground Water Storage, (3) Seawater Intrusion, (4) Degraded Quality, (5) Land Subsidence, (6) Surface Water Depletion. These all apply to drinking water.
<u>Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSAs)</u>	Local agencies that are responsible for coming up with community-based solutions to manage groundwater and prevent any of the 6 undesirable results.
<u>Groundwater Sustainability Plans (GSPs)</u>	Plans that GSAs create to show how they will manage and protect groundwater for the next 20 years, ensuring that undesirable results are avoided.
<u>Sustainability</u>	The management and use of groundwater in the basin that can be maintained without causing an undesirable result. In other words, a goal set at the local level by GSAs and beneficial users about how to balance use and recharge in the groundwater basin so that there is water available in the future as well.
<u>Beneficial User</u>	An individual who depends on groundwater including those served by private domestic wells or state small systems. (As listed in CA Water Code Sec. 10723.2.)

Examples of Changes in Groundwater:

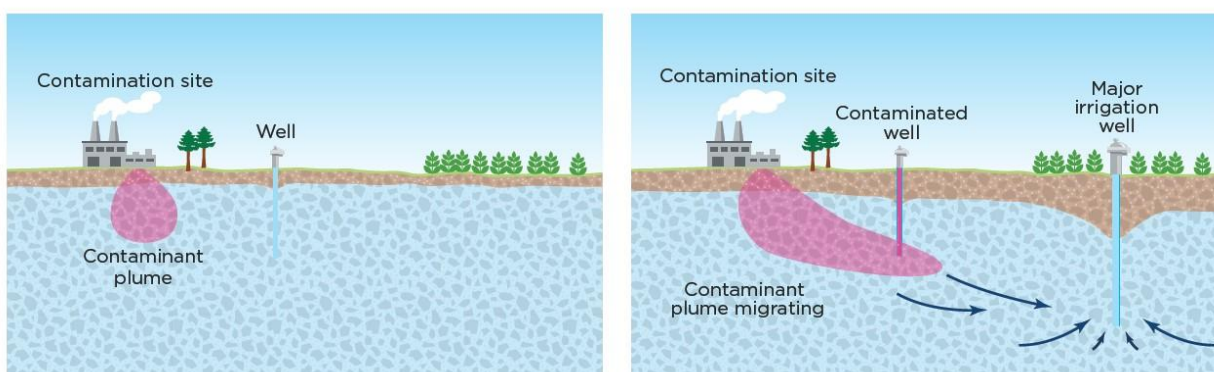


Figure 1. Contaminant plumes are a mixture of waste chemicals and groundwater that exist in the aquifer near the sites where they are produced. Groundwater pumping from major irrigation wells can pull contaminant plumes toward nearby wells, putting their drinking water at risk. ([Union of Concerned Scientists](#), 2017. *Getting Involved in Groundwater: A Guide to California’s Groundwater Sustainability Plans.*)

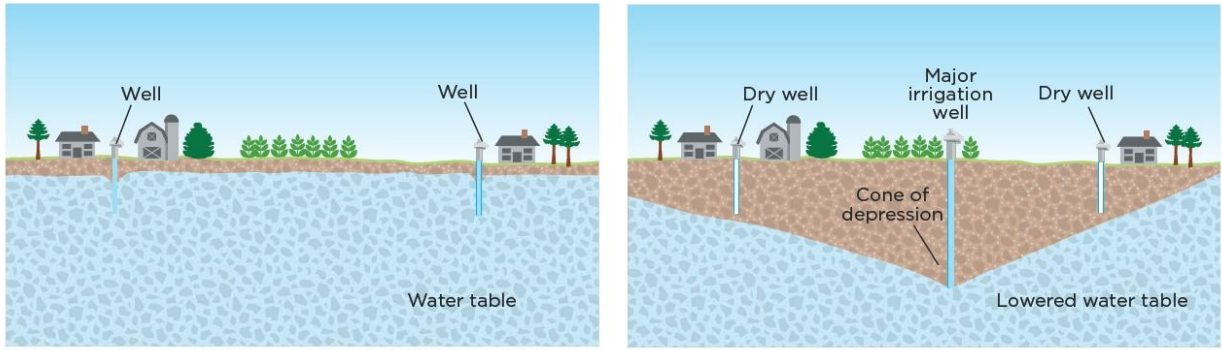


Figure 2. Deep wells, like major irrigation wells, can overuse groundwater and cause neighboring shallow wells to go dry or become contaminated. ([Union of Concerned Scientists](#), 2017)

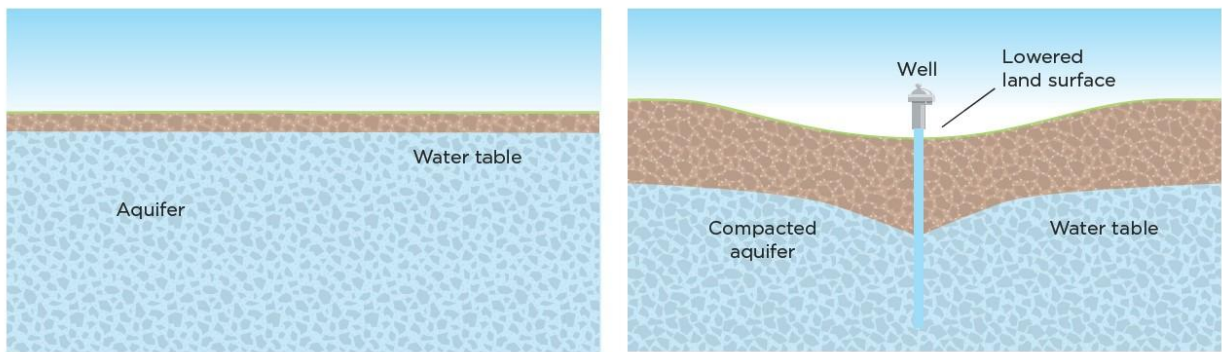


Figure 3. Overdraft and overuse of groundwater can cause land subsidence. ([Union of Concerned Scientists](#), 2017)



Figure 4. Community members getting involved and learning more about their groundwater basin. ([Union of Concerned Scientists](#), 2017)