

For Immediate Release
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Kern Subbasin Groundwater Sustainability Agencies Urge State to Consider Updated Plan

Probation recommendation based on outdated science, data

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The Kern Subbasin Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSAs) have responded to a draft report from the California State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB). The draft report finds the Kern subbasin's Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) to be inadequate and recommends that the subbasin be placed on probation. The GSAs' response was submitted during public workshops held on August 26, 2024, and August 29, 2024, and highlighted the significant improvements made in the 2024 GSP, which addresses previous deficiencies and outlines a strategy to achieve groundwater sustainability by 2040.

Notable improvements include enhanced protection for drinking water wells, expanded monitoring network, and the application of uniform data sets and methodologies across the entire subbasin to establish and maintain the subbasin's sustainability goals. Despite these advancements, the SWRCB's draft report, primarily based on outdated plans, recommends placing the Kern subbasin on probation, which could lead to state oversight and additional requirements for local landowners.

"We are simply asking the State to give adequate consideration to our updated 2024 GSP that is consistent with the requirements of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) and not base a probation recommendation on an outdated plan," stated Derek Yurosek, Director, Arvin-Edison WSD and Chair of the Kern Subbasin Coordination Committee. "The current GSP is protective of all beneficial users with its comprehensive management program, and its consistent groundwater thresholds designed to reduce potential impacts, need to be factored in when making such a monumental decision."

SGMA requires input from local expertise with adaptive management based upon the best available science and data. Utilizing a review of the 2022 Plan to recommend probationary status for the Kern subbasin does not consider the best available science and data presented. Subbasin GSAs will request that the SWRCB submit a revised draft staff report detailing their feedback on the 2024 Plan before a final staff report is released.

"When considering placing Kern in probation, the State Board should ensure that the processes they are undertaking considers all the recent efforts and coordination. To send this subbasin directly into probation would have significant broader economic and financial impacts to projects like groundwater banks with participants extending well beyond Kern County," added Royce Fast, Director, Kern County Water Agency.

"If the State decides to put the Kern subbasin into probation, they will ultimately affect the people they are trying to protect in the DACs." Expressed Raul Barraza Jr., General Manager at Arvin Community Services District. "Our communities are home to many of the agricultural workers in the basin, my parents included, and by forcing farmers to pay fees, they will ultimately have to cut down on all aspects of their operations. Less water means less land for farming, which means fewer workers are needed."

The Kern subbasin GSAs remain focused on the future of sustainable groundwater management in the subbasin by incorporating additional local stakeholder feedback into the 2024 GSP. The subbasin GSAs look forward to working with SWRCB staff related to the 2024 GSP and will hold in-person and online public workshops in September to gather feedback from interested stakeholders on the amended 2024 GSP. Interested parties can receive additional information by going to www.kerngsp.com or by emailing comments@kerngsp.com.

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