

Regional Water Quality Control Board
North Coast Region

Executive Officer's Summary Report
Wednesday, November 19, 2014
Regional Water Board Office
Santa Rosa, CA

- ITEM: 1
- SUBJECT: Update on Santa Rosa Plain Watershed Groundwater Management Plan. (*Jeremiah Puget; Grant Davis and Marcus Trotta, Sonoma County Water Agency; Tracy Nishikawa, USGS*)
- BOARD ACTION: This is an informational item. No action will be taken by the Regional Water Board.
- BACKGROUND: This informational item is to provide an overview of a groundwater management planning effort in the Santa Rosa Groundwater Plain, not only to highlight the excellent work by the stakeholders, but also to lay the groundwork for Regional Water Board staff's groundwater protection planning efforts across the Region. It is intended to provide the Regional Water Board with a broad context of the State and local groundwater protection strategies as well as a deep understanding of the local efforts within the Region. In the early 1990s California legislators passed the Groundwater Management Act. The intent of the Groundwater Management Act is to encourage local agencies to work cooperatively to manage groundwater resources within their jurisdictions and to provide a methodology for developing Groundwater Management Plans.
- Associated with the Groundwater Management Act, the California Water Code has been modified over the years, most recently through a combination of both Assembly and Senate bills collectively known as the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act. A central feature of these bills is the recognition that groundwater management in California is best accomplished locally. This informational item focuses particularly on the local efforts led by the Sonoma County Water Agency (Water Agency) in conjunction with scientific assessments by the U.S. Geologic Survey (USGS).

DISCUSSION:

Groundwater is a vital component of life in the North Coast Region, which, when managed in a responsible and sustainable manner, will continue to support urban, rural, and agricultural land uses, and natural functions. Careful management of groundwater resources is seen as particularly important to ensure ecosystem resilience as the effects of climate change become more dramatic. The North Coast Region contains 62 groundwater basins, as identified by the California Department of Water Resources (DWR) Bulletin 118-2003. Of the 62 basins, eight basins provide water supply for about 60 percent of the region's population and about 80 percent of groundwater use for the region. The Santa Rosa Plain Groundwater Subbasin (i.e., Santa Rosa Plain) is one of eight priority basins within the Region. The Santa Rosa Plain is currently experiencing an average annual loss of stored groundwater of 3,300 acre-feet, or roughly 1 billion gallons, which, if not modified, could lead to issues such as declining yield from or even depletion of municipal and domestic wells, base flows reduction in creeks and streams, and unsustainable water supply.

To meet this challenge, local water managers are seeking to acquire the knowledge and tools needed to understand the likely effects of future groundwater development in the Santa Rosa Plain and to identify efficient strategies for surface water and groundwater management that will ensure the long-term viability of the water supply. The USGS, in cooperation with the Water Agency and other stakeholders in the area (cities of Cotati, Rohnert Park, Santa Rosa, and Sebastopol, Town of Windsor, Cal-American Water Company, and the County of Sonoma), undertook studies to characterize the hydrology of the Santa Rosa Plain and to develop tools to better understand and manage the groundwater system. The objectives of the study were: (1) to develop an updated assessment of the hydrogeology and geochemistry of the Santa Rosa Plain; (2) to develop a fully coupled surface water and groundwater flow model for the Santa Rosa Plain watershed; and (3) to evaluate the potential hydrologic effects of alternative groundwater management strategies for the watershed and the groundwater basin.

To be proactive, the Water Agency led a balanced group of stakeholders called the Basin Advisory Panel (Panel) and has developed a Groundwater Management Plan (Plan) to manage the area's groundwater resources. After almost five years of developing the Plan, the Water Agency Board of Directors recently adopted the Plan and allocated over \$300,000 for initial implementation.

The Plan provides an overarching strategy for managing groundwater resources within the groundwater basin based on the scientific work performed by the USGS. The Plan integrates activities to balance groundwater inflows and outflows. Some of these activities include monitoring for groundwater levels and quality, promoting water conservation, enhancing water reuse, and promoting recharge. The Plan will continue to be a living document that can adapt to changing conditions. Plan implementation is structured to encourage an open, collaborative and cooperative process for groundwater management activities. This Plan is an important step towards local, voluntary monitoring and management of this critical resource, to help achieve a thriving community and healthy environment. Water Agency and USGS staff will update the Board on the key elements of the Plan.

Supporting
Documents:

Web link to Plan: <http://www.scwa.ca.gov/srgroundwater/>

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