

OJAI BASIN
GROUNDWATER MANAGEMENT AGENCY
A STATE OF CALIFORNIA WATER AGENCY



MEMBER AGENCIES

Ojai Water Conservation District
Casitas Municipal Water District
City of Ojai
Golden State Water Company

OJAI BASIN MUTUAL WATER COMPANIES

Senior Canyon MWC
Siete Robles MWC
Hermitage MWC

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California Water Action Plan

To Whom It May Concern our comments follow:

The Ojai Basin Groundwater Management Agency began in 1991 in response to an extreme drought. It was formed by the five major groups that were using the underground water at the time and these five groups became the directors of the Agency. Each one of the group selects one person to represent that group as one of the five directors of the Agency.

This small water basin has then benefited from the formation of the Agency and some of their results are:

1. Passing a resolution prohibiting export of water
2. Creating a system for extractors to report semi-annual extractions
3. Creating a web site for all interested parties to understand what the agency is doing
4. With Grant funding developed a detailed scientific modeling program of the basin.
5. With Grant funding the Agency is participating with Ventura Watershed Protection Agency in developing a recharge facility in San Antonio Creek
6. Passing a resolution requiring water meters on all operating wells
7. Approved as recordation agency by the Department of Water Resources.

The basin remains un-adjudicated and the well owners are generally cooperative. Major strides have been taken by the agency to document, record, monitor, preserve and protect the groundwater resource. However, much more can be done. The Ojai Basin Groundwater Management Agency appreciates the opportunity to comment on the Groundwater Workplan Concept Paper.

Regional Leadership

All groundwater basins in Bulletin 118 that currently have a CASGEM management agency should be legislated into Groundwater Basin Management Agencies. Local authority over the extraction, maintenance, and protection of groundwater is essential. The State should authorize local governance over each and every groundwater basin identified in Bulletin 118. The Department of Water Resources could manage the basins that have no CASGEM oversight.

Groundwater well drilling should be regulated and controlled by permits issued by the local authority governing these basins. The action should not be simply a ministerial act. It should be discretionary for the authority to determine that newly proposed wells will not harm the integrity of the basin to the detriment of all correlative users of the basin.

Key Management Elements

Specific scientific knowledge of each basin is necessary in order for local authority to establish realistic thresholds for groundwater extraction. Groundwater quality is a separate subject, different from extraction quantity, and will require additional study in order to maintain basin integrity.

The State should provide guidance and grant funding for basin start-up and ongoing modeling of each different basin. This will enable the new agencies to establish safe extraction yields for each basin. This will be necessary in order to achieve cooperation from landowners that will be vigilant about protecting their rights without adjudication.

Governance

See comments above on Regional Leadership

Funding

Continue the Integrated Regional Water Management Planning effort. This effort should be specific to watersheds for integrated management planning.

State Bond Grant funding should be restructured to be less complicated and less expensive for smaller local agencies to comply with. The grant monies are an essential step in creating the knowledge base, leading to informed agencies capable of providing guidance for water related necessities statewide. Smaller communities and agencies are constrained by both the cost of application for grant funding, and lack of application knowledge, so desperately needed projects go unfunded.

Oversight and Enforcement

Enforcement should always be delegated to the basin groundwater management agency via appropriate legislation. Oversight could be provided on a watershed basis with possible cooperative reviews by all groundwater basin agencies sharing ideas and expertise on a regular basis.

Antidegradation Policy

The State Boards Resolution No. 68-16, Antidegradation Policy could be applied to the proper and timely abandonment and destruction of water wells no longer used or that cannot be found on the property. This is essential to preserve the groundwater basin from surface water contamination.

The local groundwater management agency should have plans and authorizations in place, authorizing restrictions to deal with extractions beyond safe yield, depth of wells into unhealthy water quality, and over-pumping leading to subsidence.

Statewide Well Number Audit

A correct database of recorded water wells is absolutely essential for management purposes. The current state of the well number database finds it substantially corrupted. Human errors occur between state, county and local agency well databases. These errors must be corrected if proper management is to occur.

Conjunctive Use - Demand Management

Local agencies should have a Demand Management plan in effect in order to facilitate the shift from groundwater to surface water as underground water declines or is put into jeopardy.

GeoTracker GAMA

If the state is going to mandate this shift to technologically compatible hardware and software it must be prepared to provide funding for the effort.

Groundwater Recharge

There should be statewide consideration given to the reality that numerous State agencies mandate conditions that are in conflict with each other. An example of this would be conditions imposed by State Fish & Game over dry river water courses in the southern part of the State that prohibit the preparation of the dry but overgrown channels from performing the historic water percolation into the groundwater as had been the historic case.

A related issue is the numerous and overlapping permits required by government agencies that essentially discourage private property owners from participating in the clean-up activities required in dry river or drainage channels to facilitate recharge.

The old idea of moving storm water from surface collection points as quickly as possible to storm drains, arroyos, streams and rivers has outlived its usefulness. Minimal percolation potential takes place under the old scenario with concrete lined channels. Rivers are overwhelmed and flooding is the result.

A new action plan for storage of groundwater would be for Flood Control Districts and Watershed Protection Districts to co-ordinate with Groundwater Management Agencies to slow it, sink it, and store it. This would entail detention basins to slow storm water, percolation basins, and simple contour line ditches all designed to increase percolation and groundwater storage.

Low Impact Development and Low Impact Retrofit policies should be developed utilizing fewer impervious surfaces and be statewide. Schools and parks should not be excluded from this mandate. French drains utilizing potato sized cobble to reduce or eliminate surface sheet flows between parking stalls could accommodate large amounts of runoff and provide percolation to thirsty aquifers.

Water Recycling

Water recycling must have its own co-equal goals. If not, significant amounts of water would be removed from rivers and streams to the detriment of biological species and their habitat.

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Ojai Basin Groundwater Management