

# SECURING SUSTAINABLE GROUNDWATER in the SLO Basin



COUNTY  
OF SAN LUIS  
OBISPO

A QUARTERLY UPDATE OF THE SLO BASIN GROUNDWATER SUSTAINABILITY PLAN DEVELOPMENT  
VOLUME 4 | AUGUST 2020

## With an Understanding of the SLO Basin Developed, Goal Setting Begins

### ABOUT THE PROJECT:

Three water sources—surface water, recycled water and groundwater—serve all of the needs within the San Luis Obispo Valley Basin (SLO Basin). The Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA), signals the first time in California's history that groundwater will be formally managed. As required by SGMA, the SLO Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSAs) are developing a Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) now through January 2022. The GSP will guide groundwater users on how to maintain sustainable groundwater levels in the future.

### GSP DEVELOPMENT PROGRESS

**Step 2: Document Basin Setting** is nearing completion. Over the last several months the project team has documented the Basin's geology, groundwater levels and quality, water accounting, and future land use plans. This information helps to predict future groundwater demand and inform how sustainable groundwater levels can be maintained in the future.

### Key takeaways of the basin setting include:

- Groundwater levels have steadily declined in the Edna Valley since the 1990s, parallel to the growth of vineyard agricultural in the Valley.

### In this issue

GSC MEETING SUMMARIES — page 2

HOW TO PARTICIPATE — page 3

WORKSHOP SUMMARY — page 5

KEY TERMS — page 6

ACCOMMODATIONS — page 6

- Groundwater levels within the San Luis Valley have remained fairly steady since the 1990s
- A bedrock high creates a natural geological demarcation between the San Luis Valley and Edna Valley areas of the Basin

**Chapter 6: Water Budget** is now open for public comment and will close September 30, 2020. In addition, the project team

ARTICLE CONTINUED ON PAGE 4

## 5 Steps to Sustainable Groundwater in the SLO Basin



# Groundwater Sustainability Commission (GSC) Meeting Summaries

## Summary of March 11, 2020 GSC Meeting

The project team presented several updates to the Groundwater Sustainability Commission (GSC) on March 11, 2020 including a summary of Chapter 5 of the GSP, **Groundwater Conditions**. Chapter 5 documents the current and historical groundwater conditions of the SLO Basin and includes: groundwater elevation contour maps; estimates of groundwater in storage; groundwater quality distribution; history of land subsidence; as well as the identification of interconnected groundwater-surface water features and groundwater dependent ecosystems. In the meeting, the GSC recommended that Chapter 5 be received by the GSA and released for public comment. The chapter was opened for public comment on March 11, 2020 and closed on May 31, 2020. View Chapter 5 and submitted comments at: [SLOWaterBasin.com/review-documents](https://SLOWaterBasin.com/review-documents).

The project team also gave an overview of the process they'll use to develop a basin wide sustainability goal and corresponding monitoring network for the SLO Basin. The presentation included an overview of the sustainability indicators required by SGMA. Each representative monitoring well will identify a measurable objective and minimum threshold for each of the sustainability indicators. The sustainability indicators include: 1) chronic lowering of groundwater levels, 2) reduction of groundwater in storage, 3) land subsidence, 4) water quality degradation, and 5) interconnected surface water depletions.

The project team also defined key concepts associated with the Basin monitoring network, including: potential management areas, undesirable results, measurable objectives, minimum thresholds, interim milestones and representative monitoring sites. The team confirmed that the June stakeholder workshop as well as the July and September GSC Meetings would gather input to inform a draft of the basin wide Sustainability Goal.

The project team has been tasked with the development of an integrated groundwater/surface water flow model (GW/SW Model) for use in supporting the GSP development. The model will be used to estimate future groundwater levels in the basin, and to demonstrate the effects that various proposed projects and management actions will have on the goal of achieving sustainability by 2042. At the meeting, the project team provided an update on the progress of the GW/SW Model and the next steps in the model development, which will include model calibration and sensitivity analysis. The **Technical Memo: Surface Water / Groundwater Modeling Approach** opened for public comment following the GSC meeting and closed on June 15, 2020. View the Technical Memo and submitted comments at: [SLOWaterBasin.com/review-documents](https://SLOWaterBasin.com/review-documents).

## Summary of July 8, 2020 GSC Meeting

Due to COVID-19, the June GSC Meeting was moved to July 8, 2020. At this meeting, the project team provided several updates to the GSC.

First, the project team gave a summary of GSP Chapter 6, **Water Budget**, which provides an accounting and assessment of the total annual volume of groundwater and surface water entering and leaving the SLO Basin for historical and current conditions. The water budgets for historical and current conditions are developed using an analytical approach. Chapter 6 estimates the preliminary sustainable yield and overdraft for future conditions under climate change and other proposed management actions for the Basin. A projected water budget will be included in this chapter at a later date utilizing the integrated computer flow model.

The GSC recommended that Chapter 6 be received by the GSA and released for public comment. The comment period opened on July 8, 2020 and closes September 30, 2020. View Chapter 6 and submitted comments at: [SLOWaterBasin.com/review-documents](https://SLOWaterBasin.com/review-documents).

The project team also shared the key takeaways from the June 10, 2020 stakeholder workshop: **Groundwater Management Vision**. The draft workshop summary was shared, which captures all stakeholder input collected within the workshop, and translates it into a set of **5 Guiding Principles to inform the SLO Basin GSP**. The GSC provided feedback on the **5 Guiding Principles** that will be incorporated into the final document. The draft **Stakeholder Workshop Summary – Groundwater Management Vision** was opened for public comment on July 1, 2020 and closed August 15, 2020. View the workshop summary at: [SLOWaterBasin.com/review-documents](https://SLOWaterBasin.com/review-documents). A snapshot of the summary is also listed on page 4 of this newsletter.

Finally, the project team gave a preview of the next set of GSP development actions and stakeholder engagement activities related to **Step 3: Set Sustainability Goals**. The **5 Guiding Principles** described above will be used to create a draft basin wide sustainability goal. This draft goal, along with a draft of preliminary monitoring network, will be presented at the next GSC Meeting on September 9, 2020.

The October 1, 2020 stakeholder workshop, **Sustainable Goal Setting** will give stakeholders the opportunity to further inform the sustainability goals and monitoring network within an interactive format.

View GSC Meeting recordings and agenda packets at: [SLOWaterBasin.com/resources](https://SLOWaterBasin.com/resources)

# Opportunities to Participate

To meet the required completion deadline of January 31, 2022, the GSP will be developed in phases through the end of 2021. During this period, there will be ample opportunity for the public to participate in the plan development process, including participation in quarterly public GSC meetings, interactive workshops, and review and comment periods for each GSP chapter/section.



## VIEW SUBMITTED COMMENTS

The commenting period for the documents below is now closed. To view all public comments submitted for these documents go to [SLOWaterBasin.com/review-documents](https://SLOWaterBasin.com/review-documents) and scroll down to “Documents Closed for Public Comment.”

- **Communications and Engagement Plan**
- **Chapters 1-2: Administrative Information**
- **Chapter 3-4: Description of Plan Area and Basin Setting**
- **Chapter 5: Groundwater Conditions**
- **Technical Memo: Surface Water/Groundwater Modeling Approach**

## UPCOMING OPPORTUNITIES



### September GSC Meeting

SEP. 9, 2020 • 3:30pm-5:30pm • Go to Meeting

All stakeholders are encouraged to join the next virtual GSC Meeting. Key topics include: A review of the draft basin wide sustainability goal; details of the proposed monitoring network and sustainability indicators; an update of the Data Management System; and other topics related to sustainable goal setting.

**REGISTER:** To access the Go to Meeting details, go to [SLOWaterBasin.com](https://SLOWaterBasin.com), click on **Calendar** and go to the September 9, 2020 calendar details.



### Chapter 6: Water Budget, Public Comment Period

Closes SEP. 30, 2020

Chapter 6 of the GSP, **Water Budget**, describes the historical and current groundwater budget for the SLO Basin including water coming in (inflows), water pumping and discharging (outflows), and changes in storage. It will also quantify the current overdraft in the Basin and estimate the Basin’s sustainable yield.

To review the chapter or submit comments go to [SLOWaterBasin.com/review-documents](https://SLOWaterBasin.com/review-documents).



### Stakeholder Workshop #3: Sustainable Goal Setting

OCT. 1, 2020 • 3:00pm-5:00pm • Zoom Meetings

Join this workshop to help refine the Basin sustainability goals and monitoring network. Input gathered within this workshop will help ensure that the goals outlined in the GSP align to the values and needs of Basin stakeholders while still meeting the requirements of SMGA.

**WHO SHOULD ATTEND:** Stakeholders interested in or affected by the management of groundwater in the SLO Basin.

**REGISTRATION IS REQUIRED.** Learn more and register at [SLOWaterBasin.com/workshops](https://SLOWaterBasin.com/workshops).



## FUTURE GSP CHAPTER/SECTION REVIEW OPPORTUNITIES

### Chapters 7-8: Sustainable Management Criteria and Monitoring Network

Chapters 7 and 8 identify the undesirable results for each of the five sustainability indicators required by SGMA and relevant to the SLO Basin, including: further groundwater level decline; reduction in groundwater storage; depletion of interconnected surface water bodies; water quality degradation; and land subsidence.

**GSC MEETINGS:** 09/09/2020;  
12/09/2020

**WORKSHOP:** 10/2020

**REVIEW AND COMMENT:** Released upon GSC approval at the 12/09/2020 GSC meeting; comment period is anticipated to close 30 days or more following the GSC meeting.

### Chapters 9-10: Projects, Management Actions and Implementation Plan

Chapters 9 and 10 will identify projects, management actions, and the implementation plan that will bring groundwater use into balance and meet the sustainable management criteria identified in Chapters 7 and 8.

**GSC MEETINGS:** 12/09/2020;  
03/10/2021

**WORKSHOP:** 02/2021

**REVIEW AND COMMENT:** Released upon GSC approval at the 03/10/2021 GSC meeting; comment period is anticipated to close 30 days or more following the GSC meeting.



## Virtual Platforms Help Maintain Meaningful Stakeholder Engagement During COVID-19

The SLO Basin GSP project team transitioned all stakeholder engagement experiences—including both Groundwater Sustainability Commission (GSC) meetings and stakeholder workshops—to a virtual environment through at least Fall of 2020. GSC Meetings are using the Go to Meeting platform while stakeholder workshops are using the Zoom Meetings platform.

This action was taken to protect the health and safety of the project team and our community, while maintaining our commitment to meaningful engagement. To ensure this technology is not a hindrance to stakeholder participation, attendees can join via phone as well as computer. Further, workshop summaries and recordings continue to be made available on the project website following the live events. Those unable to join the live workshops have the opportunity to review and comment on workshop summaries.



### Join the Next Virtual GSC Meeting

September 9, 2020 • 3:30pm-5:30pm •

**Go to Meetings**



All stakeholders are encouraged to join the next virtual GSC Meeting. Key topics include: A review of the draft basin wide sustainability goal; details of the proposed monitoring network and sustainability indicators; an update of the Data Management System; and other topics related to sustainable goal setting.

Register at: **SLOWaterBasin.com** click on Calendar

## Continued from page 1: With an Understanding of the SLO Basin Developed, Goal Setting Begins

completed a technical memo, **Groundwater / Surface Water Model Approach**. The memo comment period closed June 15, 2020.

### STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT PROGRESS

On June 10, 2020, more than 75 stakeholders participated in a virtual workshop to set a shared vision for what a “sustainable SLO Basin” means to them. A workshop summary was produced, which synthesized stakeholder feedback into a set of **5 Guiding Principles to inform the SLO Basin GSP**. The summary was opened for public comment and closed on July 31, 2020. The final **5 Guiding Principles** will be used to inform the draft basin wide sustainability goal that will be shared at the September 9, 2020 GSC Meeting and October 1, 2020 stakeholder workshop.

### WHAT'S NEXT

**Step 3: Set Sustainability Goals** is now underway. Key topics that will be discussed at the September 9, 2020 GSC Meeting include: a presentation and discussion of the data management system (DMS) plan; details of the proposed basin monitoring network; the proposed representative monitoring sites; and a draft set of sustainability management criteria for each representative monitoring well.

Stakeholders can inform the draft sustainability goals by attending the September 9, 2020 GSC Meeting and/or October 1, 2020 **Sustainable Goal Setting Workshop**. Find details on this and other opportunities to participate on page 3 or by visiting the project website at [SLOWaterBasin.com/get-involved](https://SLOWaterBasin.com/get-involved).



# Stakeholder Workshop Summary: Groundwater Management Vision

Attendees to the June 10, 2020 stakeholder workshop, **Groundwater Management Vision**, participated in an interactive visioning exercise where they helped populate a virtual white board to answer the question, “What is our shared vision of what a ‘sustainable SLO Basin’ means?” Stakeholders added ideas, perceptions, outcomes, and values onto the white board across the following categories:

- **Available Groundwater Supply:** What needs/uses does our groundwater supply always need to be able to serve?
- **Available Groundwater Storage:** What needs/uses does our stored groundwater need to serve or prepare us for?
- **Groundwater Dependent Ecosystem Health:** What outcomes do we want for surface water ecosystems and prevention of land subsidence?
- **Cost to Users:** If we achieve a “sustainable SLO Basin,” how does it look to ratepayers?

- **Groundwater Quality:** What is the quality of groundwater we aim to sustain?

Below is a snapshot of the draft **5 Guiding Principles** that resulted from this input and will be used to guide the remaining decisions in the GSP development. Find the complete workshop summary, including detailed input and public comments on the project website at [SLOWaterBasin.com/review-documents](https://SLOWaterBasin.com/review-documents).

(DRAFT)

## 5 GUIDING PRINCIPLES INFORMING THE SLO BASIN GSP

1

AVAILABLE  
GROUNDWATER  
SUPPLY SUPPORTS  
DIVERSE NEEDS  
RELIABLY AND  
EQUITABLY.

2

STORED  
GROUNDWATER  
EQUITABLY  
SUPPORTS **WATER  
SUPPLY RESILIENCE  
AND EVOLVING  
NEEDS.**

3

GROUNDWATER  
LEVELS SUPPORT  
THE **SUSTAINED  
HEALTH** OF  
GROUNDWATER  
DEPENDENT  
ECOSYSTEMS.

4

COST OF  
MAINTAINING  
SUSTAINABLE  
GROUNDWATER  
LEVELS IS  
**EQUITABLY  
DISTRIBUTED.**

5

GROUNDWATER  
QUALITY IS  
MAINTAINED AT A  
**SAFE STANDARD**  
TO MEET DIVERSE  
BASIN NEEDS.

## Join the Next Virtual Stakeholder Workshop #3: Sustainable Goal Setting

October 1, 2020 • 3:00pm-5:00pm • **Zoom Meetings**

Join this workshop to help refine the Basin sustainability goals and monitoring network. Input gathered within this workshop will help ensure that the goals outlined in the GSP align to the values and needs of Basin stakeholders while still meeting the requirements of SMGA.

Register at: [SLOWaterBasin.com/workshops](https://SLOWaterBasin.com/workshops)



# Key Terms

**Groundwater Sustainability Agency (GSA)** — One or more local agencies may establish a GSA. It is the GSA's responsibility to develop and implement a groundwater sustainability plan that considers all beneficial uses and users of groundwater in the basin. Two GSAs (i.e., the City and County of San Luis Obispo) have been formed for the SLO Basin to cover the whole basin area.

**Groundwater Sustainability Commission (GSC)** — The Groundwater Sustainability Commission is an advisory body that is established by the City and County GSAs to advise the GSAs in connection with preparation of the GSP for the SLO Basin. The GSC is currently comprised of the following individuals and related agencies: Bob Schiebelhut, Chairperson, Edna Valley Growers Mutual Water Company; Mark Zimmer, Vice Chairperson, Golden State Water Company; Dennis Fernandez, Member, Edna Ranch Mutual Water Company/Varian Ranch Mutual Water Company; Andy Pease, Member, City of San Luis Obispo; Adam Hill, Member, County of San Luis Obispo.

**Groundwater Sustainability Portal (Portal)** — Located at SLOWaterBasin.com, the Portal is the central online communication hub for public participation and information sharing on the GSP project. Any interested party can subscribe to receive project updates and/or to review and submit public comment on GSP chapters/sections through the Portal.

**GSC Meetings** — Quarterly public meetings held by the Groundwater Sustainability Commission. The general public is encouraged to attend to learn about project progress, ask questions, and/or provide and share input. For a full calendar of meetings visit the Portal at SLOWaterBasin.com and click on "calendar."

**Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP)** — A management plan developed by the GSAs to provide a framework for managing the groundwater basin sustainably to meet the requirements of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA).

**San Luis Obispo Valley Groundwater Basin (SLO Basin)** — A groundwater basin area within the San Luis Valley and Edna Valley that has been designated as a high priority basin by the State Department of Water Resources (DWR).

**Stakeholder Communication and Engagement Plan (C&E Plan)** — Groundwater is best managed at the local level. GSAs are required to develop and implement a C&E Plan to ensure the timely, forthright, and consistent communication among all beneficial users of groundwater and stakeholders affected by the GSP.

**Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA)** — SGMA is a package of three bills (AB 1739, SB 1168, and SB 1319) that provide local agencies with a framework for managing groundwater basins in a sustainable manner. Recognizing that groundwater is most effectively managed at the local level, the SGMA requires local agencies to achieve sustainability within 20 years.

**Stakeholder Workshops** — Four public workshops are anticipated to be held at specific milestones in the GSP development process to allow for inclusive and meaningful opportunities for affected stakeholders to participate and contribute in the plan design. Find details on scheduled workshops at SLOWaterBasin.com, click on "calendar."

## Stakeholder Engagement Snapshot

A Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) considers all beneficial uses and users of groundwater—making meaningful stakeholder engagement an important part of the planning process. Recent highlights of the project team's engagement efforts are as follows:

**426**

EMAIL LIST  
SUBSCRIBERS

**8/10**

STAKEHOLDER GROUPS  
REPRESENTED ON LIST

**14**

PUBLIC  
NOTICES  
POSTED SINCE  
JUNE 2020

**11**

ORGS  
RECEIVED  
DIRECT  
OUTREACH

**30**

AVERAGE  
GSC MEETING  
ATTENDANCE

**75**

ATTENDED JUNE  
2020 STAKEHOLDER  
WORKSHOP  
"GROUNDWATER  
MANAGEMENT  
VISION"

## Questions and Accommodation Requests

If you have any questions, if you wish to receive materials about the GSP development by mail, or if you'd like to request accommodations to attend an upcoming event or workshop including translation services, contact Dick Tzou at [dtzou@co.slo.ca.us](mailto:dtzou@co.slo.ca.us) or 805-781-4473.

### You can also contact us by mail:

County of San Luis Obispo Department of Public Works  
County Government Center, Room 206  
San Luis Obispo, CA 93408

Si necesita solicitar alojamiento para asistir a un próximo evento, incluidos los servicios de traducción, comuníquese con Dick Tzou a [dtzou@co.slo.ca.us](mailto:dtzou@co.slo.ca.us) o al 805-781-4473.