

Sustainable Groundwater Management Terminology

Acre Foot (AF): The amount of water required to cover an acre of land (an area that is about the size of a football field), one foot deep. Water yields are usually expressed in acre-feet per year (AFY).

Annual Report: A yearly report prepared and submitted to the Department of Water Resources (DWR) by April 1st. The report serves as a status update on data collected over the previous water year for each sustainability indicator. The Annual Report includes analysis of data and issues/data gaps that still exist.

De Minimis User: Domestic groundwater users that extract less than 2 acre-feet per year. These users tend to have shallow wells, which puts them at risk of losing their drinking water if larger water users cause groundwater levels to drop or contamination to worsen.

Domestic/Private Well: A well on private property that serves no more than three households. Many of these private wells have gone dry during droughts, as groundwater levels drop from increased pumping. The Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) is intended to ensure ongoing drinking water access for domestic/private well users.

Groundwater: Water from rain and snow that collects beneath the surface of the earth that can be pumped out for drinking, irrigation, or environmental purposes.

Groundwater Recharge: Refers to the addition of groundwater, to the underground aquifer, occurring either through natural inputs such as precipitation and snowmelt or through engineered recharge methods.

Groundwater Subbasin: A subdivision of a groundwater basin created by dividing the basin by using geologic and hydrologic conditions or institutional boundaries. ([Glossary](#))

Groundwater Sustainability Agency (GSA): A locally formed group of people responsible for implementing Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) rules for each groundwater basin. Each Groundwater Sustainability Agency (GSA) works together to produce a Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) that will stabilize local groundwater within 20 years by limiting pumping and helping to flow water back into the ground.

Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP): A detailed plan for how groundwater basins will reach long-term groundwater sustainability. Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSAs) prepare and submit the Groundwater Sustainability Plans (GSPs) to the California Department of Water Resources (DWR) for approval. DWR tracks their performance over time and will formally evaluate updated plans submitted by GSAs every five years.

Interconnected Surface Water (ISW): Surface water that is connected at any point to a zone completely saturated with water to groundwater and still contains water above the water table.

Management Area: Area within a basin for which the GSP identifies different minimum thresholds, measurable objectives, monitoring, or projects and management actions based on differences in water use sector, water source type, geology, aquifer characteristics, or other factors.

Minimum Thresholds (MT): A numeric value for each sustainability indicator used to define undesirable results.

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Periodic Evaluation (PE): A written assessment of the GSP, developed by the GSA(s), for each evaluation cycle (i.e., at least every five years after GSP is first submitted) that summarizes basin conditions relating to sustainable management criteria established in the GSP, the implementation of projects and management actions, and other information as specified in SGMA and the GSP Regulations. Outlines GSP progress in meeting milestone/measurable objectives.

Periodic Review: An evaluation of an approved GSP performed by the Department at least every five years. The Department ensures the GSP, as implemented, remains compliant with SGMA and GSP Regulations, and is implemented in a manner that will achieve the sustainability goal. The Department may rely on Annual Reports and Periodic Evaluations prepared and submitted by the GSA as well as other available information when performing Periodic Reviews. The Department will issue a written assessment reporting the results including a determination of the status of the GSP and its implementation (i.e., Approved, Incomplete, or Inadequate).

Projects and Management Actions (PMAs): Are the planned physical and policy-based actions that Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSAs) implement to achieve groundwater sustainability goals under the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) ([SGMA Portal](#)).

Subsidence: Sinking of land that occurs after too much groundwater is pumped out, allowing the dirt and rocks that previously held water to collapse in on themselves, reducing the amount of space underground where water can collect. SGMA requires GSPs address and prevent subsidence.

Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA): A California law passed in 2014 that requires local agencies to protect and sustainably manage groundwater supplies for the future while avoiding undesirable results.

Sustainable Management Criteria (SMC): Includes sustainability goals, undesirable results, minimum thresholds, and measurable objectives. Development of the criteria relies upon information about the basin developed in the hydrogeological conceptual model. ([Sustainable Management Criteria Best Management Practice](#))

Sustainability Indicators: Refers to any of the effects caused by groundwater conditions occurring throughout the basin that, when significant and unreasonable, cause undesirable results. Indicators include lowering of groundwater levels, reduction of groundwater storage, seawater intrusion, degraded water quality, land subsidence, and depletion of interconnected surface water.

Water Year: The hydrologic period used in water resources management and reporting, which runs from October 1st to September 30th. The water year is designated by the calendar year in which it ends.

Other Acronyms

- **BMP:** Best Management Practices
- **DWR:** Department of Water Resources
- **GWL:** Groundwater Level
- **MOA:** Memorandum of Agreement
- **SGMA:** Sustainable Groundwater Management Act
- **SWRCB:** State Water Resources Control Board