

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

## Colusa Groundwater Authority (CGA)

### Proposed SGMA Operational Assessment

The Colusa Groundwater Authority has proposed an Assessment to support implementation of the Colusa Subbasin Groundwater Sustainability Plan and to comply with the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act.

#### *What is the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act?*

The Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) is a California law passed in 2014 to ensure sustainable management of groundwater basins. It provides for local agencies called Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSAs) to be formed to develop and implement Groundwater Sustainability Plans (GSPs). If local agencies choose to not form a local GSA or implement a GSP, the state will assume the responsibility or could step in to manage groundwater basins. The goal of a GSP is to achieve sustainability. GSPs must be approved by the California Department of Water Resources (DWR). SGMA requires that GSAs submit Annual Reports DWR by April 1st of each year documenting progress towards sustainability and plan implementation. SGMA further requires that GSAs submit a periodic evaluation to DWR once every five years, which is a more comprehensive reporting on GSP implementation and SGMA compliance.

#### *Who is the Colusa Groundwater Authority?*

Colusa Groundwater Authority (CGA) is a Joint Powers Authority formed in 2017 to serve as the GSA for the Colusa County portion of the Colusa Subbasin. CGA works with Glenn Groundwater Authority (GGA) to jointly implement the Colusa Subbasin Groundwater Sustainability Plan. CGA consists of ten member agencies, comprising reclamation districts, water districts, cities, and the County of Colusa, as well as two representatives of private groundwater pumpers. Governance is carried out by a twelve-member Board of Directors, with one Director appointed by each member agency as well as two private pumper representatives that are recommended by the Colusa County Groundwater Commission and are appointed by the County Board of Supervisors.

#### *How is CGA Funded?*

CGA is currently funded through a fee on all lands within the CGA boundary. Funds are used to pay for general administration, legal costs and SGMA compliance activities, including GSP annual reporting, development of GSP programs and Plan updates. The current fee rate is \$1.21 per acre.

#### *Why is there a need for an increase in funding and the Assessment?*

The Colusa Subbasin GSP was jointly developed by CGA and GGA and submitted to the Department of Water Resources (DWR) in January 2022. In October 2023, DWR determined that the GSP was incomplete, in part because, in DWR's opinion, it did not include a reasonable assessment of groundwater overdraft conditions and a reasonable means to mitigate overdraft. The GSAs revised the GSP to include a groundwater accounting program and domestic well mitigation program, which will require additional funding and other resources to implement. The revised GSP was resubmitted in April 2024 and approved by DWR in February 2025.

**CGA's current fee does not adequately support the necessary efforts to implement the GSP approved by DWR.** Revenue generated by the proposed Assessment will be used to support the efforts of CGA to

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implement the GSP, maintain compliance with SGMA, and ensure the protection of groundwater resources in the Colusa Subbasin. These efforts include agency operations, monitoring and reporting required by the State, and programs detailed in the GSP.

If the CGA does not have the funding to implement the GSP as approved, the State, as it has done with other basins, could put the basin on probation which could result in state oversight on groundwater use and additional costs.

### ***What is a Groundwater Accounting Program?***

The planned Groundwater Accounting Program will address the lack of parcel-scale groundwater use data in the Colusa Subbasin. The proposed Assessment would fund the design and operation of a comprehensive groundwater accounting system. This includes the setup and ongoing operations of the accounting platform, interpretation of satellite imagery to monitor land and water use, collection and quality control of groundwater well data, and the implementation of board-approved demand management policies when necessary to prevent or respond to minimum threshold exceedances. These measures will ensure that CGA complies with State requirements and maintains reliable data and responsive tools to actively manage groundwater demand and reduce risks of overdraft. The CGA and GGA have jointly developed a Request for Qualifications for qualified firms to submit a proposal which will include firm experience, qualified staff and anticipated costs. The CGA and GGA together will decide which firm to select going forward.

Following selection of a firm for the water accounting system, a Request for Proposals/Qualifications will be developed to determine how best to proceed with alternatives related to evapotranspiration remote sensing, groundwater measurement, as well as other groundwater usage estimating tools. Additionally, in accordance with the GSP, the Groundwater Accounting Program must be operational by January 2027. Coordinating well registration and installation of meters for all wells in the Subbasin would likely prevent this deadline from being met. For these reasons, CGA is initially considering a satellite-based approach to groundwater accounting with the option to incorporate other options into the future.

### ***How do benefit assessments work?***

CGA has proposed an assessment ballot proceeding under Proposition 218 to establish a special benefit assessment to fund its operational and GSP program costs as described above. Benefit assessments are one of the funding mechanisms provided for by Proposition 218, which was passed by California voters in 1996. An assessment ballot proceeding includes the preparation of an Engineer's Report, which provides the legal and methodological basis for a benefit assessment. Once the Engineer's Report is adopted, an all-mail balloting can commence, with notice and ballots mailed to all affected property owners. This balloting is weighted by assessment amount, meaning that parcels with a larger assessment have more voting power (it can be thought of as \$1 = 1 vote). The balloting period must last for at least 45 days after the date of the notice, but CGA has provided for a 51-day balloting period to ensure that property owners have an opportunity to submit their ballots. The assessment ballot proceeding concludes with a hearing conducted by the CGA Board. Once the hearing closes, the votes are tabulated. If ballots submitted in opposition to an assessment outweigh the ballots submitted in favor of the assessment, the Board may not adopt the assessment.

Property owners have the option to submit their ballot by mail.

### ***What will happen to the current CGA fee?***

If the new Assessment is successful, the current CGA fee program will be replaced by the new Assessment. If the Assessment is not successful the current fee would remain in place; however, CGA would likely continue to pursue options for revenues to satisfy its obligation to implement the GSP.

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### ***What will happen if the assessment is not successful?***

By State mandate, CGA has been tasked with the responsibility of implementing the Colusa Subbasin GSP and achieving sustainability within the Subbasin. CGA's ability to fulfill this mandate is crucial to maintain local control of the subbasin and to ensure the long-term protection of groundwater resources within it. However, the current fee falls short of providing the necessary financial resources to carry out the programs outlined in the GSP. If a new funding mechanism is not successful, this could have repercussions for CGA's ability to meet its obligations under the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act. If CGA is unable to meet these obligations, the State could potentially determine that it must temporarily take control of managing the Subbasin in a process called State intervention.

### ***What would happen in the event of State intervention?***

If the State were to take control of the management of the Subbasin, local input into the management of groundwater resources would be severely limited. Annual charges of \$300 per non-de minimis well, \$20 - \$55 per AF, and \$100 per de minimis well could be imposed. Groundwater users would be required to submit reports to the State regarding their groundwater use. Additionally, State intervention is only an interim status, and local agencies would be expected to regain control of the Subbasin and implement the GSP as soon as possible. It is likely that the State would also scrutinize all water users including groundwater and surface water to better understand how to bring the basin into sustainability and would likely implement the same actions as discussed within the GSP but at a higher cost.

### ***What will be the basis of charges for the assessment, and who will pay?***

The proposed Assessment is composed of land-based charges, with land in the Subbasin being classified under four different Land Use Groups. Each of these classifications has a different rate per acre, based on the variable benefit provided to each type of land:

- Non-Irrigable: land that is historically not irrigated, generally does not irrigate and does not have access to groundwater or surface water. Rate: \$0.53 per acre.
- Groundwater Only: land that has no access to surface water and relies exclusively on groundwater. Rate: \$11.19 per acre.
- Conjunctive Use: land that has access to both surface water and groundwater for irrigation. Rate: \$7.42 per acre.
- Surface Water: land that relies heavily on surface water for irrigation but may occasionally use groundwater in drought years. This Group includes parcels that use groundwater for domestic purposes only and irrigate with surface water. Rate: \$2.66 per acre.

Landowners who use a well for domestic purposes only and do not irrigate may be eligible for a reduction in the amount of acreage that is assessed. More information is provided below under "What if I believe I am being charged incorrectly."

The proposed Assessment is based on an annual budget and will be considered each year and approved by the CGA Board of Directors. If the annual cost of GSP implementation is less than projected, the budget and rates will be reduced.

If approved, the Assessment may be increased each year by up to the maximum allowable increase in the Consumer Price Index (CPI) for the first five years only. No other increases would be permitted without additional property owner approval.

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### ***What if I believe I am being charged incorrectly?***

The Land Use Group designation for each parcel under the proposed Assessment was determined by historical average water use of the subarea each parcel lies within. Property owners who believe one or more of their parcels have been classified incorrectly may submit a Land Verification Form requesting a change. A new ballot can be provided that includes any approved changes. For more information and to receive a copy of the Land Verification Form, please call (800) 273-5167.

### ***When will all of this take effect?***

A public hearing is currently scheduled for August 7<sup>th</sup>, 2025 at 1:00 p.m. at Colusa Industrial Properties, 100 Sunrise Boulevard, Colusa, CA 95932. You are invited to attend the public hearing. If the Assessment is successful, charges will be placed on 2025-26 property tax bills.

### ***How can I learn more?***

If you have questions regarding the proposed assessment, your ballot, the services provided by CGA, or to view the Engineer's Report, please visit [www.colusagroundwater.org](http://www.colusagroundwater.org) or call: (800) 273-5167. Your call will be directed to the appropriate party. Additionally, CGA holds public Board meetings each month that are open to the public.

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