



ACTIONS FOR LOCAL AGENCIES TO FOLLOW WHEN DECIDING TO BECOME OR FORM A GROUNDWATER SUSTAINABILITY AGENCY (GSA)

INTRODUCTION

The 2014 Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) established a framework of priorities and requirements to help local agencies sustainably manage groundwater within a basin or subbasin. SGMA provides a basic minimum standard for outreach and notification regarding the formation of a groundwater sustainability agency (GSA). The information in this document highlights the requirements that must be followed pursuant to California Water Code (Water Code) Section 10723 *et seq.* in order to become or form a GSA. This document incorporates the amendments made to SGMA by Senate Bill (SB) 13 in September 2015.

Pursuant to Water Code Section 10723(a), any local agency or combination of local agencies overlying a groundwater basin or subbasin may decide to become a GSA for that basin or subbasin. A GSA is formed by using either a joint powers agreement (JPA), a memorandum of agreement (MOA), or other legal agreement, and the Department of Water Resources (DWR or department) must be notified after the GSA has been formed. The definitions for GSA and local agency, as defined in Water Code Section 10721, are as follows:

“Groundwater sustainability agency” means one or more local agencies that implement the provisions of this part [Part 2.74]. For purposes of imposing fees pursuant to Chapter 8 (commencing with [Water Code] Section 10730) or taking action to enforce a groundwater sustainability plan, “groundwater sustainability agency” also means each local agency comprising the groundwater sustainability agency if the plan authorizes separate agency action.

“Local agency” means a local public agency that has water supply, water management, or land use responsibilities within a groundwater basin.

SUMMARY OF INFORMATION REQUIRED TO BE SUBMITTED TO DWR

A local agency is required to submit the following information to DWR in order to complete the GSA formation notification requirements of Water Code Section 10723.8(a). A notice of GSA formation will not be determined to be complete unless all information is submitted.

- Information that clearly shows the GSA formation notification was submitted to DWR within 30 days of the decision to become or form a GSA.
- A map and narrative indicating (1) the local agency’s service area boundaries, (2) the boundaries of the basin or portion of the basin the agency intends to manage, and (3) the other agencies managing or proposing to manage groundwater within the basin. *Please include a hard-copy map and GIS shape files.*
- A copy of the resolution forming the new agency.
- A copy of any new bylaws, ordinances, or new authorities developed by the local agency.
- A list of the interested parties developed pursuant to Water Code Section 10723.2 and a detailed explanation how the GSA will consider the interests of all beneficial uses and users of groundwater, as well as those responsible for implementing GSPs.

A representative of the local agency deciding to become a GSA, or a designated representative from the group of local agencies forming a GSA, shall include a statement in the notification to DWR that all applicable information in Water Code Section 10723.8(a) has been provided in the notification.

GSA FORMATION NOTIFICATION GUIDELINES FOR LOCAL AGENCIES

While not specifically required by Water Code Section 10723.8(a), the local agency submitting the GSA formation notification may wish to include a copy of the Government Code Section 6066 notice, as well as evidence or a statement demonstrating that a public hearing in accordance with Water Code Section 10723(b) was held in the county or counties overlying the basin.

GSA INFORMATION FOR LOCAL AGENCIES

The GSA formation notification requirements are located in Division 6 of the Water Code, Part 2.74, Chapter 4, Section 10723 *et seq.* The language in this document reflects the amendments made to SGMA by SB 13 which becomes law on January 1, 2016. DWR will review pre-SB 13 notifications for completeness and will retroactively address any GSA overlap and local agency service area issues pursuant to the process outlined in **Attachment A**.

The following Internet links provide the relevant SGMA legislation text:

- Summary of SGMA Legislation Text:
http://www.opr.ca.gov/docs/2014_Sustainable_Groundwater_Management_Legislation_092914.pdf
- Senate Bill 13 Text:
http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billCompareClient.xhtml?bill_id=201520160SB13

The Water Code mandates that all local agencies are required to notify DWR within 30 days of deciding to become or form a GSA and submit in that notification specific information. The “exclusive” local agencies listed in Water Code Section 10723(c)(1), which are agencies created by statute to manage groundwater within their statutory boundaries, must also follow the notification requirements before they become GSAs.

Additional information related to a local agency’s decision to form a GSA is welcomed and will help demonstrate to DWR, the State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB), and other local agencies that a proposed GSA has the long-term technical, managerial, and financial capabilities to sustainably manage basin-wide groundwater resources and prepare a groundwater sustainability plan (GSP) or coordinated GSP for an entire groundwater basin.

Pursuant to Water Code Section 10723.8(b), DWR shall post all complete notices it receives on its Internet Web site within 15 days of receipt. The list of GSA notifications received by DWR, an interactive map of the proposed GSA areas, and other helpful interactive planning maps are located on DWR’s Sustainable Groundwater Management Web site at the following Internet links:

- GSA Formation Table: http://www.water.ca.gov/groundwater/sgm/gsa_table.cfm.
- GSA Interactive Map: http://water.ca.gov/groundwater/sgm/gsa_map.cfm.
- Water Management Planning Tool: <http://water.ca.gov/groundwater/boundaries.cfm>
- Basin Boundaries Assessment Tool: <http://water.ca.gov/groundwater/sgm/bbat.cfm>

FORMING A GSA AND LOCAL AGENCY NOTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS

The following information summarizes the GSA formation and public notification steps identified in SGMA. Relevant Water Code sections are included.

Step 1: Decision to Form a GSA

The first step in the GSA formation process is public notification that a local agency is either (1) deciding to become a GSA or (2) deciding to form a GSA together with other local agencies. Water Code Section 10723(b) requires that a local agency or group of local agencies hold a public hearing in the county or counties overlying the groundwater basin. The relevant Water Code sections are included below.

GSA FORMATION NOTIFICATION GUIDELINES FOR LOCAL AGENCIES

WATER CODE SECTION 10723

- (a) *Except as provided in subdivision (c), any local agency or combination of local agencies overlying a groundwater basin may decide to become a groundwater sustainability agency for that basin.*
- (b) *Before deciding to become a groundwater sustainability agency, and after publication of notice pursuant to Section 6066 of the Government Code, the local agency or agencies shall hold a public hearing in the county or counties overlying the basin.*
- (c) *[Includes list of 15 "exclusive" local agencies – these agencies do not become a GSA until they submit a notification of GSA formation to DWR].*

GOVERNMENT CODE SECTION 6066

Publication of notice pursuant to this section shall be once a week for two successive weeks. Two publications in a newspaper published once a week or oftener, with at least five days intervening between the respective publication dates not counting such publication dates, are sufficient. The period of notice commences upon the first day of publication and terminates at the end of the fourteenth day, including therein the first day.

Step 2: Consideration of Interests of Beneficial Uses and Users of Groundwater

Water Code Section 10723.2 requires GSAs to consider the interests of all beneficial uses and users of groundwater. Additional sections of the Water Code require that this information be submitted as part of the GSA formation notification to DWR by a local agency(s). The relevant Water Code sections are included below.

WATER CODE SECTION 10723.2

The groundwater sustainability agency shall consider the interests of all beneficial uses and users of groundwater, as well as those responsible for implementing groundwater sustainability plans. These interests include, but are not limited to all of the following:

- (a) *Holders of overlying groundwater rights, including:*
 - (1) *Agricultural users.*
 - (2) *Domestic Well owners.*
- (b) *Municipal well operators.*
- (c) *Public water systems.*
- (d) *Local land use planning agencies.*
- (e) *Environmental users of groundwater.*
- (f) *Surface water users, if there is a hydrologic connection between surface and groundwater bodies.*
- (g) *The federal government, including, but not limited to, the military and managers of federal lands.*
- (h) *California Native American Tribes.*
- (i) *Disadvantaged communities, including, but not limited to, those served by private domestic wells or small community water systems.*
- (j) *Entities listed in Section 10927 that are monitoring and reporting groundwater elevations in all or a part of a groundwater basin managed by the groundwater sustainability agency.*

GSAs are encouraged to engage additional stakeholders in order to develop the necessary relationships and expertise needed to develop and implement GSPs. Pursuant to Water Code Section 10727.8, *"The groundwater sustainability agency shall encourage the active involvement of diverse social, cultural, and economic elements of the population within the groundwater basin prior to and during the development and implementation of the groundwater sustainability plan."*

Step 3: Submittal of GSA Formation Information to DWR

A local agency or group of local agencies must notify DWR and document the process it chose to take in deciding to become or form a GSA. The GSA formation notification requirements are described in Water Code Section 10723.8(a). The requirement for DWR to post complete GSA notifications is included in the Water Code references below. DWR will not post notifications on its Internet Web site that are determined to be incomplete.

WATER CODE SECTION 10723.8

- (a) *Within 30 days of deciding to become or form a groundwater sustainability agency, the local agency or combination of local agencies shall inform the department of its decision and its intent to undertake sustainable groundwater management. The notification shall include the following information, as applicable:*
- (1) *The service area boundaries, the boundaries of the basin or portion of the basin the agency intends to manage pursuant to this part, and the other agencies managing or proposing to manage groundwater within the basin.*
 - (2) *A copy of the resolution forming the new agency.*
 - (3) *A copy of any new bylaws, ordinances, or new authorities adopted by the local agency.*
 - (4) *A list of interested parties developed pursuant to Section 10723.2 and an explanation of how their interests will be considered in the development and operation of the groundwater sustainability agency and the development and implementation of the agency's sustainability plan.*
- (b) *The department shall post all complete notices received under this section on its Internet Web site within 15 days of receipt.*

GSA TIMELINE – OVERLAPPING AREAS AND SERVICE AREAS WITHIN A BASIN

The deadline for GSA formation in high- and medium-priority groundwater basins and subbasins is June 30, 2017. A local agency that decides to become a GSA within its service area, or a group of local agencies that decides to form a GSA within their combined service areas, does not effectively become a GSA unless the provisions of Water Code 10723.8(c) and (d) are also met – these provisions address overlapping GSAs and management within a service area. If multiple local agencies form separate GSAs in a basin or subbasin within a 90-day period, and if any of those proposed GSAs result in an overlap in the areas proposed to be managed, then none of the local agencies will become the GSA unless the overlap is resolved, which could require making a material change to the existing notification(s). The relevant Water Code sections are included below.

WATER CODE SECTION 10723.8

- (c) *The decision to become a groundwater sustainability agency shall take effect 90 days after the department posts notice under subdivision (b) if no other local agency submits a notification under subdivision (a) of its intent to undertake groundwater management in all or a portion of the same area. If another notification is filed within the 90-day period, the decision shall not take effect unless the other notification is withdrawn or modified to eliminate any overlap in the areas proposed to be managed. The local agencies shall seek to reach agreement to allow prompt designation of a groundwater sustainability agency. If agreement is reached involving a material change from the information in the posted notice, a new notification shall be submitted under subdivision (a) and the department shall post notice under subdivision (b).*
- (d) *Except as provided in subdivisions (e) and (f), after the decision to be a groundwater sustainability agency takes effect, the groundwater sustainability agency shall be presumed to be the exclusive groundwater sustainability agency within the area of the basin within the service area of the local agency that the local agency is managing as described in the notice.*

GSA FORMATION NOTIFICATION GUIDELINES FOR LOCAL AGENCIES

CONDITIONS FOR DETERMINING A GSA NOTIFICATION INCOMPLETE

A GSA formation notification will be determined to be incomplete if (1) the local agency does not certify the notification as complete and (2) the provisions of Water Code Section 10723.8 are not clearly addressed. An incomplete notification will not be posted on DWR's Internet Web site and DWR staff will inform local agencies of the reason(s) for not posting. Local agencies will be given the opportunity to provide additional information.

Examples of what could deem a GSA notification to be incomplete include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Informing DWR of the decision to become a GSA more than 30 days after the decision was made in accordance with the required public hearing process.
- An incomplete map or insufficient information that clearly defines the local agency's service area boundaries with respect to the area of the basin or subbasin proposed to be managed as a GSA.
- No copy of a resolution or legal agreement forming the new agency.
- No copy of any new bylaws, ordinances, or new authorities adopted, if applicable.
- An incomplete list of interested parties developed pursuant to Water Code Section 10723.2.
- Submitting a GSA formation notification for a basin or portion of a basin where a local agency is already presumed to be the GSA.
- Deciding to become or form a GSA for an area that is outside the service area boundary of the local agency(s) forming the GSA.
- Forming a GSA outside the boundaries of a basin or subbasin defined in DWR's Bulletin 118.

Questions related to GSA notifications can be directed to DWR by contacting Mark Nordberg at Mark.Nordberg@water.ca.gov or calling 916-651-9673. Information is also located on DWR's GSA webpage at: <http://water.ca.gov/groundwater/sgm/gsa.cfm>.

Please e-mail your GSA formation notification and GIS shape files, and/or send via postal mail a hardcopy, to the following DWR staff:

Mark Nordberg, GSA Project Manager
Sustainable Groundwater Management Program
California Department of Water Resources
901 P Street, Room 213-B
P.O. Box 942836
Sacramento, CA 94236

DWR Region Office Groundwater Contact
<http://water.ca.gov/groundwater/gwinfo/contacts.cfm>
Bill Ehorn, Northern Region
Bill Brewster, North Central Region
Dane Mathis, South Central Region
Tim Ross, Southern Region



ATTACHMENT A
**PROCESS FOR REVIEWING COMPLETE GSA NOTIFICATIONS –
ADDRESSING OVERLAPPING GSAS AND SERVICE AREA BOUNDARIES**

Note: The amendments to SGMA provided by Senate Bill 13 will be retroactively applied to GSA formation notifications already submitted to DWR.

1. DWR receives a GSA formation notification (notification) from a local agency(s).
2. DWR reviews the notification for completeness.
 - a. If incomplete, the local agency(s) is contacted and the notification is not posted. DWR informs the local agency(s) of the reason(s) for being determined incomplete.
 - b. If complete, the notification is posted on DWR’s GSA Formation Table within 15 days.
3. Complete GSA notifications are posted with (1) the posting date and (2) a date that indicates the posting-date-plus-90-calendar-days. This is the active 90-day period.
 - a. The GSA area submitted with the notification is included on DWR’s GSA Interactive Map after DWR Region Office staff determines the suitability of the GIS shape files. The area included as a shape file must match the area depicted in the notification.
4. If no other local agency(s) submits a notification within the 90-day period in all or a portion of the same basin area, the local agency(s) that submitted the notification will become the “presumed” GSA for the area claimed within the service area of the local agency(s).
 - a. Status as “presumed” GSA will be indicated on the GSA Formation Table and the area claimed by the GSA will be distinctly colored on the GSA Interactive Map.
 - b. If any other local agency(s) submits a notification for all or a portion of an area managed by a “presumed” GSA, DWR will determine that notification to be incomplete and will contact that local agency(s).
5. If another local agency(s) submits a complete notification within an active 90-day period, and that notification results in an overlap in all or a portion of the same area of an existing notification, then:
 - a. The notification will be included on the GSA Formation Table with a posting date.
 - b. The column with the posting-date-plus-90-days date for all affected notifications will be replaced with “overlap” to indicate a GSA formation overlap.
 - c. The GIS shape files on the GSA Interactive Map for all affected notifications will be labeled with a color that clearly indicates GSA formation overlap.
6. All local agencies that are affected by overlapping notifications will remain in overlap status until the conditions stated in Water Code Section 10723.8(c) are met.
 - a. “Presumed” designation of a GSA will not proceed unless conflicting notifications are withdrawn or modified to eliminate any overlap in the areas proposed to be managed.
7. If agreement is reached involving a material change from the information in the posted notice, a new notification shall be submitted in accordance with Water Code Section 10723.8(a) and the notification will be reviewed and posted by DWR as described in this process.
 - a. A material change includes, but is not limited to: a GSA boundary revision; a change of local agencies forming the GSA; or a consolidation of local agencies or proposed GSAs through a JPA or MOA or other legal agreement.
8. If overlapping GSA formation notifications exist in a basin after June 30, 2017, then that basin is subject to probationary status by the SWRCB per Water Code Section 10735.2. In addition, the groundwater extraction reporting requirements in Water Code Section 5202 *et seq.* apply to the portions of that basin where local agencies have not been determined “presumed” GSAs.