

October 2016: Water Task Force Update

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As winter approaches, we are all hopeful that we will have a nice wet winter with gentle rains and above average snowpack. Reservoir levels around California are varied, and while they look better than last year they still have plenty of room to fill. Unfortunately many forecasters are predicting a “La Nina” condition which historically brings us cool drier than normal weather, but time will tell and we will keep our fingers crossed for the best.

While we wait to see what mother nature delivers us, we are dealing with what Sacramento gave us a while back, which is the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (“SGMA”). Around the state entities which lie over groundwater basins deemed high and medium priority are trying to sort out the governance structures before the mandated deadlines. Most pressing is the July 2017 requirement that a GSA or multiple GSA’s be established to completely cover affected groundwater basins. This has proven to be a difficult task but the DWR and SWRCB have stated they will hold firm to this deadline.

Locally, a boundary modification was approved which makes the Atascadero Sub Basin separate from the Paso Robles Groundwater Basin in regards to SGMA management, and includes Atascadero, Templeton, and rural areas south and southwest of the Rinconada Fault.

There is movement to form a Shandon-San Juan “opt-in” water district which has pretty complete coverage of the Shandon area and has had hearings in front of LAFCO and is progressing fairly rapidly. It is projected that they will probably meet the July 2017 deadline.

A second “opt-in” district is being put together for the Estrella-Pomar-Creston areas and is a few months behind the Shandon effort, not having been heard before LAFCO yet.

That leaves any areas which are not in a city or one of these districts a bit in limbo. It is assumed that the County will declare itself the GSA for these areas, but that has not been confirmed, nor is it known what this will entail, as the Board of Supervisors has pushed off any decisions thus far and with the election coming and changing of the Board make-up may continue to do so.

The SWRCB has published some preliminary charges that it will levy for non-compliant/”probationary” basins or portions of the basin. (see attached page) Also note that “de minimis” users are not exempt, at the State’s discretion.

Also progressing through this SGMA compliance process are the Edna Valley Groundwater Basin, though seemingly with less fanfare, and the Cuyama Valley Water Basin. Cuyama is unique in that it covers multiple counties. They started out on a path that seemed simple but seem to have gotten derailed. They are navigating similar to Paso in that they are attempting to form a water district and there is some concern that large landowners or ag interests will control the water.

Updates on SLO County Basins can be found at: <http://slocountywater.org/site/Water%20Resources/SGMA/>