

Salinas Valley Groundwater Sustainability Agency 5-Year Agency Report Accomplishments 2017 - 2021

Fiscal year 2021-22 will mark five years of work in developing, directing, funding, and managing the Salinas Valley Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency (Agency). This milestone is a notable accomplishment in that the Agency was explicitly formed to address the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA). From its inception, the Agency has worked collaboratively with the broadest range of stakeholders ever assembled to plan for the future of groundwater in Monterey County. With solid values based on honesty, transparency, and inclusivity, the Agency has changed water planning in the Salinas Valley.

SGMA declared that groundwater basins identified at risk of overdraft by the California Department of Water Resources had until June of 2017 to establish Groundwater Sustainability Agencies. In response, local interests came together to design a collaborative process, known as the "Formation Committee," to determine how best to address the many complex issues created with the passage of SGMA. Out of this work came the development of a nine-member Joint Powers Authority (JPA), which provided the GSA a platform for legal representation, funding, and stakeholder governance. The first official board meeting of the SVBGSA occurred in April of 2017, meeting the California Department of Water Resources' formation deadline. One of the first actions of the SVBGSA was to establish a management structure to ensure the success of day-to-day operations and that production of the first GSP due for submittal in January of 2020 could begin immediately.

The Board of Directors issued a Request for Proposals for management services, selecting Regional Government Services (RGS) as the organization best suited to develop a management structure that could effectively meet the stringent planning deadlines while providing quality stakeholder interaction and Board support. RGS is a Joint Powers Authority established in 2002 to serve the needs of cities, counties, special districts, joint powers authorities, and other governmental entities throughout California. RGS works exclusively with public agencies, providing a ready source of support and consulting services to meet its partner agencies' needs in a broad range of disciplines. RGS contracts to provide services on an hourly basis. This model allowed the GSA to establish personnel and financial infrastructures that serve the Agency by paying for only those hours employees work. Additionally, all benefits to employees are paid by RGS, which frees the Agency from legacy costs associated with retirement, vacation, or health benefits.

The first iteration of staffing for the GSA included a part-time General Manager and a part-time clerk. RGS provides financial services through a structure that included managing grants, expenditures, and budgeting paid on a per-hour rate. Following the agreement with RGS, the Agency set out to identify and recruit an organization well versed in SGMA and focused on hydrology to develop the first of six GSP's due in just over two years. The Agency contracted with Hydrometrics (later acquired by Montgomery and Associates M&A)) to provide GSP planning services. M&A immediately began work on the first GSP.

In the first two years of GSA development (FY 2017-18 and 2018-19), JPA members provided funding. However, the GSA Formation Committee had included a caveat in the JPA agreement that required the Agency to develop a separate funding stream within two years of the GSA formation. To accomplish this, staff selected Hansford and Associates to create and implement a fee to fund day-to-day operations and planning for the GSA. This fee was successfully implemented in FY 2019-20.

With the agency management structure in place and a team of highly competent support consultants, work began on developing the first GSP for the 180/400-Foot Aquifer Subbasin. During this period staff secured a \$1.5 million grant from the state for the first GSP and received additional grants totaling \$4.1 million grant to complete the next five GSPs. These grants have provided significant grant resources for Agency planning obligations. This Agency successfully submitted the 180/400-Aquifer Subbasin Plan in January of 2021.

With the first GSP completion, the Agency reorganized to complete five more GSP's due in January of 2022. This reorganization included the addition of a Deputy General Manager and a Senior Advisor. With this structure now in place, the staff is completing the next five plans while implementing the first plan. Importantly the grant funds secured for the planning work have significantly offset planning costs that would have otherwise been born by the Agency. The Agency continues to work with its consultant team. It is now actively working on a communications plans to broadcast the importance of this planning work, encouraging even greater participation levels by stakeholders. The communications work includes a focus on disadvantaged communities and small water systems.

The Agency is now forecasting what implementation of all GSPs will entail. The first plan submitted in 2021 is now beginning implementation and has previewed the types of implementation work that lies ahead for the Agency. The GSA will use the lessons learned from these actions to consider a future that includes the full implementation of six GSPs. To better understand the needs of funding and staffing to implement the plans fully, the GSA is currently working on a strategic plan to identify critical areas of work that will leverage available resources.

Five years in the GSA has successfully met or will meet the challenges presented by SGMA. Given that this is a new law that still contains many uncertainties, this is a remarkable accomplishment. It is essential to recognize that through this intense

planning period, the Agency has developed and created an innovative and effective stakeholder-driven organization that has kept costs as low as possible while producing high-quality outcomes.

Report Created By:

Gary Peterson, Senior Advisory and Founding General Manager
peterseng@svbgsa.org

Donna Meyers, General Manager
meyersd@svbgsa.org