

## **7 OUTREACH, ENGAGEMENT, AND COORDINATION WITH OTHER AGENCIES**

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Groundwater supports economic activities from small domestic scale to large industrial scale. Groundwater is an important supply for over 400,000 people living within the Salinas Valley Groundwater Basin. Beneficial users in the Basin are the key interested parties targeted for robust public engagement for GSP development and implementation and are highly diverse. Community engagement and public transparency on SVBGSA decisions is paramount to building a sustainable and productive solution to groundwater sustainability in the Basin.

The process for development of the original 180/400 Subbasin GSP from 2020 included a combination of gathering feedback during public meetings with the Advisory Committee and Board of Directors. Subsequently, subbasin planning committees were established in May 2020 by the Board to inform and guide planning for the remaining 5 GSPs submitted in January 2022. SVBGSA Resolution No. 2021-06, adopted in July 2021, established subbasin implementation committees to be convened upon the submittal of the GSP for each subbasin, including a new 180/400 Subbasin Implementation Committee (180/400 Committee).

The Board, Advisory Committee, and Subbasin Implementation committees are working together to implement the 6 GSPs required within the SVBGSA jurisdiction. Subbasin implementation committee meetings follow the requirements of the Brown Act. Meeting agendas and materials are noticed publicly on the SVBGSA website and public comments are taken on all posted agenda items. In addition to these formal public participation processes, SVBGSA maintains robust outreach and engagement with interested parties through multiple channels.

### **7.1 Public Involvement in Amendment 1**

During the preparation of GSP Amendment, SVBGSA held more than 12 public meetings where the Board, committee members, and the public provided comments and input. In April 2022, the 180/400 Committee recommended the draft Amendment 1 Board be released for public comment. Public comments on the draft were compiled and responded to during preparation of the final Amendment for Board approval. SVBGSA provided the required public notices and held a public hearing to adopt Amendment 1 on September 8, 2022.

### **7.2 Amendment 1 Chapter 2: Communications and Public Engagement**

As discussed in Section 1.1.1, GSP Amendment 1 updated the previous 2020 GSP Chapter 11 in a new Chapter 2: Communications and Public Engagement. This purpose of this chapter is to better characterize its approach and strategies to reach a broad audience. It provides additional information to address DWR Recommended Corrective Action 1 on SVBGSA's implementation of required, ongoing communications elements. It includes sections on the following:

- Identification of interested parties for the purposes of public engagement
- SVBGSA 180/400 Subbasin Planning and Implementation Committees
- Communication and public engagement actions (goals, objectives, target audiences, stakeholder database, key messages and talking points, engagement strategies, timeline and tactics, and an annual evaluation and assessment)
- Strategic engagement and communications with underrepresented communities and disadvantaged communities

### **7.3 Public Involvement in 5-year Evaluation**

During preparation of this 5-year Evaluation in 2024, the 180/400 Committee increased its meeting frequency, holding a total of 11 meetings. These meetings included reviewing the groundwater conditions related to sustainability criteria, discussing the current PMA feasibility studies, reviewing the list of PMAs in the GSP, and discussing other new ideas. The meetings provided an opportunity for committee discussion and public comments on resulted in several suggestions that could be considered further in the next plan amendment, or through variations to GSP projects with additional feasibility analyses.

### **7.4 Outreach and Engagement Activities**

SVBGSA’s outreach strategy engages the public early and frequently, and keeps information flowing among staff, consultants, committee members, and the SVBGSA Board regarding GSP implementation activities. Critical to the success of the 180/400 Subbasin GSP is public understanding of the plan’s goals and objects, projects and management actions planned to achieve sustainability, as well as other groundwater management activities. The following sections provide an overview of outreach and engagement activities during the 5-year evaluation period.

#### **7.4.1 180/400 Subbasin Implementation Committee**

The 180/400 Committee was first convened on October 22, 2021. The Committee had 17 members appointed to it. Broadly, the committee was tasked with advising and providing recommendations on the implementation of the GSP to review the sustainability status of the Subbasin and ensure the Subbasin is on a path to sustainability. In the summer of 2024, SVBGSA opened an application process for appointment or reappointment to the Subbasin Committees, each of which has up to 12 members and a term of 2 years.

Topics on Subbasin Committee agendas include updates on SGMA compliance activities and PMAs. The Subbasin Committee provided input throughout preparation of Amendment 1 and

was a venue for public comments during the process. The Annual Reports and 5-Year Evaluations provide an important opportunity to discuss sustainability status and goals.

## **7.4.2 Advisory Committee**

The Advisory Committee provides input and recommendations to the Board and uses consensus to make recommendations to the Board. The Advisory Committee was established by Board action and operates according to a Committee Charter which serve as the bylaws of the Advisory Committee. The role of the Advisory Committee evolved after formation of the Subbasin Planning and Implementation Committees. The Advisory Committee currently meets every other month.

In 2022, the Board updated the role of the Advisory Committee to have an emphasis on integrated implementation of the GSPs and addressing seawater intrusion. In July 2022, the Board approved the Advisory Committee nomination process and directed staff to make the necessary changes to the committee Charter and Bylaws. The new Advisory Committee was convened in August of 2022. In the spring of 2023, the Advisory Committee reviewed and provided comments on Charter and Bylaws and a work plan that included the following:

- Support of SVBGSA efforts in addressing Seawater Intrusion
  - Information and Education - Learn about how other areas are managing Seawater Intrusion
  - Feasibility Studies
- Integrated Implementation of the GSPs:
  - Use of USGS Groundwater model and SWI model
  - Water Quality Coordination/Land Use Jurisdiction Coordination
  - Groundwater Dependent Ecosystems
  - Underrepresented Community Representation
- Topics at the Board of Directors' Request

In 2023, the Advisory Committee also began to utilize work groups for ad-hoc, topic specific involvement and input. Thus far, they have created a Groundwater Dependent Ecosystems (GDE) Work Group to collaborate with the CCWG on developing an approach to conduct necessary field reconnaissance for GDE identification.

In the next 5-year evaluation period, the Advisory Committee will likely focus on consideration of multi-subbasin PMAs and revisiting the concept of an Integrated Implementation Plan.

## **7.4.3 SVBGSA Board**

As noted in the GSP, SVBGSA is governed by a local and diverse 11-member Board of Directors (Board) and relies on robust science and public involvement for decision making. The

Board meets monthly—all meetings are open to the public—and they are the final decision makers for the adoption of GSPs as well as any plan amendments. The Annual Work Plan, Budget, and Fees are approved by the Board each year prior to the start of each fiscal year.

The Board has committees, including a Budget and Finance Committee and Executive Committee. Members of the Board also participate as members of subbasin committees.

#### **7.4.4 SVBGSA/MCWDGSA Steering Committee**

As discussed in Section 7.4.4, SVBGSA and MCWDGSA maintain ongoing coordination, including on Annual Reports and on this 5-Year Evaluation. In 2024, the 2 GSAs technical consultants closely coordinated on further development of the Salinas Valley Seawater Intrusion Model, discussed elsewhere in this report. MCWDGSA has a subgrant agreement with SVBGSA for its current SGM Round 2 Implementation Grant for the Monterey Subbasin. Work under this grant is informing 180/400 Subbasin management, given shared hydrogeologic characteristics at the boundaries.

SVBGSA and MCWDGSA have a Steering Committee to oversee activities under the Framework Agreement, including developing and maintaining coordinated data management system(s) and facilitating data sharing, preparing coordinated water budgets and basin setting information for the 2 subbasins, and developing coordinated monitoring network objectives. Currently, the Steering Committee meets quarterly.

#### **7.4.5 Water Quality Coordination Group (Implementation Action 4)**

GSP Amendment 1 added an implementation action to establish a Water Quality Coordination Group (Coordination Group). SVBGSA coordinates with water quality regulatory agencies and programs in all subbasins. The Coordination Group includes the CCRWQCB, local agencies and organizations, water providers, domestic well owners, technical experts, and other interested parties. The group coordinates between agencies that regulate water quality directly and the SVBGSA, which has an indirect role to monitor water quality and ensure its management does not cause undesirable water quality results.

During the 5-year evaluation period, SVBGSA initiated ongoing meetings with other agencies that regulate and monitor water quality. In support of both the Well Registration and Coordination Group goals, staff meet regularly to coordinate and exchange data. Details about wells such as location, borehole depth, and perforation are essential to know which aquifer the water sample or measurement is representing and how that data should be applied. Active data sharing continues but linking the well identification from water quality samples to well construction records remains a challenge.

In 2023, staff from SVBGSA, MCWRA, CCRWQCB, and Central Coast Water Quality Preservation Inc. (Preservation Inc.) convened to discuss each agencies' role and actions that address water quality concerns. Preservation Inc. is leading the Alternative Compliance Pathway (ACP) for water quality monitoring for compliance with the CCRWQCB's ILRP. Preservation Inc provided updates and sought input for the development of the ACP and the staff group began discussions about SVBGSA's unique role relative to water quality.

The CCRWQCB staff and SVBGSA staff have agreed to meet to review water quality data and achieve effective coordination. The emphasis has been on data coordination as the foundation. MCWRA, Preservation Inc, and SVBGSA continue to work together to reconcile datasets as described in the Groundwater Quality Monitoring Network Changes. In the future, the goal is to broaden the group participation to include technical experts and other additional interested parties after the data coordination has progressed.

The Coordination group meets annually. The first meeting occurred in April of 2024. Staff from SVBGSA, CCRWQCB, and Preservation Inc met to review the Water Quality SMC from the Salinas Valley Annual Reports for WY 2023. Staff identified a better method to share data going forward to include timely ILRP data in the Annual Reports. Staff discussed the development of the approach to address RCA #5 and the opportunities for broader interested party engagement in the future. Part of this effort is understanding and developing a process for determining when groundwater management and extraction result in degraded water quality in the Subbasin. The Coordination Group will also review water quality data, identify data gaps, and coordinate agency communication. The next Coordination Group meeting will be in April 2025.

#### **7.4.6 Land Use Jurisdiction Coordination (Implementation Action 5)**

During the evaluation period, SVBGSA met informally with land use jurisdictions to share information about the GSPs and to discuss opportunities to coordinate groundwater management with land use planning. This effort will be further developed and formalized in the next evaluation period. Within the 180/400 Subbasin, land use jurisdictions include the cities of Marina, Salinas, and Gonzales, and the County of Monterey. The County's unincorporated communities within the subbasin include Castroville and Chualar, as well as rural residential areas in the North County Coastal Land Use Plan area.

Potential activities under this program will be to coordinate with the cities and County to better understand future land use plans and anticipated development. Similarly, SVBGSA will work with the land use jurisdictions to provide information on the GSP's to consider in their decision-making processes. Information on future land uses needs to be incorporated into groundwater models used for developing predictive scenarios and to inform additional PMA planning and development. In the next evaluation period, SVBGSA will coordinate with Monterey County on its General Plan policies related to long-term sustainable water supplies, addressing concerns

about seawater intrusion in this Subbasin and other groundwater conditions in the Salinas Valley as a whole.

### **7.4.7 Deep Aquifers Agencies Working Group**

The Deep Aquifers Agencies Working Group was formed in 2024 following the completion of the Deep Aquifers Study and after the Boards of several agencies with management authorities over the Deep Aquifers received the Study. The Working Group consists of staff from these agencies: SVBGSA, MCWDGSA, MCWRA, and Monterey County Environmental Health Bureau. It is currently reviewing the Study's management guidance and will make recommendations for long-term management actions in 2025, along with a monitoring plan.

### **7.4.8 Outreach and Engagement with Underrepresented Communities**

Several areas of the 180/400 Subbasin are considered disadvantaged or underrepresented, including the communities of Castroville, Chualar, and other unincorporated rural residential areas of northern Monterey County, and some areas of the cities of Salinas and Gonzales. The following discussion describes SVBGSA's activities to reach out to and engage these beneficial users over the 5-year evaluation period.

#### **7.4.8.1 Disadvantaged Community Engagement Strategy**

Following submittal of the 2020 GSP, the Board expressed an interest in understanding more about underrepresented and disadvantaged communities (DAC) experiences in the Salinas Valley and how the GSP development process could help better understand groundwater conditions affecting these communities. SVBGSA worked with the Consensus Building Institute (CBI) to develop an engagement strategy for working with DAC and underrepresented communities (URC). These communities are important interested parties for the Agency to develop meaningful and long-term relationships regarding groundwater sustainability.

CBI conducted interviews to gauge primary groundwater issues of concern in DACs, identified possible areas of focus with DACs, confirmed barriers to engagement with DACs, and identified outreach and education materials and approaches to achieve success with these communities over the long-term. The purpose of the assessment was to capture insights and recommendations to inform an engagement strategy for URCs and DACs. CBI conducted 14 interviews and summarized findings from the assessment to identify initial strategic steps for work with URCs and DACs for GSP planning and implementation. With the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, the beginning of this work was mostly done virtually.

In February 2021, SVBGSA's Board affirmed CBI's DAC outreach and engagement strategy to deploy during implementation of the GSP. The work products from this effort describe the need for an iterative process and recommended that initial outreach be viewed as the SVBGSA

“introducing” itself more intentionally to begin a dialogue about the relevance of regional groundwater management to the lived experience in disadvantaged areas of the Salinas Valley .

Although SVBGSA has not yet established the DAC advisory committee or working group recommended by CBI, SVBGSA staff had ongoing meetings with representatives from the Community Water Center, Monterey Water Keeper, and more recently, California Rural Legal Assistance (CRLA) and the California Association of Family Farmers (CAFF). These organizations are the most frequent community advocates for groundwater sustainability in DACs and URCs in the Salinas Valley.

In the 180/400 Subbasin, Community Water Center provided written comments on Amendment 1 and directly to DWR expressing specific concerns about seawater intrusion impacts and the groundwater conditions near the unincorporated community of Castroville. SVBGSA staff have been meeting with the Castroville Community Services District (CCSD) Board and representatives, as discussed further below.

In the next evaluation period, SVBGSA will continue to work on outreach and engagement strategies to be able to reach a wide audience of residents from diverse backgrounds in the disadvantaged and underrepresented areas of the Subbasin. SVBGSA is currently planning a Water Leadership Institute program in partnership with the Rural Community Assistance Corporation and Environmental Defense Fund in 2025 to support and improve URC participation in SVBGSA meetings and GSP implementation activities.

#### **7.4.8.2 Castroville Community Services District**

Castroville Community Services District (CCSD) delivers water and provides other public services to approximately 7,000 residents in Castroville. Groundwater is currently the only water supply. In 2021, one of CCSD’s 4 water supply wells was taken offline due to high chloride levels due to seawater intrusion. CCSD has described Castroville as “the canary in the coal mine” for other areas at risk of seawater intrusion. Over the past few years, SVBGSA staff met with the CCSD General Manager and attended several CCSD Board meetings to discuss SVBGSA’s activities.

SVBGSA staff, along with the Watershed Coordinator and MLRP program representative, met with the Board specifically about outreach and to discuss how to work together to engage residents in groundwater issues. CCSD board members and staff identified the need for better outreach and educating and engaging Castroville residents and their ratepayers to better understand what could happen if seawater intrusion worsens, including how it will affect residents’ health, water bills, and home values: “it’s more than just buying bottled water.” CCSD’s Board expressed concern that residents are not very engaged, public attendance at their meetings is low, and there is little response to inserts included with bills. CCSD feels that if Castroville residents had a better understanding of what was at stake and knew how to voice their

concerns, CCSD could get more traction on securing solutions to the impacts of seawater intrusion.

In 2024, SVBGSA coordinated with CCSD to develop outreach materials specific to Castroville, including a poster display with information about 180/400 Subbasin and seawater intrusion. SVBGSA and CCSD, along with the Multi-Benefit Land Repurposing Program outreach coordinator, shared a booth at a Castroville Community Resources Fair put on by the North Monterey County School District.

#### **7.4.9 Other Ongoing Communication Activities**

As noted in Amendment 1, SVBGSA uses a variety of tactics to achieve broad, enduring, and productive involvement with interested parties during the development and implementation of the GSPs. GSP Amendment 1, Chapter 2 provides an extensive discussion on the activities that SVBGSA uses to currently engage the public and on anticipated activities for GSP implementation.

During the 5-year evaluation period, SVBGSA continually worked to deploy these outreach and engagement strategies and to reach audiences beyond those who regularly participate through the Subbasin and Advisory Committees. SVBGSA's website, social media, and newsletters are available and easily accessible. The SVBGSA website has been maintained and improved as a communication tool for posting data, reports, and meeting information. This website features a link to an interactive mapping function for viewing Salinas Valley-wide data.

The Dry Well Reporting System is included in Amendment 1 as Implementation Action 3. SVBGSA has used its communication tools to promote the Dry Well Reporting System, which is a free, easy-to-use online tool that tracks wells that have gone dry across California. The data is used to inform state and local agencies about drought impacts on residential water supplies and helps to develop strategies that support long-term sustainability for groundwater sources. In early 2023, one well was reported as dry in Monterey County, just outside of SVBGSA's jurisdiction in Royal Oaks. By using the Dry Well Reporting System, impacted residents can also discover helpful resources.

Lastly, during the evaluation period, SVBGSA became a member of the Water Awareness Committee, which is a non-profit with multiple water agencies and water utilities that have joined in efforts to promote water conservation in Monterey County. SVBGSA has participated in their community outreach events, including the annual water conservation showcase with booths at the Monterey County Fair.