



**BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
AGENDA LETTER**

Agenda Number:

Clerk of the Board of Supervisors
105 E. Anapamu Street, Suite 407
Santa Barbara, CA 93101
(805) 568-2240

Submitted on:
(COB Stamp)

Department Name: PW/Water Agency
Department No.: 054
Agenda Date: October 21, 2025
Placement: Administrative Agenda
Estimated Time: N/A
Continued Item: No
If Yes, date from:
Vote Required: Majority

TO: Board of Directors, Water Agency
FROM: Department Directors: Chris Sneddon, Public Works Director
Contact: Walter Rubalcava, Deputy Director-Water Resources
SUBJECT: Annual Groundwater Basins Summary Report, All Supervisorial Districts

County Counsel Concurrence

As to form: Yes

Other Concurrence:

As to form: N/A

Auditor-Controller Concurrence

As to form: N/A

Recommended Actions:

That the Board of Directors:

- a) Receive and file the Santa Barbara County 2025 Groundwater Basins Summary Report; and
- b) Determine that the Santa Barbara County 2025 Groundwater Basins Summary Report is not subject to California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to State CEQA Guidelines Sections 15378(b) (5), as it is an administrative action that will not result in direct or indirect changes to the environment, and 15306 as information collection which does not result in serious or major disturbance to an environmental resource.

Summary Text:

This item is on the agenda to receive and file the Santa Barbara County 2025 Groundwater Basins Summary Report.

Discussion:

On March 19, 2019, the Board directed the Water Agency to return annually with a report which illustrates groundwater conditions, summarizes the various monitoring programs, and outlines the resources available for locating groundwater data throughout the County.

Only the nine defined groundwater basins recognized by the California Department of Water Resources in Santa Barbara County (Carpinteria, Montecito, Santa Barbara, Foothill, Goleta, Santa Ynez River Valley, San Antonio Creek Valley, Santa Maria River Valley, and Cuyama Valley) are included in this report. Although parts of some basins are located outside the County boundary, only data located within the County are referenced. Sub-basins within the larger groundwater basins are also differentiated as determined by management area or natural barriers to groundwater movement. Hydrographs of water surface elevation for representative monitoring wells located within each of these basins are plotted with yearly precipitation totals within the basin to clearly illustrate long-term storage trends, seasonal recharge response, and discharge. The annual distribution of water levels in 2025 is presented for each basin using histograms. Discrete water level values illustrated in these hydrographs and histograms are representative of yearly maximum aquifer levels during early spring and before significant agricultural pumping resumes.

Results of recent measurements indicate that many of the groundwater basins within the county showed signs of recovery and stabilization following above-average precipitation in Water Year 2019 (128%), near-average precipitation in Water Year 2020 (92%), and well above-average precipitation in Water Years 2023 (202%) and 2024 (143%). Water levels in most basins at varying depths show stability or considerable improvement in Water Year 2024, as a result of two consecutive wet years and a reduction in groundwater pumping. Despite being below average precipitation in Water Year 2025 (51%), groundwater levels increased in most South Coast basins. In contrast, other basins show mixed trends, with water levels varying based on factors such as sub-basin location and well depth. Overall, most water levels remain above 2022 levels measured prior to two years of above-average precipitation.

Background:

The groundwater basins of Santa Barbara County are essential sources of water for both municipal and agricultural uses and provide a critical line of defense against periodic water shortages. Unlike the surface water storage network, groundwater resources may not react as quickly following precipitation events. Recharge is complex and can vary between and within each groundwater basin because of aquifer materials, local geology, physical barriers, hydrology, evapotranspiration, and anthropogenic activity. Water levels may rise quickly in shallow wells when located in alluvium along flowing rivers and creeks. Deeper wells, however, may not show signs of recharge for many years following wet seasons.

Water level elevation data from groundwater monitoring networks have been collected throughout Santa Barbara County for decades. These networks provide representative data of the major aquifer systems and attempt to emphasize the role of local variables such as geology, topography, and land use on recharge, sub-surface flow, and distribution. Data also illustrates temporal variability and are combined with meteorological data to assist in the interpretation of ambient water level changes. The temporal and spatial distribution of the monitoring network has continued to change throughout the years and may be dependent on many factors to include funding, local groundwater study objectives, legislative requirements, and landowner access. Some networks

have been developed to track long-term trends, while others are more specific to modeling goals or local water distribution objectives.

The Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) was passed in 2014 to create a framework for groundwater sustainability throughout California. As part of SGMA, Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSA) are responsible for the development, implementation, and oversight of Groundwater Sustainability Plans (GSP) within groundwater basins.

Fiscal and Facilities Impacts:

Budgeted: Yes

Fiscal Analysis:

The Annual Groundwater Basins Summary Report is funded through existing staff time under Salaries and Benefits. These costs are included in the adopted FY 2025-26 Water Agency budget within the Public Works Department. No additional appropriations are required.

Special Instructions:

Direct the Clerk of the Board to email a copy of the minute order of these actions to Christina Lopez at clopez@countyofsb.org.

Attachments:

Attachment A – Santa Barbara County 2025 Groundwater Basins Summary Report

Contact Information:

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