



RCRC Comments
Water Action Plan: Sustainable Groundwater Management Workshop
Input on Groundwater Legislative Proposal
Wednesday, April 16, 2014

RCRC appreciates the opportunity to provide input on proposed legislative changes relating to groundwater management. We have previously submitted extensive comments on the Water Action Plan – Sustainable Groundwater Management. The primary focus of our comments today is on the Low Priority and Very Low Priority groundwater basins.

The December 2013 California Statewide Groundwater Elevation Monitoring (CASGEM) Program Basin Prioritization Report (CASGEM Report) ranked 46 of the 515 groundwater basins as High Priority, 80 as Medium Priority, 35 as Low Priority, and 354 as Very Low Priority. The CASGEM Report states that many of the Low and Very Low Priority groundwater basins have few people, limited irrigation, and little or no groundwater use.

RCRC urges that the laws governing groundwater management be amended to explicitly include counties in the definition of “local agency.” The current definition of “local agency” in Water Code Section 10752 defines local agency to mean “....a local public agency that provides water service to all or a portion of its service area and includes a joint powers authority formed by local public agencies that provide water service.” Counties do not as a general rule provide “water service” but can, and many do, play an important role in groundwater management. Some counties have adopted Groundwater Management Plans that cover portions of the county not covered by other local agencies, while others have adopted ordinances governing groundwater use, for example.

Counties that do not provide “water service” and/or are not a groundwater management entity do not qualify to receive state funding for groundwater projects or groundwater quality projects, including projects that are part of an integrated regional water management (IRWM) program or plan. This poses a problem as CASGEM requires counties to “volunteer” to monitor groundwater elevation in remote basins where there is no other entity to undertake the task – or lose eligibility for water-related grant and loan funding awarded or administered by the State.

RCRC urges that remote basins that are undeveloped and have no wells and/or a minimal number of wells/users (Low Priority and Very Low Priority) be excluded from any new requirements to develop a local governance structure, groundwater management plan, etc. Placing new requirements on Bulletin 118 identified basins

without consideration of the utilization (or non-utilization) of the basin is not a good use of scarce resources.

RCRC also urges that the law be changed to specifically allow counties where there is no need for a groundwater management entity/groundwater management plan, to apply for and receive state funding for the installation of monitoring wells or other activities necessary in order to comply with CASGEM requirements. Alternatively, remote basins that are undeveloped and have no wells and/or have a minimal number of wells/users (Low Priority and Very Low Priority), could be exempted from CASGEM elevation monitoring requirements.

AB 1152 (Chapter 280, Statutes of 2011) which allows for alternative monitoring of groundwater basins has not, unfortunately, resolved all the difficulties counties face as they try to comply with the CASGEM program. Excluding remote undeveloped basins with no wells would, we believe, go a long way towards resolving these difficulties.

On the issue of mandated timelines, RCRC urges that consideration be given to the number of basins to which any new requirements would apply. Many rural areas have multiple basins and any timeline should take this factor into consideration. For example, Shasta County has ten basins and Inyo County has thirty-six basins scattered throughout the county.

In conclusion, RCRC urges that:

1. The laws governing groundwater management be amended to explicitly include counties in the definition of “local agency”;
2. Remote basins that are undeveloped and have no wells and/or a minimal number of wells/users be excluded from any new requirements to develop a local governance structure, groundwater management plan, etc.;
3. The law be changed to specifically allow counties, where there is no need for a groundwater management entity/groundwater management plan, to apply for and receive state funding for the installation of monitoring wells, etc. in order to comply with CASGEM requirements; **or**, remote basins that have no wells and/or have a minimal number of wells/users be exempted from CASGEM monitoring requirements; and,
4. Mandated timelines take into consideration the number of basins to which any new requirements would apply.

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