

Cosumnes | Op-Ed on GSP

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Locals Working Together to Ensure Water Supplies

For the last four years, the Cosumnes Working Group has been developing a master plan to reverse the declining groundwater levels throughout our community. The plan is very near completion and beginning in early 2022 we'll start implementing projects and management actions to improve our local water supply. Eighty-five percent of our water in the Cosumnes basin comes from groundwater so this effort is vital to our future.

Solving this problem is complicated. But it is possible!

Our lives depend on the water stored beneath us. The collective “we” (all of us who live here, grow crops, run businesses, go to school, etc.) pump so much water out of the ground that the water levels are declining at a rate of about 1 foot per year. This current rate of decline is simply not sustainable. It puts wells at risk of going dry, threatens agriculture production, and could increase the cost of our water and decrease our quality of life here in the Cosumnes subbasin.

We can use a simple bank account metaphor to underscore the importance of this. If you consistently make larger withdrawals than deposits, sooner or later you will end up with a negative balance. If you depend on the money in this account to pay bills negative balances are more stressful and your circumstances become dire. Operating with an overdrafted account is something we all want to avoid. The goal is to save up to get a reserve going for a “rainy day.”

The same goes for groundwater. We need to start putting in more water than we take out each year to create a reserve for some very “dry days” ahead. Our persistent drought conditions shine a spotlight on this need.

This is where the plan comes in. It's officially called the Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) for the Cosumnes Subbasin. The development of the plan over the last five years has been a collaborative undertaking with input from community members, groundwater users, technical experts, hydrologists, geologists, and engineers. They've worked hard to ensure the plan meets local needs while complying with all requirements outlined in the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act – a state law requiring the development of plans throughout California by January 2022.

The plan for the Cosumnes region has been crafted by people who live and work here, by people whose daily lives will benefit from the plan's implementation. It includes projects that put more winter flood water into the groundwater aquifer (recharging) and options that reduce usage. Because the Cosumnes subbasin relies almost completely on groundwater, our goal is to ensure that groundwater in the basin continues to be a long-term resource to support our community and a healthy environment.

Of course, there are costs to implement and monitor the projects described in the GSP. Local agencies will be working hard to bring in grants and partners to cover a portion of the costs. The remaining portion of the costs will need to be generated locally.

We're not the only place in California undertaking this effort. Nearly 100 distinct regions of the state are going through the process of developing a GSP to locally manage their vital groundwater resources.

Generating these plans forces us to consider challenging realities and have difficult – yet essential - conversations about how to change our ways when business as usual is no longer defensible. This is our opportunity to take action for a better future.

DRAFT – For Working Group Discussion

We will submit our plan to the State no later than January 31, 2022. While waiting for the State's review and approval, we will begin to implement some of these projects and management actions as early as February 2022. That will give us twenty years, as required by the State law, to reverse our trend of groundwater decline, support resilience, and protect our water supplies for future generations.

The public review period for the Draft GSP is August 18 – October 20, 2021. Visit Cosumnes.WaterForum.org to view the Draft GSP chapters and learn how to submit comments. Public comments are **due by October 20, 2021**.

The Groundwater Sustainability Plan is the detailed roadmap for how the Cosumnes Subbasin will reach long-term sustainability, and the time to share your input on this Plan is now.

Signed:

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on behalf of the Cosumnes Working Group.