

Western Management Area Groundwater Sustainability Agency

Process and Criteria for Administering Written Verifications Per Executive Order N-7-22

This document describes the process and criteria that will be used by the **Groundwater Sustainability Agency (GSA) for the Western Management Area (WMA GSA)** of the Santa Ynez River Valley Groundwater Basin (Basin) to administer requests for written verifications for new well permits under Governor Newsom's Executive Order N-7-22. Santa Barbara County Environmental Health Services (EHS) is responsible for processing applications for well permits in the County, including the Western Management Area of the Basin. Currently EHS is processing water well applications in accordance with Executive Order N-7-22, the Temporary Water Well Permitting Ordinance adopted by the County Board of Supervisors on May 24, 2022 (Urgency Ordinance), and the County's May 24, 2022 Revised Water Well Permit Application (County Well Application).

Section 9(a) of Executive Order N-7-22 provides that the County shall not approve a permit for a new groundwater well or for alteration of an existing well in a basin subject to the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) and classified as medium or high-priority without first obtaining written verification from the applicable GSA managing the basin or area of the basin where the well is proposed to be located that groundwater extraction by the proposed well (1) would not be inconsistent with any sustainable groundwater management program established in any applicable Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) adopted by that GSA, and (2) would not decrease the likelihood of achieving a sustainability goal for the basin covered by the GSP.

Process Outline:

Requests for the WMA GSA to issue a written verification will be administered as set forth below. Those requesting a written verification must submit the following documentation to the WMA GSA:

1. Copy of completed County Well Application (including all related records and information)
2. Supplemental well-related information that may be requested by the WMA GSA
3. WMA GSA Acknowledgment and Agreement Form (Must be signed by owner of the property)
4. WMA GSA Indemnification Agreement (Must be signed by owner of the property)
5. WMA GSA Deposit/Reimbursement Agreement (Must be signed by owner of the property)

Upon receipt of all required documentation, a request for a written verification will be reviewed to initially determine if it can be administered on an expedited basis. Expedited processing may apply to requests relating to water wells located outside a principal groundwater aquifer as defined in the WMA GSP, or to Replacement Wells meeting specified criteria, as defined by EHS and as determined by the WMA GSA. Requests not subject to expedited review will undergo additional technical review by the WMA GSA to determine if groundwater extraction by the proposed well would be inconsistent with any sustainable groundwater management program established in the WMA GSP or would decrease the likelihood of achieving a sustainability goal for the basin covered by the GSP. Applicants may request the WMA GSA to reconsider a decision that denies a verification. All information and documentation submitted to the WMA GSA in connection with a request for a written verification shall be deemed public information unless specific exemptions apply as determined by the WMA GSA.

Submittals (1) – (5) above and questions about the written verification process can be sent to the Western Management Area Groundwater Sustainability Agency at P.O. Box 719, Santa Ynez, California 93460. Or sent electronically to wma@SantaYnezWater.org. Telephone inquiries 805-693-1156.

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Criteria Outline:

As set forth above, Section 9(a) of Executive Order N-7-22 requires a written verification from the applicable GSA to address whether groundwater extraction by a proposed well would be inconsistent with any sustainable groundwater management program established in any applicable GSP adopted by the GSA or would decrease the likelihood of achieving a sustainability goal for the basin covered by the GSP. SGMA defines sustainable groundwater management as “the management and use of groundwater in a manner that can be maintained during the planning and implementation horizon without causing undesirable results” and the WMA GSP defines its sustainability goal as follows:

To sustainably manage the groundwater resources in the Western, Central, and Eastern Management Areas to ensure that the Basin is operated within its sustainable yield for the protection of reasonable and beneficial uses and users of groundwater. The absence of undesirable results, as defined by SGMA and the Groundwater Sustainability Plans (GSPs), will indicate that the sustainability goal has been achieved. Sustainable groundwater management as implemented through the GSPs is designed to ensure that:

1. Long-term groundwater elevations are adequate to support existing and future reasonable and beneficial uses throughout the Basin;
2. A sufficient volume of groundwater storage remains available during drought conditions and recovers during wet conditions;
3. Groundwater production, and projects and management actions undertaken through SGMA, do not degrade water quality conditions or cause seawater intrusion in order to support ongoing reasonable and beneficial uses of groundwater for agricultural, municipal, domestic, industrial, and environmental purposes.

According to these standards, groundwater extraction by a proposed well in the WMA would not be inconsistent with the sustainable groundwater management program of the WMA GSP and would not decrease the likelihood of achieving its sustainability goal if the extraction would not cause undesirable results as defined in the WMA GSP, which include:

- Chronic lowering of groundwater levels indicating a significant and unreasonable depletion of supply
- Significant and unreasonable reduction in groundwater storage
- Significant and unreasonable degraded groundwater quality
- Significant and unreasonable land subsidence that substantially interferes with surface land uses
- Depletion of interconnected surface water that have impacts on beneficial uses of the surface water.
- Significant and unreasonable sea-water intrusion

As set forth by SGMA and the WMA GSP, a key indicator of whether undesirable results exist is the actual or imminent exceedance of Minimum Thresholds as defined in the GSP. (To review a copy of the GSP, please refer to https://www.santaynezwater.org/files/273c6a5e1/SYRVGB+SGMA+GSP++WMA+JAN+2022_compressed.pdf) Because Minimum Thresholds are directly tied to prevailing conditions in the WMA, the presence or absence of undesirable results is subject to change, and is reviewed on an ongoing basis by the WMA GSA. Basin conditions were most recently evaluated in the First Annual Report for the WMA (2019–2021). To review that Report, please refer to: <https://www.santaynezwater.org/wma-annual-reports>. Thank you for your cooperation in this important process.

Chris Brooks
WMA GSA Committee Chair