



Fact Sheet #1

Castac Basin’s Next Step in Complying with SGMA: Developing a Groundwater Sustainability Plan

What is SGMA?

Groundwater provides approximately one-third of the drinking water in California; it is a natural resource that sustains vital current and future needs. The Sustainable Groundwater Management Act of 2014 (SGMA) established California’s framework for managing groundwater resources. SGMA provides a process for landowners, water users, and agencies to work together to determine the best way to achieve sustainability within each groundwater basin.

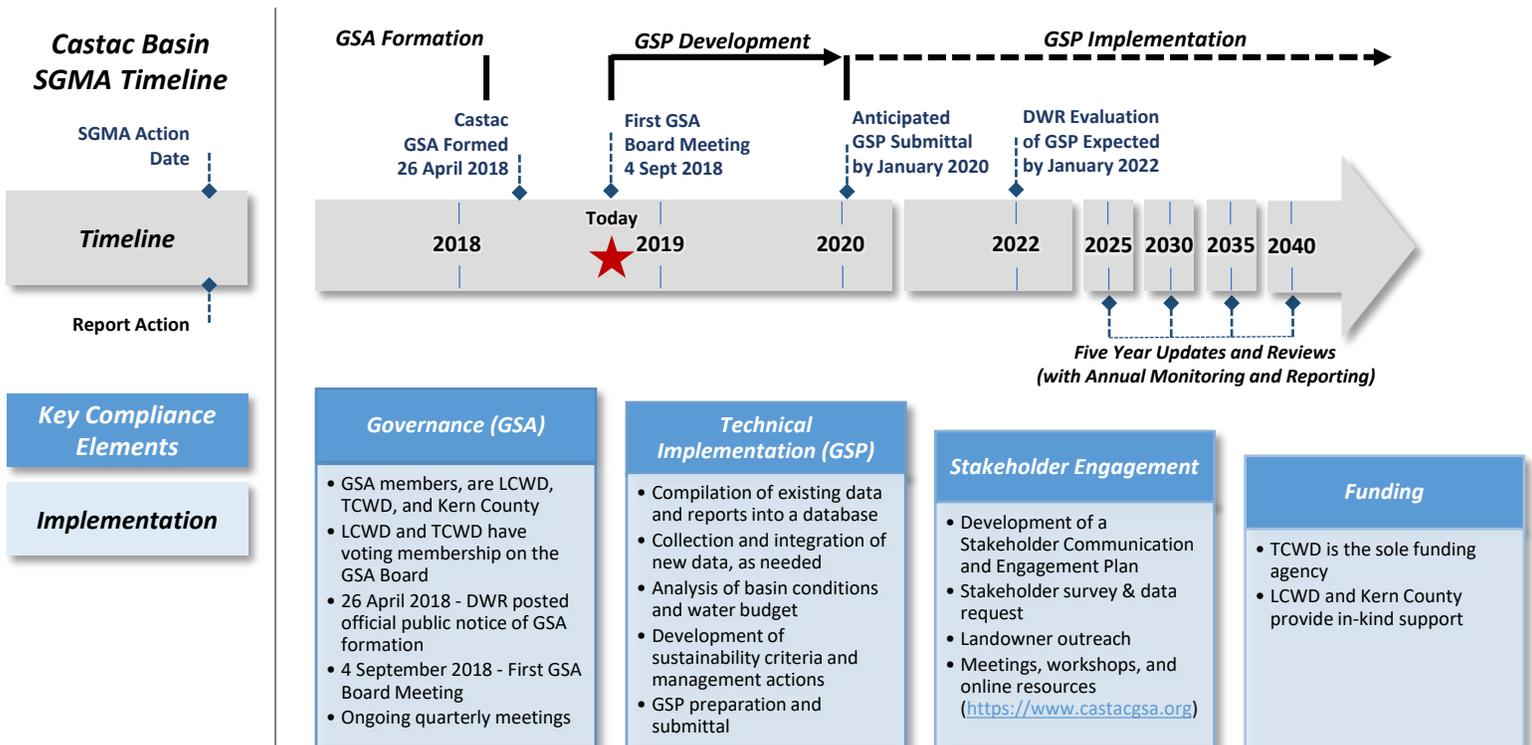
The SGMA states:

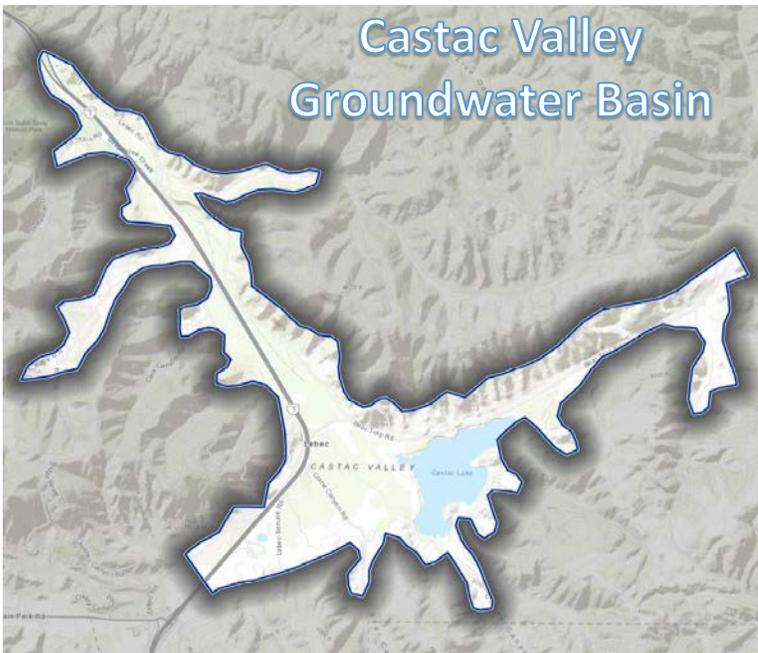
“The people of the state have a primary interest in the protection, management and reasonable beneficial use of the water resources of the state, both surface and underground, and that the integrated management of the state’s water resources is essential to meeting its water management goals.”

California’s Department of Water Resources (DWR) divides the state into 517 groundwater basins, with each assigned a priority ranking of high, medium, low, or very low, based on components identified in the California Water Code. The Castac Lake Valley Groundwater Basin (Castac Basin) is designated as a very low priority basin. The Legislature “authorizes and encourages” basins designated as very low priority to be managed under a Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) pursuant to SGMA. The Castac Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency (Castac Basin GSA) was formed in 2018 with the objective to monitor and assess groundwater conditions on a voluntary basis, and to proactively develop a GSP for the Castac Basin.

What are the key SGMA elements?

- Basins must be managed by Groundwater Sustainability Agencies
 - ✓ The Castac Basin GSA, formed in April 2018, is made up of three agencies, including Lebec County Water District (LCWD), Tejon-Castac Water District (TCWD), and Kern County
- Groundwater Sustainability Agencies must develop Groundwater Sustainability Plans
 - Castac Basin’s GSP is planned for submittal to DWR by January 2020.
- Basins must achieve clearly-defined sustainability criteria within 20 years of GSP adoption
 - Performance assessment: The GSP will be updated and reviewed every five years





How does SGMA affect Castac Basin?

Groundwater in the Castac Basin is a critical source of supply to LCWD and other local groundwater users. DWR has designated the Castac Basin as very low priority. DWR encourages (but does not require) very low priority basins to comply with SGMA and develop GSPs. The Castac Basin GSA has decided to proactively pursue groundwater sustainability by developing and implementing a GSP which will provide a transparent framework long-term protection and management of the local, shared resource.

Challenges for the Castac Basin:

- Castac Basin is the last of an interconnected chain of groundwater basins and will be affected by groundwater management in upgradient basins
- Stakeholder concerns for future growth, long-term reliability of groundwater supply, and effects of SGMA compliance
- Groundwater Dependent Ecosystems (GDEs), natural biological communities that need near-surface groundwater to survive
- Gaps in needed data – no formal active groundwater monitoring programs exist

What exactly is the GSP?

The GSP is a basin-wide plan which will set the path to maintain groundwater sustainability through SGMA's 50-year planning timeline. The GSP is required to include five major sections: 1) Description of the basin, 2) Characterization of the hydrogeologic conceptual model and water budget for the basin, 3) Criteria for sustainable management, 4) Projects and management actions to achieve sustainability, and 5) GSP implementation plans. The hydrogeologic conceptual model is an informational tool to help stakeholders understand the existing groundwater system, and will help determine where data gaps or issues may exist.

Groundwater sustainability will be determined by comparison to SGMA's six "*Sustainability Indicators*". These six quantifiable conditions define groundwater over-use when experienced at "significant and unreasonable" levels:

1. *Chronic Lowering of Groundwater Levels*
2. *Reduction of Groundwater Storage*
3. *Seawater Intrusion (in coastal basins; not a concern in Castac Basin)*
4. *Degraded Water Quality*
5. *Land Subsidence*
6. *Depletion of Interconnected Surface Water (lakes, rivers, and streams)*

The GSP will establish a measurable threshold for each sustainability indicator, providing a standard, based on local data, to determine and maintain groundwater sustainability within the Castac Basin.

How can you help?

The Castac Basin GSA's first step in developing the GSP is to gather information on groundwater pumping, water levels, and water quality (analytical lab data), which will help us understand current groundwater conditions and challenges faced by all basin residents. *Please help us out!* You can add your voice by responding to the *Stakeholder Survey and Data Request* published on the GSA's website (see below). The more data we receive, the better we will understand groundwater dynamics in the Castac Basin, which will allow more informed and thoughtful decisions for the long term.

The GSP development and implementation process is open for your input, and we welcome the participation of interested parties. Castac Basin GSA Board meetings are open to the public and include opportunities for public comment. Selected board meetings will include technical presentations by hydrogeologists, engineers, and other specialists. Two public workshops also will be held during GSP development, and a final public hearing will be held to review the draft GSP. Agendas will be published before each meeting.

Stay up-to-date by visiting the Castac Basin GSA website at: <https://www.castacqsa.org>

The Six SGMA "Sustainability Indicators"

