

CASE STUDY 2

Ventura County: Environmental Stakeholder Representation in Groundwater Sustainability Agencies



Summary: The Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) requires the preparation of groundwater sustainability plans (GSPs) for nine groundwater basins in Ventura County. The groundwater sustainability agencies (GSAs) that will prepare these plans consist of government agency and stakeholder representatives. Notably, in Ventura County, each basin is including specific representation of environmental interests in the GSP development process. The Fox Canyon Groundwater Management Agency (Fox Canyon) has included an environmental representative on its advisory committee and the other GSAs have included an environmental representative on their governing boards. The purpose of this organizational structure is to ensure that the groundwater needs of environmental uses are represented in the planning process.

Program: SGMA specifically directs the identification of groundwater dependent ecosystems (GDEs) within each groundwater basin. GDEs are plants, animals and ecological communities that are dependent upon groundwater. SGMA directs that all beneficial uses of groundwater, including GDEs, be considered as part of the planning process and ongoing management. In Ventura County representatives of these environmental beneficial uses of water have been included in groundwater planning and governance.

Three of the nine basins are under the jurisdiction of Fox Canyon, a long-established groundwater management agency. SGMA specifically designated Fox Canyon as the GSA for the three basins it manages. Because it is an existing government agency, the Board of Directors of Fox Canyon, will approve the GSP. The Fox Canyon Board determined, however, that preparation



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of its GSP would benefit from broad stakeholder participation including cities, agriculture, water agencies and advocates for environmental uses of water. Its Board

already included representatives from all these groups except for environmental stakeholder representation.

To guide technical preparation of the GSP, Fox Canyon formed a seven-member Technical Advisory Group (TAG) in 2016. All TAG members must have demonstrated knowledge of hydrology, geology or water resources. Five of the TAG members represent the constituents of one of the board members (e.g., county, cities, agriculture, large and small water agencies). To increase stakeholder representation, two additional TAG members, representing the general public and the environment, were added. Environmental stakeholders were invited to apply to be appointed to the TAG and the Board selected a representative of The Nature Conservancy as the environmental stakeholder.

The GSAs for the other six basins were new agencies, formed in 2017 and the County of Ventura is a party to each of these GSAs. The County Supervisor representing the County on the Fox Canyon Board proposed a resolution requiring environmental representation on all new GSA boards that include non-governmental representatives. There was some opposition to including environmental representatives on the GSAs, primarily from agricultural pumpers and water agencies. There was also significant support for the resolution from the environmental community and private citizens. Ultimately, the Board of Supervisors passed the resolution by a 3-2 vote and this position, including environmental representation on new GSA boards, was subsequently adopted by each of the new GSAs in Ventura County.

Status: All GSAs in Ventura County have included a non-governmental environmental representative on their governing board or on their advisory committee (in the case of Fox Canyon). Fox Canyon initiated its GSP process in 2016 and targets completion in 2018. The other new GSAs have all been formed with their environmental representative board members in place. These new GSAs are in the process of developing the capacity to support the preparation of GSPs for their respective basins.

Additional Resources:

Fox Canyon Groundwater Management Agency
<http://www.fcgma.org/>

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