Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What is the North Fork Kings Groundwater Sustainability Agency (NFKGSA)?

Short answer

A: The NFKGSA is a local public agency that was formed to 2016 to help landowners manage the groundwater in a sustainable manner and avoid long-term groundwater overdraft.

Expanded answer

A: The North Fork Kings Groundwater Sustainability Agency (NFKGSA) was created by Special Act Legislation in 2016 to serve as the Groundwater Sustainability Agency (GSA) under the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) for the southwestern portion of the Kings Groundwater Subbasin that lies within the boundaries of the GSA. In compliance with SGMA requirements, the NFKGSA developed a Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) that outlined a plan to achieve sustainable groundwater management and avoid long-term groundwater overdraft within the territory of the GSA. The GSP was submitted to the State in January 2020, and comments are expected to be received by January 2022, at which time the GSP may need to be revised to address comments that are received. The NFKGSA has been approved by the State as the exclusive local public agency with powers to comply with SGMA, including the authority to impose fees to fund the costs of implementing a groundwater sustainability program and take actions necessary to achieve groundwater sustainability within the 20-year time frame established by SGMA. Water use within the NFKGSA is predominately agricultural, with some land receiving surface water and supplementing the surface water deliveries with groundwater, and other land only pumping groundwater. Domestic water users within the GSA, comprised principally of rural residential properties and the three small communities of Laton, Riverdale and Lanare, all pump groundwater.

Q: What is the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA)?

Short answer

A: SGMA is a state law that requires high-priority groundwater basins to eliminate groundwater overdraft and prevent undesirable results by the year 2040.

Expanded answer

A: The Sustainable Groundwater Management Act was passed in 2014 by the State legislature to mandate sustainable groundwater management in portions of California determined to be a medium- or high-priority groundwater basins. The State legislature developed SGMA with the intent of having local regional agencies be responsible for managing groundwater in a sustainable manner, with oversight by the State. 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*."
"Undesirable results" are defined in SGMA as any of six primary effects caused by groundwater conditions occurring throughout the groundwater basin:

1) Chronic lowering of groundwater levels indicating a significant and unreasonable depletion of supply.
2) Significant and unreasonable reduction of groundwater storage.
3) Significant and unreasonable seawater intrusion.

4) Significant and unreasonable degraded water quality.
5) Significant and unreasonable land subsidence.
6) Depletions of interconnected surface water that has significant and unreasonable adverse impacts on beneficial uses of the surface water.

Some of these undesirable results, such as sea water intrusion, are not applicable to the NFKGSA area, while others, such as lowering of groundwater levels and reduction in groundwater storage are significant issues and need to be addressed and corrected. Each of these undesirable results was investigated and prioritized as part of the GSP development. The GSP included water level measurable goals and objectives and implementation actions to achieve and maintain groundwater basin sustainability. During the GSP implementation phase, GSAs are required to adopt programs to facilitate measures outlined in the GSP, update the GSP every 5 years, and provide the State Department of Water Resources (DWR) with annual updates on the progress of achieving sustainability. Comments from the State on the submitted GSP are expected to be received by the end of 2021, at which time the GSP may need to be revised to address comments or concerns from the State.

Q: What are the consequences if the groundwater is not managed sustainably on the local level and the State intervenes?

Short answer

A: SGMA was developed with the intent of having local regional agencies be responsible for managing groundwater in a sustainable manner, but if the local GSAs are unable or unwilling to sustainably manage their groundwater basin, then the State Board can step in (or intervene) and take over control of the groundwater.

Expanded answer

A: If local GSAs are unable or unwilling to sustainably manage their groundwater basin, the State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) can step in and take control to protect the groundwater resources using a process called state intervention. Intervention by the State Board would take away the ability of local public agencies, on behalf of our ratepayers and other stakeholders, to implement sustainable groundwater management. The State Board has stated its primary management action would be to limit the amount of groundwater that could be pumped based on what it assumes is a sustainable yield and will directly charge the fees for intervention to each groundwater extractor (landowner).

Q: Who are the other GSAs in our region and who are neighboring GSAs?

Short answer

A: There are seven total GSAs in the Kings Subbasin, three of which are adjacent to the NFKGSA. Neighboring GSAs in other subbasins include the Mid-Kings River GSA and the South Fork Kings GSA in the Tulare Lake Subbasin and the Westlands Water District GSA in the Westside Subbasin.

Expanded answer

Frequently Asked Questions

A: The North Fork Kings GSA is located in the Kings Subbasin, a hydrologic region that includes portions of Fresno, Kings and Tulare Counties. Six other GSAs have been formed that cover the remainder of the Kings Subbasin, including the North Kings GSA, Central Kings GSA, James Irrigation District GSA, Kings River East GSA, McMullin Area GSA and the South Kings GSA. All of the GSAs in the Kings Subbasin are working cooperatively together to achieve groundwater sustainability in the basin. The NFKGSA is adjacent to three of the GSAs in the Kings Subbasin (Central Kings GSA, James Irrigation District GSA and McMullin Area GSA). Neighboring GSAs in other subbasins include the Mid-Kings River GSA and the South Fork Kings GSA in the Tulare Lake Subbasin and the Westlands Water District GSA in the Westside Subbasin.

Q: What is the groundwater condition in the NFKGSA and in the Kings Subbasin as a whole?

Short answer

A: The Kings Subbasin is considered to be a high priority, critically overdrafted subbasin and the NFKGSA is one of the most overdrafted GSAs in the Kings Subbasin.

Expanded answer

A: The Kings Subbasin is considered to be a high priority, critically overdrafted subbasin, similar to most of the other subbasins in the San Joaquin Valley. Water demand has historically exceeded the captured amount of surface water and sustainable groundwater supply, leading to groundwater overdraft. The intent of SGMA is to correct the overdraft condition by balancing water demand and water supply in overdrafted subbasins. Groundwater levels have declined throughout the Kings Subbasin, but the groundwater overdraft is most pronounced in the NFKGSA and the McMullin Area GSA

Q: What authority does the NFKGSA have to impose the groundwater sustainability rules and regulations upon my land?

Short answer

A: As the exclusive local public agency approved by the State with powers to comply with SGMA, the NFKGSA has the authority under California State Law to implement the requirements of SGMA on all land within the GSA.

Expanded answer

A: As the exclusive local public agency approved by the State with powers to comply with SGMA, the NFKGSA has the authority under California State Law to implement the requirements of SGMA on all land within the GSA. Under these State laws, the NFKGSA, similar to other public agencies, can impose fees and penalties to meet the requirements of the law. All landowners are encouraged to participate in making the NFKGSA successful in achieving groundwater sustainability to prevent intervention by the State and State control of the groundwater.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Does SGMA apply to all landowners, and what are the repercussions if a landowner does not participate in the NFKGSA?

Short answer

A: SGMA applies to all landowners within the NFKGSA boundary since all landowners within the GSA boundary are users of groundwater, whether you pump the groundwater yourself or receive your water supply from a water system. If a landowner does not participate, primarily by not paying assessments or fees, the NFKGSA can put a lien on the property, similar to non-payment of a property tax.

Expanded answer

A: SGMA requires all subbasins to manage their groundwater supply to prevent undesirable results and applies to all users of groundwater. This means that SGMA applies to all landowners within the NFKGSA boundary since all landowners within the GSA boundary are users of groundwater, whether you pump the groundwater yourself or receive your water supply from a water system. If a landowner does not participate, primarily by not paying assessments or fees, the NFKGSA can put a lien on the property, similar to non-payment of a property tax. After a period of time, the lien obligations would need to be paid to avoid loss of the property to collections. There are some exemptions for landowners who only pump a small amount of water annually, known as de minimus pumpers.

Q: I have no irrigated agriculture on my property, why am I required to participate in the NFKGSA?

Short answer

A: It is important for all landowners to be engaged and participate, but if your property does not use groundwater, or very little, the impacts to you as a landowner will be very minimal.

Expanded answer

A: SGMA requires all parcels and persons that are within the defined subbasins to participate, and it is important that all landowners do their part to help stabilize the groundwater for future use. Within the NFKGSA, if your property does not use groundwater, or very little, the impacts to you as a landowner will be very minimal and you may be exempt if you qualify as a de minimus pumper.

Q: How will the NFKGSA reduce overdraft and achieve groundwater sustainability?

Short answer

A: There are basically only two ways to achieve sustainable groundwater levels and avoid undesirable results – either increase the water supply or reduce the demand for water. The GSA and local agencies in the region have plans to increase the water supply by developing projects to capture floodwater, but if sufficient quantities of additional water cannot be obtained to achieve sustainability, then reducing the water demand will be required.

Expanded answer

Frequently Asked Questions

A: There are basically only two ways to achieve sustainable groundwater levels and avoid undesirable results – either increase the water supply or reduce the demand for water. Various projects have been proposed and included in the GSP by the GSA and other local agencies to increase the water supply by capturing Kings River floodwater and recharging the groundwater for later extraction by landowners, which is the first priority. If sufficient quantities of additional water cannot be obtained to achieve sustainable groundwater levels, then reducing the water demand will be required. This might involve irrigating more efficiently, deficit irrigating, changing crops, or as a last resort fallowing crop land. Groundwater level measurements of indicator wells established throughout the GSA are gathered twice a year (spring and fall) and compared to measurable objectives that have been established to gauge how progress is being made in achieving sustainability.

Q: Are state or federal grant funds available to help pay for implementing the GSP?

Short answer

A: The NFKGSA and other local agencies do look for available grant funding opportunities that could help pay for some GSP implementation costs, but grant applications are generally very competitive.

Expanded answer

A: Grant funding opportunities are periodically available to assist with GSP implementation to comply with SGMA, and each grant program is reviewed by the NFKGSA and other local agencies for applicability. The best opportunities for grant funding have traditionally been for building groundwater recharge projects or installing monitor wells. Requests for grant funding generally exceed the amount of money available, making the process very competitive and making it harder to successfully receive grant funds.

Q: Will there be limitations imposed on how much groundwater a landowner can pump?

Short answer

A: It is likely that some reduction in water demand will be required in the NFKGSA because it is expected there will not be enough additional surface water supply available to overcome the current groundwater overdraft, meaning there may be a need to limit the amount of groundwater that can be pumped, at least in some portions of the NFKGSA.

Expanded answer

A: At some point in the future, it is likely that some reduction in water demand will be required in the NFKGSA because it is expected there will not be enough additional water supply available to overcome the current groundwater overdraft. In order to reduce water demand, a groundwater allocation may be established in the future to limit how much groundwater can be pumped, at least in some portions of the NFKGSA. A groundwater allocation would establish how much groundwater, in acre-feet, could be pumped from each acre of land. The GSA may be divided in the future into Management Areas based on surface water supply and other factors such as geology. Various Management Areas may or may not have the same groundwater allocation whenever an allocation is established. Information to determine the sustainable yield of the NFKGSA area and the amount of groundwater being used is currently

being gathered and will be used to determine the allowable groundwater allocation. It is likely that a groundwater allocation would be phased in to allow landowners time to transition to sustainability, and the GSA will evaluate the ability to aggregate annual allocations together to establish a total allocation for a period of time (maybe something like 5-year blocks).

Q: How does the NFKGSA measure the amount of groundwater consumed on my property?

Short answer

A: The NFKGSA has hired a company that utilizes a technique called remote sensing to calculate, by field and by parcel, the amount of water consumed each month. Once the amount of water use is known, the amount of groundwater utilized can be determined after accounting for surface water deliveries and the amount of precipitation used by the crop.

Expanded answer

A: The NFKGSA has recently hired a consultant that utilizes satellite data, cropping data, and weather stations within the NFKGSA to calculate, by field and by parcel, the amount of water consumed each month. The actual cropped acreage of a parcel is identified along with the crop itself. This data is available approximately 30 days after the end of each month. After accounting for surface water deliveries to the field and the amount of precipitation used by the crop, the amount of consumed groundwater can be obtained. Information on water use will be periodically mailed to all NFKGSA landowners, with the goal of establishing an online landowner water accounting system in the future.

Q: How does the surface water I receive from my irrigation district or mutual water company affect my water accounting?

Short answer

A: Surface water deliveries are in addition to the allowable amount of groundwater that can be pumped (which is still to be determined).

Expanded answer

A: The surface water available to a parcel or landowner will be added to the landowner water account (in a separate water bucket) based on the measured surface water deliveries from the irrigation districts or mutual water companies. The allowable amount of groundwater that can be pumped (which is still to be determined) on an annual basis, along with the amount of available surface water and the amount of precipitation that is beneficially used by the crop, will be compared to the crop water use on an on-going cumulative monthly basis. The monthly crop consumptive use data that is available for each individual parcel can be analyzed in different ways, such as aggregated together by Management Area or by landowner if desired.

Q: Am I required to register my well with the NFKGSA?

Short answer

Frequently Asked Questions

A: To effectively manage the groundwater supply within the NFKGSA boundary, it is necessary to have accurate information about groundwater wells (both agricultural and domestic) within the GSA, which requires identification and registration of all groundwater wells located within the NFKGSA.

Expanded answer

A: To effectively manage the groundwater supply within the NFKGSA boundary, it is necessary to have accurate information about groundwater wells (both agricultural and domestic) within the GSA, which requires identification and registration of all groundwater wells located within the NFKGSA. This registration shall include, but not be limited to, location, date of construction, well construction detail, and other such relevant information as may be determined to be necessary for implementation of the GSP and compliance with SGMA. In accordance with the NFKGSA Rules and Regulations, any new wells constructed after January 31, 2021 must be registered with the NFKGSA within 30 days of drilling completion. All existing wells owned by landowners who own sixty or more acres within the NFKGSA boundary need to be registered with the NFKGSA by July 1, 2022. All other wells must be registered by January 1, 2023. Wells can be registered by visiting the NFKGSA website at northforkkings.org.

Q: Will groundwater meters be required?

Short answer

A: Any new wells must install a flowmeter at the time of construction that meets the meter standards established by the NFKGSA. All groundwater wells within the GSA may be required to measure groundwater extraction by flowmeters at some point in the future.

Expanded answer

A: In accordance with the NFKGSA Rules and Regulations, any new wells must be registered with the NFKGSA within 30 days of drilling completion and new wells must install a flowmeter at the time of construction that meets the meter standards established by the NFKGSA. All groundwater wells within the GSA may be required to measure groundwater extraction by flowmeters at some point in the future. Metering wells, in concert with using the satellite data to estimate consumed water, will allow the NFKGSA to have reliable, accurate extraction data to more effectively track progress and achieve sustainability goals. SGMA does allow some exemptions from metering and reporting requirements for landowners who pump, for domestic purposes, less than 2 acre-feet/year, referred to as de minimus extractors.

Q: Will a groundwater credit system be established?

Short answer

A: The NFKGSA is in the process of establishing a groundwater credit program where landowners who use their own land or facilities to recharge the groundwater within the NFKGSA boundaries can generate “groundwater credits” for future use if/when a groundwater allocation program is established.

Expanded answer

Frequently Asked Questions

A: The NFKGSA is in the process of establishing a groundwater credit program where landowners who use their own land or facilities to recharge the groundwater within the NFKGSA boundaries can generate "groundwater credits" for future use if/when a groundwater allocation program is established. Landowners would need to apply to participate in the program, and then annually report the amount of groundwater credit achieved. This program will allow landowners to apply the groundwater credits to their own beneficial use within the GSA boundaries, and if established by the NFKGSA, allow a landowner to transfer credits he has generated to another landowner for use within the NFKGSA.

Q: How can I participate?

Short answer

A: Landowners are encouraged to become engaged and participate by signing up for the Interested Persons email distribution list at the GSA website (northforkkings.org) and to read the periodic NFKGSA newsletter and attend the monthly meetings of the NFKGSA Board of Directors.

Expanded answer

A: Landowners are encouraged to become engaged and keep up to date with planning and implementation activities for the NFKGSA by visiting the GSA website at northforkkings.org and signing up for our Interested Persons email distribution list. You are encouraged to read the periodic NFKGSA newsletter, and you are also invited to attend and participate at the monthly meetings of the NFKGSA Board of Directors.