

Groundwater Management Strategy, Confidential Water District

A circular inset photograph showing an outdoor water treatment facility. In the foreground, there are several large, white cylindrical tanks with various pipes and valves. In the background, there are more industrial structures, including a large white building, and a clear sky with some distant hills or mountains under a bright sun.

Under the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA), 127 groundwater basins in California must develop a Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) by January 2020 or 2022, and achieve groundwater sustainability by 2040 or 2042, depending on whether a basin is subject to critical overdraft.

Assembly Bill (AB) 1390 establishes a new framework for adjudication of groundwater rights in a basin. This new framework facilitates expedited determinations regarding all groundwater rights and priorities of a basin, and the use of aquifer storage space in the basin. AB 1390 also allows courts to issue preliminary injunctions in basins with a condition of long-term overdraft, placing a moratorium on new or increased extraction.

In some groundwater basins, a public agency or major pumpers may elect to solely pursue management under SGMA, or they may run a parallel process to adjudicate the basin, or they may use the adjudication process to supplant SGMA. The decision on a path forward may be dictated by technical and/or legal considerations and the relationship between the major pumpers and the Groundwater Sustainability Agency (GSA). That is, if the major pumpers feel that a GSA will develop a GSP that serves their interests, then they will support the SGMA process. However, if they feel that their interests are better served outside of SGMA, they may elect to pursue an expedited adjudication.

For this project, located in two adjacent groundwater basins, the water district that pumps groundwater is not the GSA. Thus, a separate public agency (the GSA), that does not pump groundwater, may dictate to the water district how groundwater will be managed within each basin. The water district has retained **aquilogic** to develop a strategy to more effectively manage groundwater in a way that protects its interests. As part of this work, **aquilogic** is evaluating hydrogeologic conditions, basin boundary conditions, water budget and safe yield, and historical pumping activity, amongst other technical elements. In addition, we are developing an approach to SGMA that will facilitate the development of a GSP that more effectively considers the water district's needs.