

DATE: November 20, 2015

TO: Affected local agencies, tribes, state and federal land management agencies, public water suppliers, and other potentially interested stakeholder parties

FROM: Inyo County Water Department and Tri Valley Groundwater Management District

SUBJECT: Input solicited concerning modifications to the boundaries of the Owens Valley Groundwater Basin.

Notification/invitation

The Inyo County Water Department and Tri-Valley Groundwater Management District staff will hold a meeting **December 9, 2015, 6:00 PM** at the Bishop City Council Chambers, 301 West Line Street, Bishop, California to provide a public forum to share information and receive public comment on a possible redrawing of the mapped boundary of the Owens Valley Groundwater Basin (as delineated in California Department of Water Resources Bulletin 118, Basin 6-12). For further information on the meeting, contact Laura Piper at (760) 878-0001, lpiper@inyocounty.us; for further information on the proposed boundary modification, contact Bob Harrington at (760) 878-0001, bharrington@inyocounty.us; or Brent Calloway at (760) 924-1809, bcalloway@mono.ca.gov.

Background

Groundwater basin boundaries throughout California are established based on the extent of alluvial aquifers, and are described in a publication of the Department of Water Resources (DWR) called Bulletin 118. Recently the boundaries of basins described in Bulletin 118 have taken on greater significance with the passage of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act of 2014 (SGMA). SGMA makes certain basins subject to new groundwater regulations based on priorities assigned to the basins by DWR (e.g., very low priority, low priority, medium priority, or high priority). These priorities, in turn, are determined using a number of factors including amount of groundwater extraction, number of wells, overlying use, etc.

The Owens Valley Groundwater Basin delineated in Bulletin 118 encompasses large areas within both Inyo and Mono Counties, and has been identified by DWR as a medium priority basin making it one of the basins subject to regulation under the SGMA.

However, SGMA provides that local entities may seek modifications to the groundwater basin boundaries set forth in Bulletin 118 based on either hydrologic or jurisdictional justifications. The California Water Commission has adopted regulations laying out a framework by which local agencies may request these revisions. DWR will accept requests from local agencies for boundary revisions for at least 90 days following January 1, 2016. In 2017, DWR will publish an interim update to Bulletin 118 with any boundary revisions approved by DWR. Basins will then be re-prioritized by DWR based on the revised boundaries.

In the interest of managing groundwater on a sound hydrogeologic basis with a minimum of jurisdictional obstacles, Inyo County and the Tri Valley Groundwater Management District are considering seeking a revision to the boundaries of the Owens Valley Groundwater Basin that would divide the existing basin into two subbasins, one comprising Benton, Hammil, and Chalfant Valleys (the Tri-Valley Subbasin), and one comprising the Owens Valley (the Owens Valley subbasin). The boundary between the two subbasins is proposed to correspond to the Inyo-Mono County line between Chalfant Valley and Laws (see attached map). The purpose of the meeting on December 9, 2015 will be for Inyo County Water Department and Tri Valley Groundwater Management District staff to share information concerning a possible groundwater basin boundary modification and for the public to comment on groundwater basin boundary revisions. Subsequent to the December 9 meeting, the Inyo County Board of Supervisors and the Tri-Valley Groundwater Management District Board will consider whether to submit the proposed boundary modification to the California Department of Water Resources.

Additional Information about the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act

The Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) gives local agencies the authority (and in some cases the obligation) to manage groundwater in a sustainable manner. SGMA defines sustainable groundwater management as management and use of groundwater that can be maintained without causing undesirable results, where “undesirable results” means any of the following:

- Chronic lowering of groundwater levels indicating a significant and unreasonable depletion of supply;
- Significant and unreasonable reduction of groundwater storage;
- Significant and unreasonable seawater intrusion;
- Significant and unreasonable degraded water quality;
- Significant and unreasonable land subsidence;
- Depletions of interconnected surface water that have significant and unreasonable adverse impacts on beneficial uses of surface water.

Under SGMA, a Groundwater Sustainability Agency (GSA) must be formed for all medium and high priority basins by June 30, 2017. Entities eligible to act as a GSA are local public agencies with water supply, water management, or land use responsibilities. GSAs are responsible for developing and implementing Groundwater Sustainability Plans (GSPs) by June 31, 2020 in basins identified as subject to critical conditions of overdraft, and by January 31, 2022 in all other medium and high priority basins. GSPs should provide management that will achieve sustainability by twenty years following adoption of the GSP.

SGMA provides a number of institutional arrangements by which local agencies can form GSAs, with the goal that each medium and high priority basin will be entirely covered by a GSP or multiple GSPs implemented by a GSA or multiple GSAs. Where no other eligible local entity exists, SGMA places responsibility for establishing GSAs and GSPs on counties. If local entities do not form and implement GSAs and/or GSPs, SGMA requires that the State Water Resources Control Board step in and impose an interim GSP at the expense of eligible local entities. Since

groundwater basins are the targeted management unit, the definition of groundwater basin boundaries affects how GSAs and GSPs will be formed and how basins are prioritized. Of particular importance to counties is the correspondence between groundwater basin and subbasin boundaries and county boundaries.

SGMA has certain jurisdictional provisions specific to Owens Valley. In the Mono County portion of the basin, the Mono County Tri Valley Groundwater Management District is deemed the exclusive local agency within its boundaries, and therefore would be the GSA for the Mono County portion of the basin unless the District decides to forego that role. In the Inyo County portion of the basin, SGMA provides that “*Any groundwater basin or portion of a groundwater basin in Inyo County managed pursuant to the terms of the stipulated judgement in City of Los Angeles v. Board of Supervisors of the County of Inyo, et al. (Inyo County Case No. 12908) shall be treated as an adjudicated area pursuant to [SGMA]*” (CWC 10720.8 (c)). Although SGMA does not require adjudicated areas to form GSAs and develop and implement GSPs, the parties to the adjudication are required to annually report to the State groundwater elevations, groundwater extraction, surface water used for recharge, total water use, change in groundwater storage, and annual report(s) to the court. Since the adjudication applies only to a portion of Owens Valley, GSA formation and GSP preparation are applicable to the non-adjudicated lands in the Inyo County portion of the basin.

Further information on SGMA is available on the California Department of Water Resources groundwater website: <http://www.water.ca.gov/groundwater/>

