

PASO BASIN COORDINATING COMMITTEE
PROPOSED STATEMENT OF EQUITY
FINAL DRAFT – OFFERED FOR ADOPTION
April 28, 2023

Groundwater in the Paso Robles Subbasin is a shared resource that the GSAs that are party to this GSP seek to manage for the benefit of all Subbasin users, consistent with their rights under the California Constitution and state statutes. The management framework established by SGMA and this GSP is inherently focused on assuring both sustainable and equitable access to and use of this shared resource.

Sustainable management of a reliable groundwater supply is crucial to the ongoing health and wellbeing of our communities' residents and their economic interests, especially our valued agricultural economy – and also crucial to the natural environment upon which that economy depends.

The concept of equity is explicit in state statute. As noted on the State Water Resources Control Board website, in Water Code Section 106.3 “the state statutorily recognizes that ‘every human being has the right to safe, clean, affordable, and accessible water adequate for human consumption, cooking, and sanitary purposes.’ The human right to water extends to all Californians, including disadvantaged individuals and groups and communities in rural and urban areas.”

Achieving equitable access to Subbasin groundwater faces several challenges:

- Users are located in diverse settings relative to the Subbasin's hydrogeology.
- Users' water supplies are managed in diverse jurisdictional settings (a city, a community services district, a county service area, small mutual water supply systems and individual wells in unincorporated rural areas).
- The Subbasin includes diverse land use patterns, including highly urbanized areas, rural residential lots, and both small and large irrigated agricultural operations, some of which include commercial facilities such as wineries, tasting rooms and lodging.
- Within irrigated agricultural operations – which collectively use the vast majority of groundwater – there is currently wide variation in the amount of irrigation water applied (acre-ft/acre), depending on crop type and cultural practice.
- The economic resources of individual Subbasin users vary widely.
- As stated in Water Code Section 10720.5, no action under SGMA can alter groundwater rights as determined under California common law or statute.

The central premise of SGMA is that the Subbasin's groundwater is sustainably managed and reasonably accessible to all users. Management actions in this GSP will be developed to seek equity in light of the diverse conditions noted.

Equity in achieving these goals requires that no user is precluded from maintaining reasonable access to groundwater because they lack financial resources. For example, the management objectives and minimum thresholds outlined in this GSP (Chapter 8) admit the possibility of shallow wells going dry. Such wells often serve disadvantaged residential communities and users who may be challenged to pay for improvements like deepening the well or drilling a new one.

Issues of equity should also be addressed in the distribution of water used for irrigation on different crop production sites. All GSP management efforts (supply enhancement, demand reduction, use allocations) should provide equitable opportunity for all land owners to participate and provide equitable allocation of costs and incentives.

All GSAs responsible for the development and administration of this GSP agree that the management actions established for the Paso Robles Subbasin will uphold the principles of equity outlined above.