

POSITION STATEMENT ON SONOMA COUNTY GROUNDWATER ISSUES

SONOMA GROUP OF SIERRA CLUB

There is a groundwater crisis in Sonoma County. The water table has dropped below the pump depth of wells in many areas. Well drillers must go deeper to find water. Residents in many rural areas are now dependent upon delivery by water truck. Springs are drying up. Creeks are dry in the summer and fall. Residents are affected, as are the many endangered and threatened species that are dependent on water.

The courts have held that cities and counties may regulate groundwater use at the local level. More than two dozen California counties, including Napa County, now have groundwater ordinances. Now is the opportunity to incorporate into this General Plan Update a framework for responding to this crisis, and guide policy decisions for the next 20 years.

The Sonoma Group of the Sierra Club supports the following positions on groundwater, and recommends they be incorporated into Water Element of the General Plan Update:

1. More systematic gathering of information on groundwater, as called for in the draft Water Resources Element (WRE) of the Sonoma County General Plan Update.
2. A countywide groundwater management plan consisting of two primary elements:
 - a) Specific groundwater management plans for each of the major groundwater basins in the County including the Santa Rosa Plain, Sonoma Valley, Petaluma Valley, Napa-Sonoma Volcanics and the Alexander Valley, and,
 - b) Administrative and legal support for residents of outlying water-scarce areas to create groundwater management districts to administer correlative water rights locally by establishing programs to monitor, meter, conserve and increase groundwater recharge.

3. Effective measures to halt the loss of groundwater recharge capacity that results from increases in impervious surfaces. Proactive measures are also required to begin to reduce impervious surfaces and encourage land use practices that increase groundwater recharge.

4. A modified CEQA process of discretionary regulation to address the cumulative impact of new agricultural wells and new residential wells on existing water users and upon creeks in all areas of the County.

5. Specific deadlines for studies to be commissioned, reports to be submitted and mitigation adopted in the 'special study areas' proposed in the draft Water Resource Element.

6. County intervention on behalf of residents in unincorporated areas adjacent to cities, where wells are being affected by municipal wells.