

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

## BORREGO SPRINGS WATERMASTER GROUNDWATER MONITORING PROGRAM

### 1. What is “sustainable groundwater management” and why is it important in Borrego Springs?

The groundwater basin underlying Borrego Springs (the “Basin”) is the *only* source of water for the people and businesses in the Borrego Valley. For decades, groundwater pumping of the Basin has outpaced the natural recharge, and as a result, groundwater levels steadily declined. This condition of severe “overdraft” of the Basin caused the State of California to designate it as a “critically overdrafted basin.”

In 2014, the State of California enacted the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA), which requires the users of a groundwater basin to develop and implement a “groundwater sustainability plan” so that the Basin will avoid the undesirable results associated with overuse and overdraft of groundwater, such as degradation of water quality or chronic lowering of groundwater levels. The goal of the groundwater sustainability plan is to ensure that the Basin remains a usable water supply in perpetuity.

In Borrego Springs, the groundwater basin users prepared a *Groundwater Management Plan* for the Basin, which describes the groundwater management activities that are necessary to achieve sustainable groundwater management pursuant to SGMA. The main feature of the Groundwater Management Plan is a gradual reduction in the annual volume of pumping from the Basin to halt overdraft conditions by 2040.<sup>1</sup> Other features include the establishment of criteria that define sustainable groundwater management, an initial groundwater monitoring program, and a conceptual description of activities to maintain the chemical quality of groundwater so that it’s suitable for its intended uses (*e.g.*, irrigation, drinking, etc.).

The Groundwater Management Plan was included in an adjudication of groundwater pumping rights, which was filed in the Superior Court of California on April 8, 2021 (referred to as the Judgment).<sup>2</sup> The Judgment is a Court Order, that together with the Groundwater Management Plan, defines a “Physical Solution” to sustainably manage the Basin in a manner consistent with the objectives of SGMA. The Groundwater Management Plan is Exhibit 1 to the Judgment. Implementation of the Judgment and the Groundwater Management Plan is expected to halt overdraft by 2040 and maintain the beneficial uses of the Basin.

### 2. What is the Borrego Springs Watermaster?

The Judgment established a groundwater management entity called the *Borrego Springs Watermaster* to implement the Judgment and the Groundwater Management Plan. The Watermaster is a committee of five (5) representatives of the major stakeholders in the basin,

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<sup>1</sup> An individual that pumps less than two (2) acre-feet per year is a so-called *De Minimis Pumper* and is not subject to this regulation of pumping under the Judgment.

<sup>2</sup> *Borrego Water District v. All Persons Who Claim a Right To Extract Groundwater in the Borrego Valley Groundwater Subbasin No. 7.024 Whether Based on Appropriation, Overlying Right, or Other Basis of Right, and/or Who Claim a Right to Use of Storage Space in the Subbasin; et al.* (Case No. 37-2020-00005776).  
<https://borregospringswatermaster.com/documents/>

including: Borrego Water District, recreation/golf, agriculture, County of San Diego, and the community. The Watermaster convenes monthly meetings to conduct its business and prepares an annual budget and assessment to fund its operations and activities. The Watermaster maintains a website at [www.borregospringswatermaster.com](http://www.borregospringswatermaster.com) for the purpose of disseminating important documents and data for the Watermaster parties and the public. The Watermaster also conducts groundwater and surface-water monitoring programs within the Basin to support the implementation of the Judgment.

**3. Why is groundwater monitoring important?**

Monitoring of groundwater provides critical information that informs the Watermaster of individual pumpers' compliance with the Judgment, the effectiveness of the Groundwater Management Plan in making progress towards groundwater sustainability, and any adaptation of the Groundwater Management Plan that is necessary to achieve sustainability. The main types of monitoring data collected by the Watermaster include: groundwater pumping; groundwater levels; and groundwater quality. The Watermaster stores the monitoring data in databases and uses the data to perform studies and prepare required reports.

**4. If I volunteer to participate in the Watermaster's groundwater monitoring program, what will I be asked to do?**

You will be asked to provide any available information about your well (e.g., well driller's log, etc.). Watermaster staff will visit your well to assess the feasibility of monitoring and understand the logistics of communication and site access. If your well is deemed by the Watermaster to be suitable for monitoring, you will need to execute an Entry Permit with the Watermaster. The Entry Permit is intended to protect the well owner from liability for damage and injury resulting from Watermaster's entry onto the parcel, provide for advance notice of site visits, limit activities on the parcel to those necessary to accomplish the monitoring, ensure the safety of Watermaster staff, and avoid undue interference with agricultural or other business activities on the parcel. Ongoing monitoring at your well will likely include semi-annual visits by Watermaster staff to measure depth-to-groundwater and/or collect a groundwater sample for chemical analyses at an accredited environmental laboratory.

**5. If I volunteer to participate in the Watermaster's groundwater monitoring program, will it cost me anything?**

No. The Watermaster is asking for your cooperation to conduct the monitoring at your well but will cover all monitoring costs. And, upon your request, the Watermaster will provide the data collected at the well to you free of cost.

**6. How will data collected from my well be used?**

The Watermaster will use the data collected from your well to support its required studies of the groundwater basin to assess its efforts to achieve sustainable groundwater management and adapt the Groundwater Management Plan, if necessary. The Watermaster also will use your data in required reporting to the Court and the State of California. All data collected at your well(s) will be shared with you upon request.

**7. Is the Watermaster responsible for regulating drinking water quality?**

No. The municipal groundwater supply served by the Borrego Water District (BWD) is regulated for drinking water quality by the Division of Drinking Water at the State Water Resources Control Board. The BWD performs regular, required sampling of its pumping wells to demonstrate compliance with the drinking water standards. Privately-owned wells fall outside federal and state regulation because they are on private land and are not covered by the federal Safe Drinking Water Act. Private wells are not subject to the same periodic testing and monitoring requirements as public water systems. Private well owners are responsible for the safety of their own water supply. The federal and state governments and non-profit organizations offer information regarding the importance of testing private wells and guidance on technologies that may be used to treat or remove any contaminants:

<https://www.epa.gov/privatewells>

<https://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/drinking/private/wells/index.html>

[https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water\\_issues/programs/gama/well\\_owners.html](https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/gama/well_owners.html)

<https://www.watereducation.org/post/private-wells>

The Watermaster's responsibility for managing groundwater quality is more broadly associated with the groundwater basin and its three defined management areas (North, Central, and South). The Watermaster is responsible for ensuring that degradation of groundwater quality does not impair the existing uses of the basin, such as for drinking and irrigation, but is not responsible for regulating water quality at individual wells. The Groundwater Management Plan requires the Watermaster to conduct regular monitoring at a network of representative wells across the basin for a list of Constituents of Concern (COCs), including: total dissolved solids (salinity), nitrate, arsenic, sulfate, and fluoride. If, based on the monitoring results, the Watermaster determines that changes in groundwater quality are significant and unreasonable following consideration of the cause of impact, the affected beneficial use, and potential remedies, then the Watermaster will design and implement management actions (conceptually described in the Groundwater Management Plan) to maintain the intended uses of groundwater basin.

**8. Can the data collected from my well be held confidential?**

The Watermaster must make available to the State of California the groundwater-level and groundwater-quality data collected from your well, and in the event of a public request for information, must disclose these data. However, the personal information about the well owner, address, precise well location, and water production information will not be disclosed.<sup>3</sup> At the request of any well owner, the Watermaster can prepare a Data Confidentiality Agreement to memorialize the well owner's data confidentiality needs, to the extent possible.

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<sup>3</sup> See Watermaster Resolution 20-03 (<https://borregospringswatermaster.com/watermaster-resolutions/>) and [Section 10730.8](#) of the SGMA regulations.