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Consideration of Interests of Beneficial Uses and Users of Groundwater Eel River Valley Groundwater Basin

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Overview

The purpose of this document is to explain how the interests of all beneficial uses and users of groundwater will be considered during the development and implementation of the Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) for the Eel River Valley groundwater basin, in accordance with Water Code Section 10723.2 and the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA).

Background

On May 5, 2020, the Humboldt County Board of Supervisors adopted Resolution 20-39 authorizing formation of the Humboldt County Groundwater Sustainability Agency (GSA) for the Eel River Valley groundwater basin. Humboldt County will work with water users and interested stakeholders to develop a GSP by January 2022 with funding from the California Department of Water Resources (DWR).

The Eel River Valley groundwater basin's boundaries encompass approximately 72,957 acres and 21,558 residents, with nearly half of this population residing within the City of Fortuna. The basin encompasses the City of Fortuna, City of Ferndale, City of Rio Dell, and the unincorporated communities of Loleta, Carlotta, Hydesville, and Scotia. The basin is bisected by the Eel River and its tributary, the Van Duzen River, both of which provide habitat for anadromous salmonids and other fish and aquatic species. The basin is a coastal basin which drains to the ocean and intersects with salt water along the coastline. A study performed in 2016 estimated that approximately 13,558 acres of agricultural lands were irrigated with groundwater, of which more than 85% was applied to grazed pasture or hay and alfalfa production for livestock. Other crop types include corn, quinoa, and cannabis.

Operation of an Advisory Committee

Humboldt County formed the Eel River Valley Groundwater Working Group in October 2015. The working group consists of stakeholders representing agricultural, municipal, and environmental interests. The working group has met periodically to provide information and viewpoints, support the collection and analysis of technical data, and advise the County on the local response to SGMA within the basin. The working group has been the primary means of sharing information and soliciting input from stakeholders, along with a groundwater website and appearances at other public meetings.

Resolution 20-39 provides direction to transition the working group to a Groundwater Resources Advisory Committee that would advise the Board of Supervisors on groundwater matters in the Eel River Valley and provide guidance and assistance to Humboldt County Public Works in developing the GSP. The Advisory Committee will operate under the Brown Act and conduct publicly noticed meetings in

which interested parties and members of the public will be invited to provide comments. The Humboldt County Board of Supervisors is expected to adopt bylaws for the Advisory Committee later in 2020.

Stakeholder Groups

Pursuant to Water Code Section 10723.2, the GSA will consider the interests of all beneficial uses and users of groundwater. These interests include, but are not limited to, all of the following:

- **Agricultural Users** – Approximately 20% of the basin area is utilized by agricultural users who are solely reliant on groundwater for their irrigation needs. Agricultural users include dairies and beef or crop producers. Organizations representing the interests of agricultural users include the Humboldt County Farm Bureau.
- **Domestic well owners** – Domestic well owners are located within the GSA boundaries on rural residential and agricultural properties.
- **Municipal well operators** – The City of Fortuna and City of Rio Dell are municipal well operators within the GSA boundaries.
- **Public water systems** – Public water system operators within the GSA boundaries not included in the municipal well operator category above include the Del Oro Water Company (Ferndale area), Loleta Community Services District, Hydesville Community Services District, Palmer Creek Community Services District, Riverside Community Services District, and Bear River Band of the Rohnerville Rancheria.
- **Local land use planning agencies** – Local land use planning agencies include County of Humboldt, City of Fortuna, City of Rio Dell, and City of Ferndale.
- **Environmental users of groundwater** – Groundwater serves to replenish surface waters such as the Eel and Van Duzen Rivers which have multiple beneficial uses including cold freshwater habitat, water recreation, and sport fishing. Humboldt County will consult with interested non-profit organizations active within the basin, along with the California Department of Fish & wildlife, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, and National Marine Fisheries Service.
- **Surface water users** – Surface water users include the City of Rio Dell and Scotia Community Services District. In addition, Humboldt County will review the State Water Resources Control Board's Electronic Water Rights Information Management System (eWRIMS) to review information on surface water rights within the GSA boundaries.
- **Federal government, including but not limited to military and managers of federal lands** – Humboldt County is not aware of any federally managed lands within the GSA boundaries. The GSA will consult with U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, National Marine Fisheries Service, and the U.S. Geological Survey.
- **California Native American Tribes** – Native American Tribes located within the GSA boundaries include the Bear River Band of the Rohnerville Rancheria. In addition, the Wiyot Tribe has a close cultural connection to the lower Eel River.
- **Disadvantaged communities, including, but not limited to, those served by private domestic wells or small community water systems** – The basin contains five census designated places (Loleta, Fortuna, Ferndale, Rio Dell, and Scotia) which are Economically Distressed Areas (EDAs), based on DWR's EDA Mapping Tool (<https://gis.water.ca.gov/app/edas/>). The percentage of the basin population situated within an EDA is 77%.
- **Entities listed in Water Code section 10927 that are monitoring and reporting groundwater elevations in all or part of the groundwater basin managed by the groundwater sustainability agency**- Humboldt County and DWR collaborate on the monitoring and reporting of groundwater elevations within the basin under the California Statewide Groundwater Elevation Monitoring (CASGEM) program.

Stakeholder Engagement

An Outreach and Communications Plan for the preparation of the GSP will be prepared to ensure that interested parties have opportunities to be informed about progress and opportunities to provide input and feedback. The target date for completion of this plan is August 2020. The primary elements of Humboldt County's initial engagement approach are listed below. The plan will need to be adjusted to account for the limitations of in-person meetings caused by the COVID-19 public health crisis.

A minimum of eight stakeholder meetings of the Eel River Valley Groundwater Working Group or Groundwater Resources Advisory Committee will be convened. Information and updates will be provided at a minimum of sixteen meetings involving the Humboldt County Board of Supervisors, city councils and special district boards within the basin, the Bear River Band of the Rohnerville Rancheria tribal council, the Humboldt County Farm Bureau, the Eel River Forum, or similar public venues. A user-friendly website will be developed and interim work products (e.g., work plans and technical memoranda) will be posted. At least three handouts (fact sheets) will be prepared. At least three letters and handouts will be sent to all municipal, agricultural, and industrial water users within the basin.

Humboldt County will retain an outreach specialist and collaborate with the Humboldt County Resource Conservation District on stakeholder engagement. The outreach specialist will have specialized knowledge, experience, and working relationships with the agricultural community in the basin.

Interested Parties List

Humboldt County maintains an Interested Parties list in accordance with Water Code Section 10723.4. Individuals on this list will receive notices regarding meeting announcements, milestones related to preparation of the GSP, and invitations to events. Members of the public can be placed on this list through Humboldt County's groundwater website, <https://humboldt.gov/2489/Groundwater>. Opportunities to join the list will be provided during meetings and through periodic handouts. As of May 2020, the list has a total of approximately 143 parties.