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SIERRA VALLEY SUBBASIN

Periodic Evaluation



Prepared by:

lwa

LARRY WALKER
ASSOCIATES

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List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

<u>Acronym / Abbreviation</u>	<u>Full Term</u>
AEM	Airborne Electromagnetic
AF	Acre-Feet
AFY	Acre-Feet per Year
AMSL	Above Mean Sea Level
AR	Annual Report
BMP	Best Management Practices
The Basin	Sierra Valley Groundwater Basin
CASGEM	California Statewide Groundwater Elevation Monitoring
CDFW	California Department of Fish and Wildlife
CEQA	California Environmental Quality Act
CFS	Cubic Feet per Second
COC	Constituent of Concern
DMS	Data Management System
DMW	Monitoring-Well Identifier or Prefix
DWR	California Department of Water Resources
EO	Executive Order
FCWCD	Plumas County Flood Control and Water Conservation District
GDE	Groundwater Dependent Ecosystem
GSA	Groundwater Sustainability Agency
GSP	Groundwater Sustainability Plan
GW	Groundwater
IM	Interim Milestone
InSAR	Interferometric Synthetic Aperture Radar
ISW	Interconnected Surface Water
LCCWD	Last Chance Creek Water District
LEPA	Low Energy Precision Application
LWA	Larry Walker Associates

Acronym / Abbreviation**Full Term**

MAR	Managed Aquifer Recharge
MFR	Mountain Front Recharge
MO	Measurable Objective
MODFLOW	MODFLOW Groundwater-Flow Model
MT	Minimum Threshold
MTBE	Methyl Tert-Butyl Ether
NDVI	Normalized Difference Vegetation Index
PE	Periodic Evaluation
PMA	Project and Management Action
POD	Point of Diversion
PRMS	Precipitation-Runoff Modeling System
RCA	Recommended Corrective Action
RMP	Representative Monitoring Point
RFQ	Request for Qualifications
SCP	Subsidence Monitoring Control Point
SGMA	Sustainable Groundwater Management Act
SMC	Sustainable Management Criteria
SOQ	Statement of Qualifications
SVELC	Sierra Valley Enterprises Loyalton Campus
SVGMD	Sierra Valley Groundwater Management District
SVHSM	Sierra Valley Hydrogeologic System Model
SWRCB	State Water Resources Control Board
TAC	Technical Advisory Committee
TAF	Thousand Acre-Feet
TDS	Total Dissolved Solids
TMDL	Total Maximum Daily Load
UR	Undesirable Result
USGS	United States Geological Survey
WCR	Well Completion Report

Acronym / Abbreviation

WY####

Full Term

Water Year (e.g., WY2025). Water years run from October 1 through September 30.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Sierra Valley Groundwater Management District (SVGMD), the lead Groundwater Sustainability Agency (GSA) for the Sierra Valley Groundwater Basin (the Basin) (California Department of Water Resources (DWR) Basin No. 5-012.01), has prepared this first Periodic Evaluation (PE) of the Sierra Valley Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) in compliance with the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) (California Water Code, Section 10720 et seq.). This PE covers the period from Water Year (WY) 2021 through WY2025 and summarizes GSP implementation activities, monitoring results, and progress toward achieving the Basin's sustainability goal. In some cases, discussion or analyses may use information or data from WY2026; however, this is additional information because the formal reporting period extends only through WY2025.

The GSP was adopted and submitted to DWR in January 2022 and approved by DWR in August 2023 with seven corrective actions identified for continued implementation. Table 0-1 lists the corrective actions provided by DWR. The SVGMD has made substantial progress toward addressing these corrective actions through expanded monitoring, data evaluation, and continued stakeholder coordination.

Table 0-1 Summaries of DWR Recommended Corrective Actions

RCA Number	RCA	Section Addressed
1	Investigate basin and identify appropriate principal aquifer(s)	4.1.1
2	Explain use of adjacent Chilcoat Subbasin data	4.2.5
3	Define Specific levels for significant/unreasonable groundwater lowering effects	2.1.1
4	Justify using 2021 versus 2015 water quality baseline	2.4.9
5	Establish quantitative land subsidence criteria and monitoring network	2.5.1
6	Develop methods to evaluate interconnected surface water depletion	2.6.1
7	Provide detailed monitoring network information for all indicators	5.5

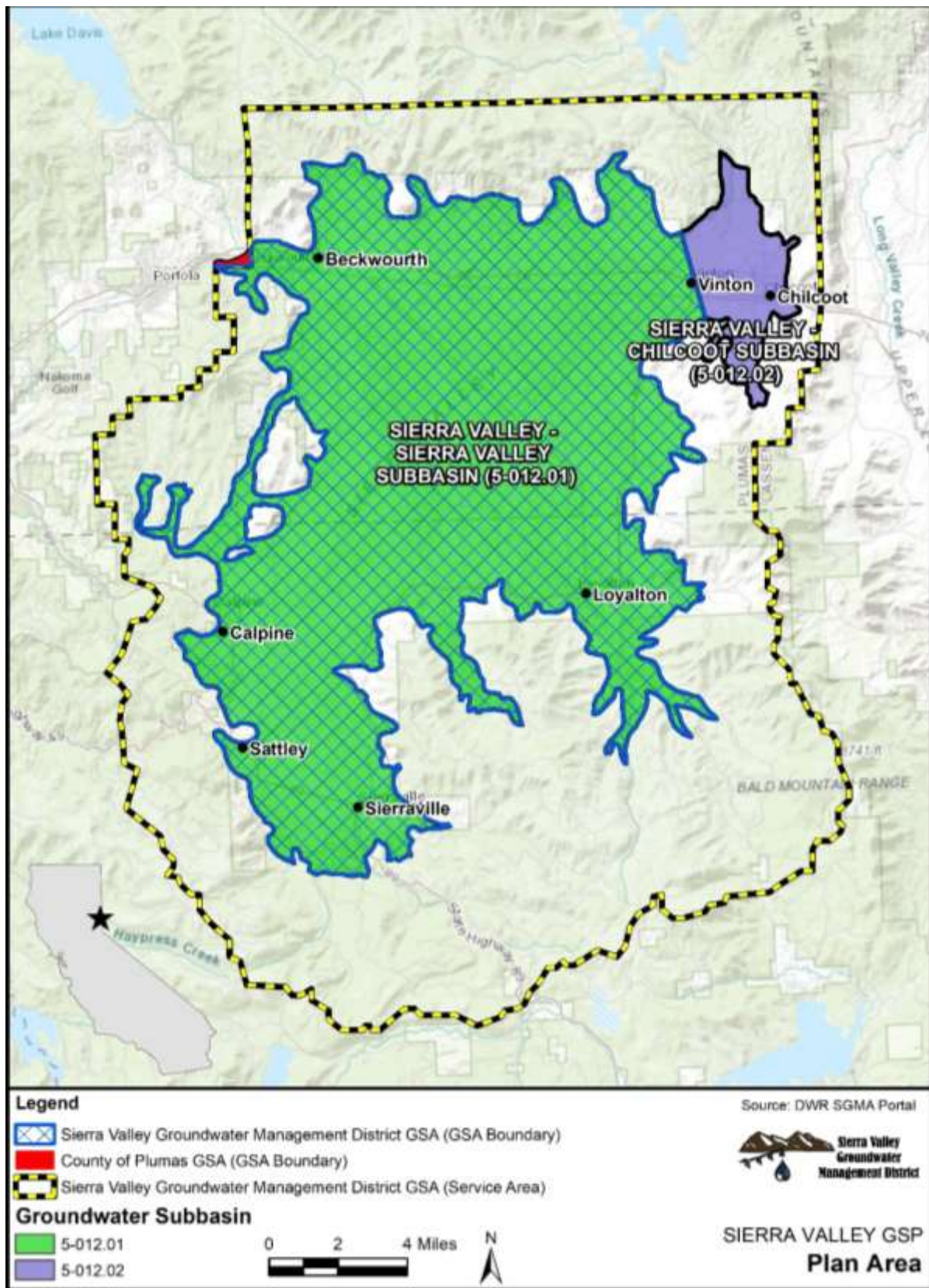


Figure 0-1 Sierra Valley location and boundaries

The GSA structure established in 2017 and affirmed by DWR upon GSP approval in 2023 remains valid and unchanged, and the SVGMD and Plumas County continue to coordinate as the exclusive GSAs responsible for GSP implementation within the Basin. Available data indicate that the Basin remains on track toward achieving sustainability by 2042. This PE is submitted without an accompanying Plan Amendment (PA), as no significant changes to the GSP are currently warranted based on the results of implementation and monitoring during the evaluation period.

The sustainability goal for the Sierra Valley Groundwater (GW) Basin is:

“To manage GW resources in a manner that best supports the long-term health of the people, the environment, and the economy of Sierra Valley into the future by avoiding significant and unreasonable impacts to environmental, domestic, agricultural, and industrial beneficial uses and users of GW.”

Since GSP adoption in January 2022, SVGMD has collected substantial new information through expanded monitoring, technical studies, stakeholder coordination, and new DWR guidance and tools, summarized in Table 0-2 below and described in full in Section 1:. This includes DWR's airborne electromagnetic survey data, an expanded well inventory, additional stream gages and groundwater monitoring wells, updated hydrologic model calibration, and new DWR technical guidance on subsidence, interconnected surface water, and groundwater recharge. Most of this new information represents enhancements to existing GSP implementation through adaptive management rather than changes requiring a Plan Amendment. Where future work, such as comprehensive integration of airborne electromagnetic data into the hydrogeologic conceptual model, may eventually warrant Plan updates, that need is identified and will be assessed as the work is completed. The Board formally directed the GSP consultant team to proceed without a Plan Amendment at its April 21, 2025 meeting, concluding that none of DWR's recommended corrective actions require a Plan Amendment to resolve. New information collected through the evaluation period, including the well inventory expansion, monitoring network additions, hydrologic model updates, and managed aquifer recharge and irrigation efficiency project results, has been assessed and does not independently warrant a Plan Amendment prior to the next Periodic Evaluation.

Table 0-2. New Data & Projects

Significant New Information	Aspect(s) of Plan Affected
AEM Data	Basin Setting; Monitoring Networks; Projects and Management Actions
Well Inventory	Basin Setting; Monitoring Networks; Data Management System; Projects and Management Actions
Additional Monitoring Network and Stream Gages	Monitoring Networks; Sustainable Management Criteria; Projects and Management Actions
New Supporting Documentation/Data from DWR	Basin Setting; Sustainable Management Criteria; Projects and Management Actions; Monitoring Networks
Groundwater Model Updates	Basin Setting; Water Budget; Projects and Management Actions
Technical Coordination and Outcomes	Projects and Management Actions; Monitoring Networks; Implementation
Recent Developments in ISW	Sustainable Management Criteria; Monitoring Networks; Projects and Management Actions; Basin Setting
Subsidence Monitoring Network Installation and Initial Results	Basin Setting; Monitoring Networks; Data Management System

Since adoption of the GSP in January 2022, SVGMD has implemented monitoring and management programs consistent with the GSP's framework. Groundwater levels remained resilient through three

below-normal or critically dry years of the five-year evaluation period, with only one well, considered to reflect local rather than basin-wide conditions, remaining below its minimum threshold as of WY2025. Groundwater storage declined by 4,962 acre-feet over the evaluation period, well below historic overdraft levels, with the basin recovering substantially from the critically dry conditions of WY2021 and WY2022. No Undesirable Results (UR) occurred for water quality, with nitrate and total dissolved solids, the Basin's two constituents of concern with established criteria, remaining within established thresholds. Land subsidence monitoring, through both InSAR data and a newly installed 11-point survey network, found no evidence of significant or widespread subsidence. Interconnected surface water monitoring expanded substantially during the period, though the relationship between streamflow depletion and groundwater pumping is not yet fully quantified. Table 0-3 summarizes progress toward achieving the Basin's sustainability goal over the evaluation period. Based on comprehensive evaluation of monitoring data, project implementation progress, and assessment of groundwater conditions relative to sustainable management criteria, the GSAs conclude that the Sierra Valley Subbasin is on track to achieve the sustainability goal by 2042.

Table 0-3. Sustainability Goal Progress Report

Sustainability Goal	Evaluation Metrics	Goal Status
Support Long-term Health of People (quality domestic water Supply)	• No domestic well failures reported due to declining groundwater levels • Groundwater quality maintained within drinking water standards • Minimum thresholds protective of domestic well depths	In progress
Support Long-term health of Environment	• Groundwater-dependent ecosystem (GDE) areas maintain stable or improving vegetation health (NDVI) • Interconnected surface water reaches maintain connectivity • No adverse impacts to environmental beneficial uses reported • Wetland habitat maintained	In progress
Support Long-term health of Economy	• Agricultural and industrial groundwater users maintain access to water supplies • Groundwater extractions trending toward sustainable yield (5,500 – 7,000 AFY) • Conjunctive use program functioning effectively • Economic impacts of water scarcity minimized	In progress
Avoid Significant and Unreasonable Impacts	• No URs occurred for any sustainability indicator • Sustainable management criteria compliance maintained • No consecutive years of minimum threshold exceedances • Projects and management actions being implemented	In progress

PMAs advanced substantially during the evaluation period. Approximately \$1.2 million in DWR grant funds supported agricultural irrigation efficiency improvements at 15 of 17 local irrigators, including 37 high efficiency sprinkler packages, 17 wheel line upgrades, 11 soil moisture monitoring stations, 6 pipeline replacements, 3 sand separators, 2 variable frequency drive pump controls, and 3 weather stations. These improvements are estimated to reduce groundwater pumping by approximately 400 to 470 acre feet per year, with roughly 90 percent of the savings attributable to high efficiency sprinkler conversions. Managed aquifer recharge pilot projects were constructed at four sites in the Smithneck and Staverville Creek areas, recharging approximately 130 acre-feet (AF) during the 2025-26 winter diversion season under a five year temporary permit issued by the State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB). A planned direct recharge project near Little Last Chance Creek was found infeasible due to site geology and was replaced with an in lieu recharge approach that allows several landowners to substitute surface water for groundwater pumping. The well inventory, monitoring network, and hydrologic model were all substantially updated during the period, as summarized in Table 0-2 below.

This Periodic Evaluation also assesses the Basin's setting in light of new information and changes in water use. In response to DWR's corrective action on principal aquifer identification, the GSA reviewed new airborne electromagnetic survey data and confirmed that basin fill deposits constitute the Basin's

primary water-bearing unit, though the degree of hydraulic connection to the underlying bedrock has not been fully characterized and remains an area of ongoing investigation. Groundwater conditions relative to sustainable management criteria, discussed in detail in Section 2:, are summarized here by indicator. Water use during the evaluation period has been relatively stable, with no significant change in irrigated acreage, and the Basin is not determined to be experiencing overdraft as of WY2025. The 2022 GSP's projected water budget remains the Basin's current projection, since that analysis has not yet been rerun using the recalibrated hydrologic model. The GSP's sustainable yield estimate of approximately 5,500 to 6,500 acre-feet per year, the figure used consistently in Annual Reports, remains the Basin's operative estimate. The Sierra Valley Hydrogeologic System Model (SVHSM)'s Precipitation-Runoff Modeling System (PRMS) and MODFLOW Groundwater-Flow Model (MODFLOW) components were substantially recalibrated during the evaluation period, improving simulated streamflow timing and magnitude at 10 of the Basin's 12 stream gages, though a climate change scenario analysis using the recalibrated model has not yet been performed.

This Periodic Evaluation also assesses the functionality of the Basin's monitoring networks and identifies data gaps affecting the ability of the Plan to track progress toward its sustainability goal. The District expanded its groundwater level, water quality, land subsidence, and interconnected surface water monitoring networks substantially during the evaluation period, including new telemetered wells in the northwest wetland complex, a nested piezometer near Griffin Drainage, four continuous stream gaging stations, and an 11-point land subsidence survey network established in direct response to DWR's corrective action. In response to DWR's recommended corrective action on monitoring network detail, the GSA confirmed that well construction information is complete for all 36 groundwater level representative monitoring points, described the District's planned basin-wide water quality monitoring program, and detailed the land subsidence survey network and its results. The water quality network's final well selection and formal tabulation remain the GSA's primary outstanding item under this corrective action. Remaining data gaps, summarized in Table 5-1, include limited spatial coverage on the Basin's western side, incomplete characterization of mountain front recharge, and InSAR coverage gaps affecting roughly 60 to 70 percent of the Basin. All monitoring network updates have been incorporated into the District's Database Management System and reported to DWR's SGMA Portal.

SVGMD was established in 1980 and has monitored GW extraction from high-capacity wells since 1989. SVGMD submitted notification to DWR in 2017 to become the exclusive GSA for the portion of the Subbasin within its statutory boundary, and Plumas County serves as the GSA for a small portion of the valley in the northwest corner of the Basin. There have been no changes to either GSA's organizational structure or governance since GSP adoption. During the evaluation period, SVGMD exercised its existing authorities to advance GSP implementation, continuing its well metering program, applying well permit ordinances to restrict new high-capacity wells in designated areas, and securing temporary diversion permits from the SWRCB to support Managed Aquifer Recharge (MAR), including a five-year temporary permit issued in 2025. The District also leveraged DWR SGMA Implementation Grant funding to advance irrigation efficiency, monitoring network expansion, well inventory completion, and hydrologic model update PMAs. No formal enforcement or legal actions were taken against GW users during the evaluation period, and no changes to SVGMD's enforcement authorities have been made since GSP adoption. The District's well permit ordinance was amended twice during the period to align with state executive orders on well permitting, and MAR project permitting benefited from California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) streamlining under Executive Order (EO) N-7-22.

SVGMD engaged interested parties throughout the evaluation period through monthly Board meetings, direct landowner outreach, three community irrigation efficiency workshops, and a staffed outreach booth at the Plumas-Sierra County Fair in both 2024 and 2025. The 2025 fair booth drew approximately 150 visitors, roughly one third of whom had substantive conversations with District staff about groundwater conditions, water quality, and the District's recharge and irrigation efficiency projects. A joint Technical Advisory Committee and community stakeholder meeting was held on February 9, 2026 to report on GSP implementation progress to date. Public comments were received throughout the evaluation period, both in writing and at Board meetings, addressing the District's recharge program water right permitting process and general groundwater conditions in the basin. These comments and the District's responses are summarized in Table 0-4 and detailed in Table 7-1.

Table 0-4. Stakeholder and Public Engagement Comments

Comment ID	Commenter	Comment
1.1	Richard Morat	Diversions under permit T033461 should preserve a reasonable minimum flow at the points of diversion.
1.2	Richard Morat	Cumulative environmental impacts of repeated temporary permits could harm surface waters; the Board should limit temporary permits absent a pending standard permit application.
2.1	Trout Unlimited	Trout Unlimited was not notified within a reasonable time during the permit noticing period.
3.1	Dotta Ranch, LLC	Dotta Ranch, LLC was omitted from the owner information on permit T033461 despite owning land at the point of diversion
4.1	Last Chance Creek Water District	Diversion from Little Last Chance Creek should be limited to December 1 through March 14.
4.2	Last Chance Creek Water District	The District should not expect additional water releases from Frenchman's Reservoir to support the temporary permit.
4.3	Last Chance Creek Water District	Little Last Chance Lake should be at full conditions before any diversion occurs.
4.4	Last Chance Creek Water District	A minimum flow of 2 cfs should be maintained through North Creek Weir during any diversion.
5.1	Tom Dotta	General support for SVGMD's recharge efforts, with encouragement to pursue larger-scale recharge opportunities using currently unused water rights (Smithneck Creek watershed, Plazola pond right, former mill pond right).
6.1	Jim Swann	Described property and water-supply impacts attributed to two nearby agricultural wells installed roughly 25 years earlier.
6.2	Jim Swann	Described personal ditch, culvert, and board-based recharge practices and encouraged SVGMD to coordinate with the road department on similar infiltration/recharge practices.

The Chilcoot Subbasin is the only adjacent GW basin believed to have a significant hydrogeologic connection to the Sierra Valley Subbasin, and SVGMD continues to manage its full jurisdictional area, including the portion overlying Chilcoot, consistently for monitoring and reporting purposes. No adverse impacts to adjacent basins' ability to achieve their sustainability goals have been identified during the evaluation period. The primary implementation challenge not addressed elsewhere in this PE is long-term funding sustainability. SVGMD's capital investments in monitoring, recharge infrastructure, and irrigation efficiency have relied heavily on DWR SGMA Implementation Grant funding, which concluded March 31, 2026 after funding the majority of the District's monitoring network expansion, well inventory update, model updates, and pilot projects. To sustain implementation activity going forward, SVGMD applied for WaterSMART grant funding from the Bureau of Reclamation, submitted a concept proposal for a SWEEP block grant from the California Department of Food and Agriculture, and joined the Small GSA Coalition to pursue Proposition 4 funding. No legal challenges to the GSP or its implementation have been filed or are pending. Four objections received during the public notice period for a 2024 temporary recharge permit were resolved through coordination with SVGMD and the Last Chance Creek Water District (LCCWD) prior to permit issuance.

No Plan Amendments are proposed in connection with this PE. New information collected during the evaluation period, including the well inventory expansion, monitoring network additions, hydrologic model updates, and MAR and irrigation efficiency project results discussed throughout this PE, has been assessed and does not require material changes to the GSP's Sustainable Management Criteria (SMC), sustainability goal, or Representative Monitoring Point (RMP) network. GW conditions reflected variable hydrology during the period, with measurable stress during the critically dry years of WY2021 and

WY2022 followed by substantial recovery in wet WY2023 and stabilization in WY2024 and WY2025, without a chronic declining trend in GW storage. Tier I and Tier II PMAs advanced substantially, supported primarily by DWR SGMA Implementation Grant funding. Looking ahead, SVGMD will continue ongoing Tier I activities without interruption, continue monitoring realized benefits from the irrigation efficiency and MAR programs now in their early implementation phases, and re-evaluate Tier II PMAs not yet initiated at the start of the next evaluation period. Hydrologic model refinement will continue as funding allows, including a climate change scenario analysis using the recalibrated model.

The GSAs will continue adaptive management, ongoing monitoring, and stakeholder engagement as GSP implementation moves into the next evaluation period. The Board affirmed via a formal vote to proceed without an accompanying Plan Amendment at its April 21, 2025 meeting, consistent with the determination presented above. Minor refinements to SMC and monitoring protocols will continue to be made through adaptive management as improved data and tools become available, consistent with the GSP's framework.

Key findings

Key findings of this PE include:

- No URs have occurred for any sustainability indicator during the evaluation period
- The basin demonstrated significant resilience and recovery capacity, with GW storage increasing by over 24,000 AF during wet WY2023 and conditions stabilizing in below-average WY2024
- Consecutive years of minimum threshold (MT) exceedances were prevented through natural recharge and adaptive management, avoiding an UR for chronic lowering of GW levels
- Multiple grant awards, including DWR's SGMA Implementation Grant and supplemental funding from California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) and the Plumas Watershed Forum, supported GSP implementation including multiple Project and Management Actions (PMAs)
- All seven of DWR's recommended corrective actions are being systematically addressed through ongoing activities and grant-funded projects
- Water quality, land subsidence, and environmental conditions remain stable with no adverse impacts observed
- Hydrologic model recalibration improved streamflow accuracy at 10 of 12 stream gages, improving the Mountain Front Recharge (MFR) model fit
- A new 11-point land subsidence network has recorded only minor elastic changes

Areas Requiring Continued Attention

Areas requiring continued attention include:

- Reducing GW extractions to consistently remain within the sustainable yield of 5,500-6,500 acre-feet per year (AFY), particularly during normal and dry water years
- Completing monitoring network enhancements to better quantify depletions of Interconnected Surface Water (ISW) and land subsidence
- Implementing funded MAR and irrigation efficiency projects
- Continuing to fill identified data gaps.

Organization of the PE

This PE documents GW conditions, project implementation, and monitoring progress in the Sierra Valley GW Basin over the first five-year evaluation period is organized consistent with the framework set out in Water Code §10728.2, 23 CCR §356.4, and DWR's Guide to Annual Reports, Periodic Evaluations, and Plan Amendments.

Following the Executive Summary, the PE opens with a description of the new information SVGMD has acquired since GSP adoption, including monitoring results, technical studies, and stakeholder input, and an assessment of whether that information warrants changes to the Plan. It then presents current GW conditions in the Basin, evaluated indicator by indicator for GW levels, storage, water quality, land subsidence, and ISW, assessed against the measurable objectives, minimum thresholds, and URs established in the GSP, alongside DWR's recommended corrective actions from its 2023 determination, and closes with an evaluation of the Basin's resulting progress toward its sustainability goal.

The PE then reviews the status of the projects and management actions identified in the GSP, including implementation activity, benefits realized to date, and continued relevance and feasibility. It also evaluates the basin setting in light of new information and changes in water use, including updates to the hydrogeologic conceptual model, GW conditions, the water budget, and the GW flow model.

The remainder of the PE addresses the monitoring network established for each sustainability indicator and the data gaps being filled within it, followed by a description of the authorities SVGMD and Plumas County have established or exercised as the Basin's GSAs. It then summarizes the outreach, engagement, and interagency coordination undertaken since GSP adoption, along with other relevant considerations such as coordination with adjacent basins and challenges encountered during implementation. The PE concludes with a summary of the changes, if any, made to Plan elements as a result of this PE and the GSAs' intended next steps.