

Chapter 9.37
GROUNDWATER

9.37.010 Title.

The ordinance codified in this Chapter may be cited as the Stanislaus County "Groundwater Ordinance."

9.37.020 Findings.

The Stanislaus County Board of Supervisors hereby finds:

1. The protection of the health, welfare, and safety of the residents of the County require that the groundwater resources of Stanislaus County be protected from adverse impacts resulting from the specific acts of unsustainable groundwater extraction within the County and the export of water outside of the County; and

2. Groundwater is an essential resource for continued agricultural production within the County which production includes, but is not limited to, field crops, nut and fruit crops, vegetable crops, seed crops, poultry and livestock and products which significantly contribute to the gross value of the total agricultural production of the County; and

3. Groundwater is an essential resource for municipal, industrial and domestic uses within the County; and

4. The unsustainable extraction of groundwater resources within the County and the export of water outside of the County each could have adverse environmental impacts on the County, including but not limited to; increased groundwater overdraft, land subsidence, uncontrolled movement of inferior quality groundwater, the lowering of groundwater levels, and increased groundwater degradation; and

5. The unsustainable extraction of groundwater resources within the County and the export of water outside of the County each could have adverse economic impacts on the County, including but not limited to, loss of arable land, a decline in property values, increased pumping costs due to the lowering of groundwater levels, increased groundwater quality treatment costs, and replacement of wells due to declining groundwater levels, replacement of damaged wells, conveyance infrastructure, roads, bridges and other appurtenances, structures, or facilities due to land subsidence; and

6. California Constitution, Article X, Section 2, as well as Water Code Section 100 prohibit the waste, unreasonable use, unreasonable method of use, and unreasonable method of diversion of water. The County finds that the unsustainable

47 extraction of groundwater and the export of water outside of the County are
48 presumptively inconsistent with the California Constitution and the California Water
49 Code.

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51 7. Nothing in this Chapter 9.37 determines or alters surface water rights or
52 groundwater rights under common law or any provision of law that determines or grants
53 surface water rights.

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55 8. There is a critical need for water well extraction data to analyze and
56 understand the degree of groundwater depletion or recharge, to establish water
57 budgets, and to balance conjunctive use of groundwater resources. The County finds
58 and determines that such data is critical to the implementation of groundwater
59 regulation under this Chapter 9.37. The County finds and determines that such data
60 from Persons is presumptively confidential and proprietary information, including
61 geological and geophysical data, plant production data, or trade secrets. The County
62 further finds and determines that the need to receive or obtain such data, and to
63 maintain its confidentiality, outweighs the public need for site specific private information
64 and that the public will have access to the aggregate of such information which is a
65 better measure of the cumulative status of groundwater resources.

66 67 68 **9.37.030 Definitions.**

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70 The following words and phrases shall have the following meanings when used
71 in this Chapter:

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73 1. "County" means the County of Stanislaus.
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75 2. "Board" means the Board of Supervisors of Stanislaus County.
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77 3. "Person" means and includes natural persons, corporations, firms,
78 partnerships, joint stock companies, associations and other organizations of persons,
79 and public entities.
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81 4. "Groundwater" means water that occurs beneath the surface of the earth
82 within the zone below the water table in which the soil is completely saturated with
83 water, but does not include water that flows in known and definite channels.
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85 5. "Public water agency" means any local public agency, mutual water
86 company, or nonprofit tax-exempt unincorporated association within, or partially within,
87 Stanislaus County that has authority to undertake water-related activities.
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89 6. "Unsustainable extraction of groundwater" means the extraction of
90 groundwater in a manner that is not sustainable groundwater management as defined in
91 Chapter 9.37 or State law.
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7. "Export of water" means the act of conveying groundwater, or surface water for which groundwater has been substituted, out of the County.

8. "Sustainable groundwater management" means the management and use of groundwater in a manner that can be maintained during the planning and implementation horizon as defined in subdivision (q) of Water Code section 10721 without causing or substantially contributing to undesirable results.

9. "Undesirable result" means one or more of the following:

a. Chronic lowering of groundwater levels indicating a significant and unreasonable depletion of supply if continued over the planning and implementation horizon. Overdraft during a period of drought is not sufficient to establish a chronic lowering of groundwater levels if extractions and recharge are managed as necessary to ensure that reductions in groundwater levels or storage during a period of drought are offset by increases in groundwater levels or storage during other periods.

b. Significant and unreasonable reduction of groundwater storage.

c. Significant and unreasonable degraded water quality, including the migration of contaminant plumes that impair water supplies.

d. Significant and unreasonable land subsidence that substantially interferes with surface land uses.

e. Surface water depletions that have significant and unreasonable adverse impacts on beneficial uses of the surface water.

10. "De minimis extractor" means a Person who extracts two (2) acre-feet or less per year.

11. "Groundwater sustainability plan" means a plan adopted pursuant to Water Code section 10727 et seq.

9.37.040 Prohibition.

Except as otherwise provided in this Chapter, the following actions are prohibited:

A. The unsustainable extraction of groundwater within the unincorporated areas of the County.

B. The export of water.

9.37.045 Application.

A. The prohibition set forth in Paragraph A of Section 9.37.040 is applicable to the extraction from any groundwater well for which an application for a new Well

Construction Permit pursuant to Chapter 9.36 is filed after November 25, 2014. Applications for a Well Construction Permit submitted after that date shall demonstrate, based on substantial evidence, that either (1) one or more of the exemptions set forth in Section 9.37.050 apply, or (2) that extraction of groundwater from the proposed well will not constitute unsustainable extraction of groundwater. This paragraph shall not apply to a well designed to replace an existing well that has been permitted under Chapter 9.36 prior to November 25, 2014 if the replacement well has no greater capacity than the well it is replacing.

B. Effective upon adoption of an applicable groundwater sustainability plan, the prohibition set forth in Paragraph A of Section 9.37.040 shall be applicable to the extraction from any groundwater well for which the County reasonably concludes that the extraction of groundwater constitutes unsustainable extraction of groundwater. In the event of such determination by the County, the affected holder or holders of a Well Construction Permit issued pursuant to Chapter 9.36 for such well shall be notified and shall be required to demonstrate, based on substantial evidence, that continued extraction of groundwater will not result in an unsustainable extraction of groundwater as defined in Paragraph 6 of Section 9.37.030.

C. This Section does not limit the application of Paragraph B of Section 9.37.040.

D. The regulations and prohibitions set forth in this Chapter 9.37 apply only to the unincorporated areas of Stanislaus County.

9.37.050 Exemptions.

A. The following water management practices are exempt from the prohibitions in Section 9.37.040:

1. Water resources management practices of public water agencies that have jurisdictional authority within the County, and their water rate payers, that are in compliance with and included in groundwater management plans and policies adopted by that agency in accordance with applicable state law and regulations, as may be amended, including but not limited to the California Groundwater Management Act (Water Code Sections 10750 et seq.), or that are in compliance with an approved Groundwater Sustainability Plan.

2. De minimis extractions as set forth in Section 9.37.030 (10) of this Chapter.

3. Groundwater extraction or the export of water in compliance with a permit issued by the Stanislaus County Department of Environmental Resources pursuant to this Chapter.

185 B. The following water management practices are exempt from the
186 prohibition against export of water in this Chapter:

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188 1. De-watering of shallow water tables where the net benefits of the removal
189 of subsurface water substantially outweighs the loss of water because of damage the
190 high water table reasonably may cause to agriculture, industry, commerce and other
191 property uses. The groundwater in some areas of the County is very near the surface
192 and if not removed by interceptor ditches or subsurface tile drains, the water can
193 seriously impact crop root zones for agricultural production or destroy foundations,
194 equipment, materials, buildings and infrastructure used for residences, industry, utilities
195 or commerce. This groundwater may or may not be reused for other purposes and at
196 times may leave the County and its groundwater system.

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198 2. Reasonable use of groundwater resources to supplement or replace
199 surface water released for other reasonable and beneficial purposes, including but not
200 limited to fisheries, ecosystem habitat or downstream water quality or quantity needs,
201 when required pursuant to federal and state law, regulations, licenses or permit
202 conditions.

203
204 3. Conservation of water in compliance with applicable state law that
205 authorizes public water agencies to transfer water outside its usual place of use.
206 Conservation investments may include, but are not limited to, irrigation practices in
207 agricultural areas where the crops grown use less water, or communities that produce
208 recycled water, fix leaks or promote other water saving devices and methods to
209 conserve water on a temporary or permanent basis.

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211 4. Recharge of groundwater in locations in the County that are capable of
212 improving groundwater conditions in order to meet total water demands of beneficial
213 uses in the hydrologic and groundwater basin area including but not limited to the
214 following sources: surface water, treated municipal drinking water, recycled water and
215 stormwater. The amount of recaptured groundwater transferred out of the area should
216 not exceed the amount of water used to recharge the aquifer. The transfer can be
217 accomplished by either direct or indirect transfer, that is, a public water agency can
218 leave the water in the ground and transfer other supplies in lieu of pumping out the
219 recharge water.

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221 5. Remediation of contaminated groundwater that is pumped and treated to
222 remove contaminants that are in violation of standards for beneficial uses. The
223 extracted and treated water may be released out of the County, resulting in a net loss to
224 the groundwater basin, if the release complies with discharge permits issued by the
225 federal, state or state resource agencies.

226
227 6. Export of water that reasonably supports agricultural operations on
228 property outside the County that is contiguous with property within the County and is
229 under common ownership.

231 7. Export of water from a private water source that is bottled in compliance
232 with a private water source operator license issued by the state pursuant to Health and
233 Safety Code Section 111120.

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235 C. The exemptions set forth in Paragraphs A and B above do not exempt the
236 activities described in those subsections from paragraph B of Section 9.37.045.

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239 **9.37.060 Implementation.**

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241 A. The Stanislaus County Department of Environmental Resources shall
242 have the primary responsibility for implementation of this Chapter and regulations
243 adopted by the Board of Supervisors. That responsibility shall include any preparation,
244 approval, and/or certification of any environmental document pursuant to the California
245 Environmental Quality Act ("CEQA") for issuance of any permit for a groundwater well,
246 to the extent required by CEQA, or a determination that such permit is not subject to, or
247 is exempt from, CEQA.

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249 B. The Department of Environmental Resources shall establish a system of
250 permits to authorize water management practices otherwise prohibited by this Chapter.
251 The Department may issue a permit for a water management practice to the extent that
252 such practice is consistent with the statements of County policy set forth in Section
253 9.37.020 of this Chapter, and provided that such practice is for a reasonable and
254 beneficial use of groundwater resources, supports sustainable groundwater
255 management, and promotes the public interest. The term of a groundwater extraction
256 permit issued by the Department pursuant to this Paragraph shall not exceed the
257 remaining term of any applicable groundwater sustainability plan.

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259 C. The Department of Environmental Resources shall have authority to
260 investigate any activity subject to this Chapter. Compliance with this Chapter will be
261 determined based on the submission of a technical report to the Department of
262 Environmental Resources on a form provided by the County. The Department is
263 authorized to enforce the prohibition of any activity that is determined to be in violation
264 of this Chapter or regulations adopted by the Board of Supervisors.

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266 D. Any interested person or entity may appeal an administrative
267 determination made by the Department under this Chapter which (1) finds that an
268 application is complete or incomplete; (2) establishes or modifies operating conditions;
269 (3) grants or denies a permit; or (4) suspends or revokes a permit. Administrative
270 appeals under this section must be made in writing, must clearly set forth the reasons
271 why the appeal ought to be granted, and must be received by the Chief Executive
272 Officer within fifteen days of the postmark date on the envelope that transmits the
273 administrative determination. Any appeal that is not timely filed, or that is not
274 accompanied by the required fee, will be deemed ineffective and the administrative
275 determination that is being appealed will become final. The Chief Executive Officer
276 shall fix a reasonable time for the hearing of an appeal of an administrative

determination, and shall provide written notice of the appeal hearing to the appellant and all interested parties, and to all landowners within one-quarter mile of the parcel where operations will occur. An appeal review committee comprised of the Chief Executive Officer or designee, the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Board of Supervisors shall hear the appeal and issue a decision within thirty days after the hearing. The appeal review committee may take any appropriate action upon the original administrative action that was appealed, including granting or denying the appeal in whole or in part, or imposing, deleting or modifying operating conditions of the permit. The decision of the appeal review committee shall be final.

E. Any interested person or entity may appeal to the Board of Supervisors the following decisions and determinations of the Department regarding a groundwater well permit: (1) a decision to approve or deny a negative declaration, (2) a decision to certify or refuse to certify an environmental impact report, or (3) a determination that a permit is not subject to, or is exempt from, CEQA.

9.37.065 Groundwater Monitoring

A. All Persons, including Public Water Agencies that extract groundwater within the County shall cause to be prepared and submitted to the County Department of Environmental Resources periodic reports of groundwater information that are reasonably necessary to monitor the existing condition of groundwater resources within the County, to determine trends, or to develop effective sustainable groundwater management plans and policies. A "De minimis extractor" shall not be required to submit such information.

B. The Department shall develop and recommend regulations to be adopted by the Board that establish the frequency and timing of required reports, and the required information to be monitored, including without limitation water level and pumping data, or other data necessary for any other method to determine groundwater production.

C. The county presumes that information submitted pursuant to this Section will be exempt from disclosure under the California Public Records Act. The regulations developed under paragraph B of this Section shall include a process for submitters to confirm that their information is exempt from disclosure. Any document that aggregates information submitted under this section shall not be treated as exempt from disclosure if such document neither identifies the sources of that information nor permits the reader to otherwise determine the sources of that information.

9.37.070 Penalty for Violation.

A. Any Person violating any of the provisions of this Chapter shall be guilty of a misdemeanor and upon conviction thereof shall be punished as set forth in Stanislaus

County Code Section 1.36.010. Each Person shall be guilty of a separate offense for each and every day during any portion of which any violation of any provision of this Chapter is committed, continued or allowed and shall be punishable accordingly.

B. In addition to or in lieu of the penalty provisions or remedies set forth in this Chapter, any violation may be abated in any manner set forth in Chapter 2.92 of the Stanislaus County Code, including, but not limited to, abatement or issuance of administrative citations.

C. In addition to or in lieu of the penalty provisions or remedies set forth in this Chapter, any violation of any of the provisions of this Chapter, and any condition caused or allowed to exist in violation of any of the provisions of this Chapter, shall be deemed a public nuisance and shall, at the discretion of County, create a cause of action for injunctive relief, including but not limited to any remedy under Chapter 5 (commencing with Section 17200) of Part 2 of Division 7 of the Business and Professions Code.

9.37.080 Severability and Effect.

A. The provisions of this Chapter are hereby declared to be severable. If any provision, clause, word, sentence or paragraph of this Chapter or the application thereof to any Person, establishment or circumstances shall be held invalid, such invalidity shall not affect the other provisions or application of this Chapter.

B. The prohibitions of this Chapter shall not be applicable to the extent that their application would result in a violation of the Constitution or other laws of the United States or the state of California. The Department of Environmental Resources shall issue a permit to authorize conduct otherwise prohibited under this Chapter if the applicant demonstrates that such permit is necessary to avoid such a violation of State or federal law.