

**Lower Tule River Irrigation District
Groundwater Sustainability Agency**

**Communication, Engagement and
Outreach Plan**

Tulare County, California
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Prepared by:



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Lower Tule Irrigation District Background

The Lower Tule River Irrigation District (LTRID) supplies supplemental water for district-wide crop irrigation to more than 85,000 acres of irrigatable land. Lower Tule Irrigation District was formed in the 1950s. We strive to provide an affordable and reliable water supply for present and future generations and are dedicated to service and excellence in water resources management.

Lower Tule River Irrigation District Groundwater Sustainability Agency (LTRID GSA) is a Groundwater Sustainability Agency (GSA) was formed and approved by the Department of Water Resources (DWR) in 2016. The Lower Tule River Irrigation Groundwater Sustainability Agency serves more than 102,000 acres within its boundary.

LTRID GSA is tasked with preparing and implanting a Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) across its' boundary jurisdiction.

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Introduction

Sustainable Groundwater Management Act Overview

The Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (**SGMA**) is a combination of three bills signed by California Governor Jerry Brown in 2014: Assembly Bill (**AB**) 1739, Senate Bill (**SB**) 1168, and SB 1319. SGMA provides local agencies with the framework to manage groundwater basins in a sustainable manner. The legislation recognizes that groundwater is most effectively managed at the local level, and local agencies will need to achieve groundwater sustainability by 2040.

In SGMA, sustainable groundwater management is defined as management of groundwater supplies in a manner that can be maintained in planning and implementation phases without causing undesirable results. Undesirable results include:

- significant and unreasonable chronic lowering of groundwater levels
- reduction of groundwater storage
- seawater intrusion
- degraded water quality
- land subsidence
- interconnected surface waters.

Requirements for Stakeholder Engagement

The framework provided in SGMA recognizes that groundwater is most effectively managed at the local level. SGMA requires that Groundwater Sustainable Agency (GSA) consider the interests of all beneficial users and uses of groundwater and include them in the GSP development process. California's Department of Water Resources (DWR) further emphasize the public engagement and consideration requirements in its Groundwater Sustainability Plan Regulations.

Implementation of SGMA and Outreach requirements are broken down into phases:

Phase 1: GSA formation and coordination has been completed. This phase stretched from 2015 through 2018, and consisted of forming the LTRID GSA, establishing and maintaining the list of interested parties, establishing Groundwater Planning Commission (GPC), and creating the Communication and Engagement plan to outline communication efforts for the GSP development, public review and implementation phases. Stakeholder input was utilized during the GSA formation phases, which was formally completed in August 2016, as beneficial users and stakeholders with interests in groundwater usage within the LTRID GSA's boundary were notified via public meeting notices as soon as the process began.

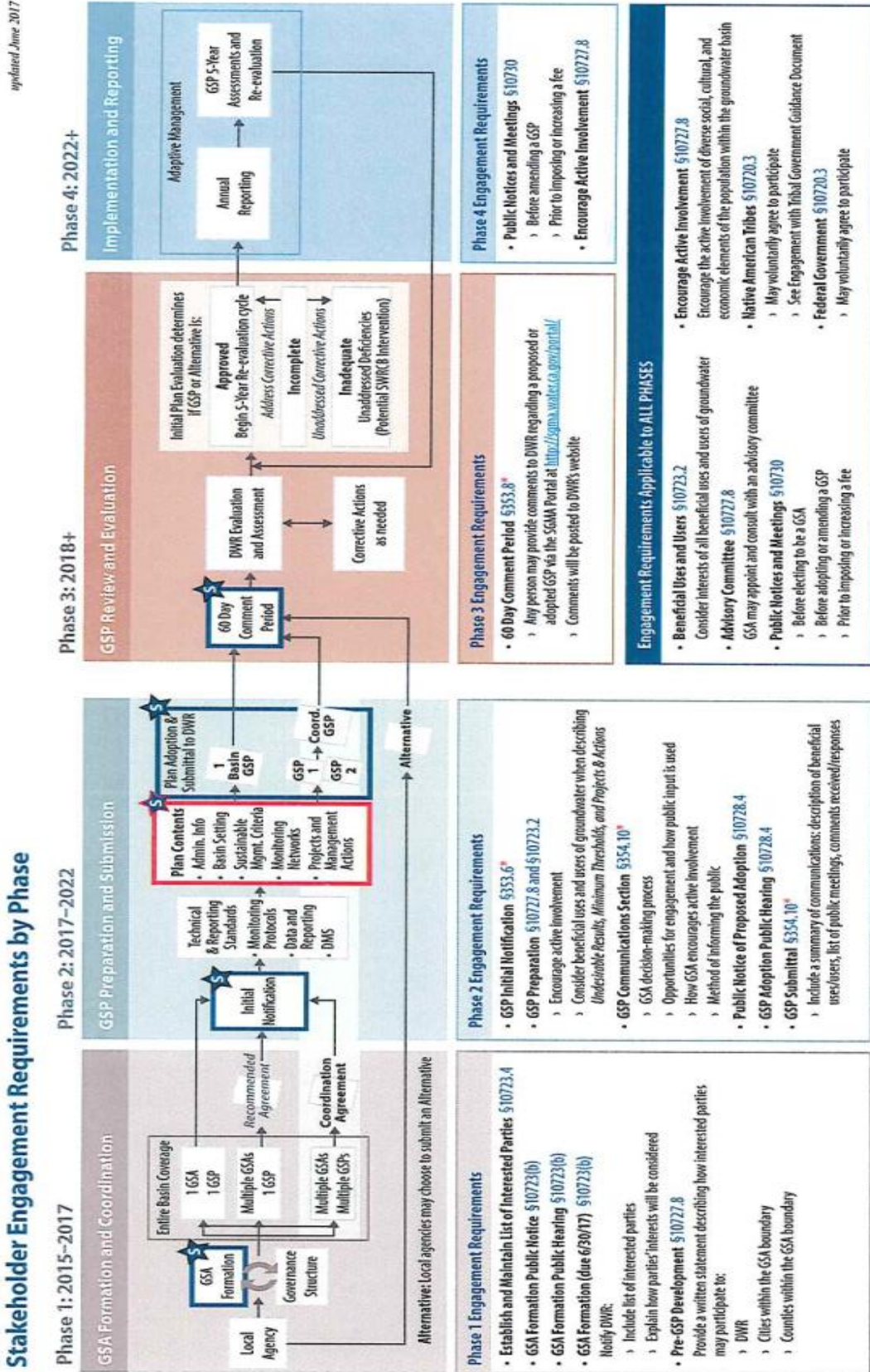
Phase 2: GSP Preparation and Submission will span from 2018 through 2020. With the goal of having the draft GSP by the first quarter of 2019, 2018 will primarily be the technical development of the plan, while working with the stakeholders for feedback and input. During 2018, direct interaction with the stakeholder, GPC group and other

organization will be held with the purpose of educating and informing stakeholders about the SGMA and the GSP process, while also soliciting feedback and input from these groups to mitigate the negative impacts to beneficial users of groundwater as much as possible.

Phase 3: GSP review and evaluation, will be the primary focus of communication and engagement efforts. Once the draft of the GSP is completed in the second quarter of 2019, the public review process will begin. A 90-day comment period will be held, with the GSP draft posted on the LTRID GSA's website for stakeholders to conveniently download and review. Outreach meeting will be held during this phase at locations the LTRID office. These meetings will focus on an overview of the GSP content, while giving stakeholders a public forum to provide their feedback and comments. Once the Public review period is completed, public comments will be taken into consideration and incorporated into the final version of the LTRID.

Phase 4: Following the submission of the GSP, GSA's will immediately begin the implementation of efforts described in the GSP to reach sustainability within the Tule Subbasin. This will be an ongoing please, as the required goal of SGMA is to reach sustainability by 2040, at the latest.

Figure A-1: Stakeholder Engagement Requirement by Phase



Communication, Engagement and Outreach Plan

As required by SGMA, GSAs must consider the interests of all beneficial uses of groundwater and include them in the GSP development process. The Lower Tule River Irrigation District Groundwater Sustainability Agency's (LTRID GSA) Communication, Engagement and Outreach Plan (CEOP) addresses how stakeholders within the GSA boundary are engaged through stakeholder's education and opportunity inputs. A stakeholder engagement effort described by the Department of Water Resources (DWR) requires a communication program that reaches out to all interested parties and is fully coordinated with the development of Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP). DWR defines "stakeholder" as individuals who can affect or be affected by an organization's activities; or individuals or groups with an interest or "stake" in what happens as a result of any decision or action.

As Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) pertains to stakeholder as individuals or groups that is interested of all beneficial uses and users of groundwater, considering the effects to other stakeholder groups in or around the Tule Subbasin with overlapping interest. The communication program needs to include a process to reach out to the public and potentially-affected individuals and communities in the Groundwater Sustainability Agency (GSA) area to solicit input and communicate all developments in the GSP. In addition, there must be a specific effort to inform disadvantage communities directly and tailored communication channels, through the PUD/CSD representative in Groundwater Planning Commission (GPC). Finally, the communication effort must document all the efforts to inform the public and the results of those efforts in terms of participation and input to sustain economic advancement and most importantly sustain water for future use.

According to SGMA, the GSA should also implement the GSP regulations (Section 354.10) which requires a communication plan to:

1. An explanation of the Agency's decision-making process.
2. Identification of opportunities for public engagement and a discussion of how public input and response will be used.
3. A description of how the Agency (GSA) encourages the active involvement of diverse social, cultural, and economic elements of the population within the basin.
4. The method the Agency (GSA) shall follow to inform the public about the progress implementing the plan, including the status of the projects and actions.

Section 1: Goals and Desired Outcomes

1.1 Description and Background of the GSA and Subsequent GSP

This section of the Communication, Engagement and Outreach Plan (CEOP) provides a description of the Lower Tule River Irrigation District Groundwater Sustainability Agency (LTRID GSA), defines the goals of how to address the challenges, regulatory requirements and opportunities, and how to reach the desired outcomes of the communication efforts.

This communication program is designed to inform and activate the public and specific stakeholders to engage in the process to develop a GSP that will benefit the Tule Subbasin by achieving sustainability before January 31st, 2040 (sustainability day). To achieve this goal, the LTRID's GSA is tasked with, among other things, monitoring the Tule Sub-basin's water conditions and gathering pertinent data, conduct necessary studies and investigation; drafting and implementation of the GSP. SGMA requires designated GSAs, in this instance, Lower Tule Irrigation District (LTRID) to consider effect of GSP to the stakeholders, public, Agricultural users and others in or around the Tule Subbasin.

Also, LTRID is tasked to educate/inform the public about surface water and groundwater resources in the Tule Sub-basin, particularly in Lower Tule Irrigation Districts' operation. SGMA also requires every GSA to engage with a diverse group of interested parties and stakeholders and promote feedback throughout the GSP preparation and implementation process. Another goal of LTRID is to employ variety of outreach programs to respond to public concerns and provide accurate clarification regarding SGMA implementation. In addition, the regulation requires LTRID to document all opportunities for public engagement and active involvement of stakeholders representing the diverse social, cultural, and economical foundations of the population within the Tule Sub-basin.

1.2 GSA Background, Description, and Boundaries

LTRID GSA is one of the six exclusive GSAs within the Tule Subbasin (table A-1), as defined in the Bulletin 118. The Tule Subbasin is a high-priority basin in critical overdraft. Per SGMA, LTRID GSA is required to submit a GSP to DWR by January 31st, 2020.

LTRID boundaries encompasses more than 102,000 acres and approximately 10,000 residents. The land within the LTRID GSA is primarily agricultural in nature, with approximately 85,000 acres under production (Figure A-2). Primary crops include pistachio, almonds, corn, hay, and grapes. Row crops predominate and make up more than 70 percent of the irrigated landscape.

Table A-1: Tule Subbasin GSA and their Members

Tule Subbasin GSAs	GSA Member Entities	
<i>Delano-Earlimart Irrigation District GSA</i>	Delano Earlimart Irrigation District	Earlimart Public Utilities
<i>Alpaugh GSA</i>	Alpaugh Irrigation District Atwell Island Water District	Alpaugh Community Services District
<i>Eastern Tulare GSA</i>	County of Tulare City of Porterville Sausalito Irrigation District Teapot Dome Water District	Vandalia Water District Terra Bella Irrigation District Kern-Tulare Water District Porterville Irrigation District
<i>Lower Tule River Irrigation District GSA</i>	Lower Tule River Irrigation District Woodville Community Service District	Poplar Community Service District Tipton Community Service Districts
<i>Pixley Irrigation District GSA</i>	Pixley Irrigation District	Pixley Public Utility District Teviston Public Utility District
<i>Tri-County Water Authority</i>	Angiola Water District	Deer Creek Storm Water

Figure A-2: Lower Tule Irrigation District Boundaries

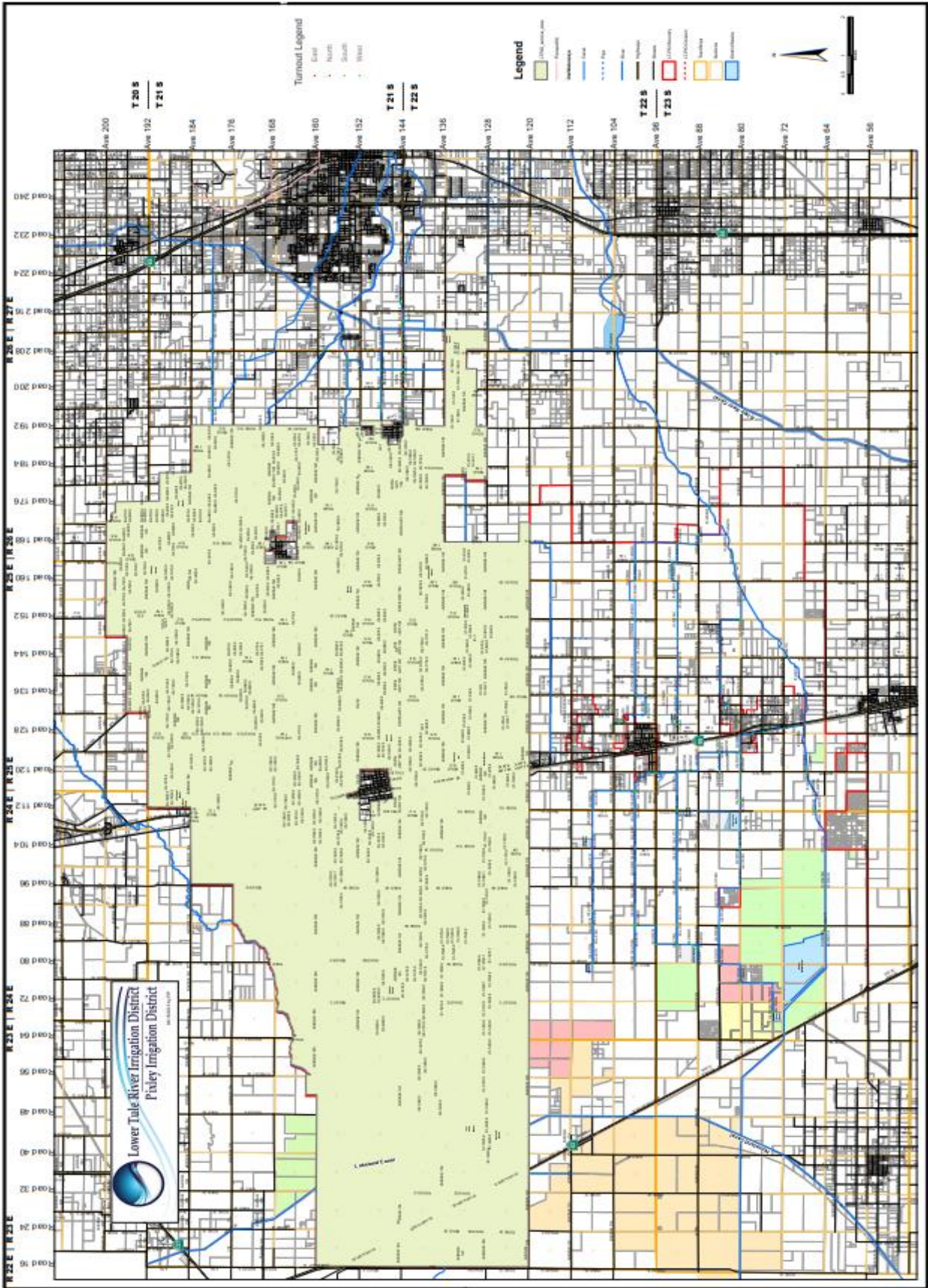
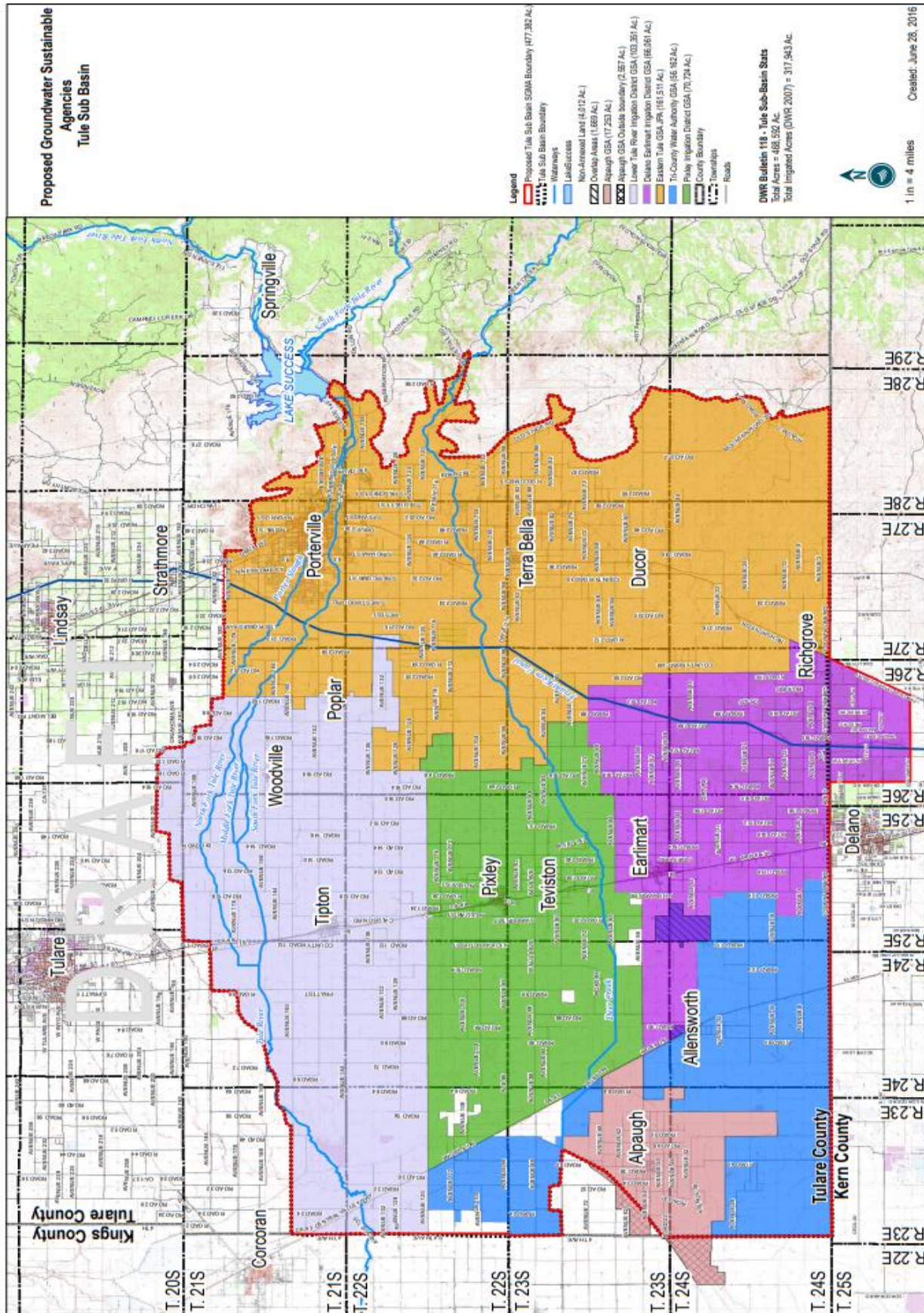


Figure A-3: GSA Boundaries



1.3 LTRID GSA's Decision-Making Process

The LTRID GSA has the responsibility to engage in a diverse population that is geographically spread throughout the Tulare County. LTRID GSA is governed by the Board of Directors. The Board of directors, and the Ground Planning Commission (GPC) are the main bodies that solely decide on GSP. The roles and responsibilities of these bodies are:

- **Board of Directors:** The Board of Directors of the LTRID GSA will be responsible for the implementation of the GSP and making the final decision establishing the direction of the plan, overseeing implementation, and allocating resources appropriately. The board of directors and may be subject to change upon coming election are:
 - Division 1: Alex Garcia
 - Division 2: Jim Costa
 - Division 3: Tom Barcellos (Vice-President)
 - Division 4: Gary Fernandes (President)
 - Division 5: Josh Pitigliano
- **Groundwater Planning Commission:** Advises the Board of Directors on matters dealing with the GSA and GSP development, GSP implementation, and other GSA/GSP matters; open to the public and all interested stakeholders who wish to participate.

1.4 Goals and Desired Outcomes of GSP Developments

The primary goal of LTRID GSA is to develop and implement a GSP that has a least or very minimal effect to the economic disruption within its boundaries. One of the goals of this GSA is to establish a Subbasin that drive into sustainability and avoid the six undesirable results legislated by SGMA. By actively engaging and purposely educating/informing the public and stakeholder during GSP implementation. The Overall goal of the LTRID GSA is to reach groundwater sustainability as required by SGMA, while protecting, enhancing and managing the water resources and related assets to benefit the growers, communities and other beneficial users within the boundary.

1.5 Commitment and Expectations

LTRID GSA makes the following commitment to keep the public and stakeholders informed of its efforts to develop and implement GSP for the Basin. These commitments are consistent with-and supports-the LTRID GSA's Groundwater Management Guiding Principles which, in conjunction with this Communication Plan, will guide development of the GSP.

- To engage with a diverse group of stakeholders, including any disadvantaged communities, during development of implementation of the GSP.
- To educate stakeholders about water resources in the Basin, the benefits and challenges of sustainable groundwater management under SGMA, and the LTRID GSA's process to comply with SGMA's requirements and ensure that the Basin is sustainably managed for future generations.
- To consider the interests of all the Basin's beneficial uses and users of groundwater during development and implementation of the GSP.
- To be open and transparent during the development and implementation of the GSP.
- To provide fair access to stakeholders and reasonable opportunities for input and feedback during the GSP development and implementation process.
- To pursue a variety of outreach and engagement methods to encourage broad stakeholder participation and collaboration.
- To promote certainty and confidence in the LTRID GSA's actions by establishing and following transparent procedures and providing clear and objective information to stakeholders about the contents of the GSP.
- To ensure all questions, comments and ideas from stakeholders are addressed.

1.6 GSP Communication and Objectives

The communication objective is to encourage the active involvement of diverse social, cultural, and economic elements of the population within the LTRID boundaries, so far more to effectively educate/inform all the beneficial users of groundwater. LTRID's goal during the GSP implementation is to provide a meaningful opportunity for engagement and input to the final plan. There are many opportunities for the public and stakeholder to input their assistance. Such opportunities will come from: events, workshops, educational material, meetings, leaving comments on the website (www.ltrid.org/SGMA), and most importantly setting a meeting with one of LTRID staff. All input received from the public and stakeholders will be reviewed by the GPC and strongly considered during the implementation and GSP development.

1.7 Overriding Concerns, Major Concerns or Challenges

Throughout the preliminary discussions with stakeholders in the LTRID GSA boundary, the major concerns, challenges or overriding concerns are fixated around the economic impacts to the agricultural industry, which will have a direct impact on the Disadvantaged Communities (DACs). The economic impact could include major loss of jobs and loss of tax generated revenue due to the decrease of land values of fallowed

land. Decrease in water budget could likely inhibit agriculture work from thriving, thus affecting the socio-economics around the LTRID boundary. DACs may confront increased costs of agricultural products and byproducts due to reductions in cropped acres and diminished farm incomes. LTRID will focus on ways to engage with agricultural industries and the DACs for which they are the most impacted by the implementations of SGMA.

Section 2: Stakeholder Identification

2.1 Active Stakeholder Groups

The active stakeholder groups of the LTRID GSA are members of the Board or Directors and Ground Planning Commission. The following list identifies stakeholder groups who have an interest in the beneficial use of the groundwater, as determined by the LTRID GSA, based on those listed in SGMA, Section 10723.2.

- **Agricultural Users** – Almost all lands within LTRID boundary are composed of agricultural users. A significant number of these agricultural users are solely dependent on groundwater and surface water for their irrigation needs.
- **Domestic Well Owners** – These are the small farms, ranches, and interconnected small wells that are located within the LTRID boundary.
- **Public Water System** – There are three water system within the LTRID GSA. Tipton Community Service, Poplar Community Service, and Woodville Public Utility District. The three public districts have entered to a Memorandum of understanding (MOU) that they will have one non-voting seat in the GPC. It is in our understanding that the three public water system entered into an agreement to send one representative to the GPC meetings.
- **Local land use planning agencies** - Local land use planning agency include the county of Tulare.
- **Environmental users of groundwater** – U.S Department of Fish and Wildlife, LTRID will coordinate with the fish and wildlife to fully cooperate and aid their needs.
- **California Native American Tribes** – at this point LTRID is not aware of any Members of the Native American tribe. According to the CWC § 10720.3 Native American may voluntarily agree to participate in any planning or discussion of GSP.
- **Disadvantaged communities, including but not limited to, those served by private domestic wells or small community water systems** – these includes the community of Tipton, community of Woodville and the community of Poplar.

- **Entities listed in Water Code section 10927 that are monitoring and reporting groundwater elevation in all or part of a groundwater basin managed by the groundwater sustainability agency** – at this point LTRID has not identified any entities that are listed in the water code section 10927, but they are highly encouraged to do participate.

Section 3: Stakeholder Survey and Overview

3.1 Survey and Overview

LTRID’s stakeholders and the public will have an ongoing opportunity to provide input and perspective throughout the GSP development. LTRID will collect stakeholder input through formal survey, public comment at regular meetings, open discussion, and other forms of both direct and indirect communication. Recognizing that not everyone will understand the contents of SGMA at first, public education, and SGMA helpful information will be posted in the LTRID website.

This section provides a brief overview of the activities LTRID has taken to date to review stakeholders regarding the GSP development process.

3.2 Stakeholder Survey

Taken from the DWR’s Stakeholder Survey Toolkit, LTRID has created some initial survey with the following questions

- Are you familiar with SGMA regulations?
- Are you currently engaged in activities or discussions regarding groundwater management in this region?
- Do you own, manage, or operate land in this basin?
- Do you manage water resources?
- If so, what is your role?
- Are bilingual information and meeting materials needed?
- There are six (6) items that SGMA defines as an undesirable result that LTRID must consider in the GSP. Do you know what they are, and ranking them from highest to lowest priority, what are they?
- What are your primary concerns about surface water supply in this region?
- What else should LTRID consider as it develops the GSP?
- What else would you like to know about the LTRID GSP process.

3.3 Regular Meeting and Lay of the Land Overview

As mentioned in the previous sections, LTRID is composed of Board of Directors and the Groundwater Planning Commission as an advisory committee to the Board of Directors. Since LTRID GSA is using an engage and direct approach with engaging stakeholders, inputs from the beneficial users will be used as a basis for the development of education material and key message and talking points. For any technical issue presented to the Groundwater Planning Commission (GPC), it will be

written and evaluated by the technical team and be presented to the Board of Directors. This has been the process that LTRID GSA has utilized and will continue to develop the GSP.

(Key interest of stakeholders related to groundwater and surface water within the LTRID GSA boundary includes:)

- Surface water allocation
- SGMA impact to water credit transfer
- Groundwater pumping (water pumping ceiling/limits/tracking)
- Land Subsidence
- Land Value
- Land retiring/fallowed
- General Farming issues

3.3.1 Key Documented Issues

While LTRID is aware of the issues brought up by the stakeholders, LTRID has documented some key issues that are currently or may affect the interest of the stakeholders in the future. Additional issues will be documented and added to the list as they arise during the GPC and Board of Director Meeting. Some of the issues that has been documented are as follows:

- **Fallowed Land/Loss of Productive Agricultural Land:** The preliminary studies and water budget for the LTRID beneficial users of surface water may need to reduce/retire some of the irrigatable land to achieve sustainability.
- **Decreased in Land Value:** This is one of the issues that comes up at the meeting. Since the land is tied up to the water rights, many of this land *may* lose some of the monetary value.
- **Land Subsidence Near the Critical Infrastructures:** In between the intersection of Kern Friant Canal, Tule River and upstream of Friant Canal and Deer Creek, LTRID have seen significant loss of water delivery capacity in some of the structures. Kern Friant Canal is a vital delivery system for the beneficial users in the LTRID boundary.
- **Economic stability within the agricultural economy:** The loss/restriction of water pumping may reduce the crop production therefore reducing the profit generated in the agricultural economy. Also, thus reducing tax generated income within the LTRID boundary.

Section 4: Message and Talking Points

4.1 Messages and Talking Points Overview

Key messages and talking points will be broken down by phases and beneficial user groups, as different issues and factors may arise with the different groups. LTRID understands that clear and consistent messaging is critical during various phases of GSP development and implementation. The LTRID GSA has developed some information and talking points posted in the LTRID website. Thus, these posted talking

points are not final and may be subjected to change. Also, every meeting agenda is posted in the website and sent to the users that are subscribed to the email blast.

Monthly email blast will be sent out to the subscribed user. This will contain the monthly update regarding the GSP implementation and newsletter regarding the SGMA timeline. *(To be part of this party email list please contact the LTRID office)*

4.2 Key Messages and Talking Points

Messaged and key Talking Points will be subjected to change according the different phase. Some of these will be developed and further improved at a later date when LTRID approaches the different phase.

Some of the Key Messages and Talking Points may include some of the following:

- What is Sustainable Groundwater Management Act?
- What is the role of LTRID in SGMA?
- What are they key factors in GSP that can affect beneficial users?
- How can a beneficial user/stakeholder get involve?
- What are the key significances/impacts that SGMA have in the beneficial users or DACs in LTRID boundary?
- What are the necessary steps to take to achieve sustainability?
- How much water thus the beneficial users are able to pump?
- Will beneficial users have to retire some of their irrigatable land?
- How can stakeholders voice their opinion?

4.3 Key Phases and Talking Points

4.3.1 GSA formation

Phase 1 is complete. Key messages and talking point were focused on:

- What is SGMA
- What and how was GSA formed?

4.3.2 GSP Preparation and Submission

Phase 2 is currently ongoing. Key messages and talking points during this phase include:

- What are the components of GSP development?
- How can beneficial users and stakeholders can get involve during the preparation of GSP?
- What role does the GPC have in the preparation of GSP?
- What are the current and future project that the GSA is considering?
- How will the GSA use the information gathered from Harder's report and Land SAT data?
- What educational resources is there for the stakeholders and the beneficial users?

4.3.3 GSP Review and Evaluation:

Phase 3 will consist of reviewing the draft and public evaluation.

- What's next?
- Timeline and GSP process.
- Process of public review of the drafted GSP and public comments to the drafted GSP.

4.3.4 GSP Implementation

Phase 4 will begin following the submission of the adopted GSP to the DWR. Messages and talking point will focus on the implementation timeline, and possible revision of the plan after its implementation.

(Some of these questions are answered in www.ltrid.org/sgma, and many of these questions has yet to be answered and documented. As mentioned above, many of these questions will developed and will be answered as different phase arrives)

Section 5: Venues for Engaging

5.1 Overview of Venues for Engaging

There are variety of opportunities, venues and methods for the LTRID GSA to connect with and engage with the beneficial users and the stakeholders throughout the GSP development. LTRID will use the traditional ways of engaging with its' beneficial users and stakeholders, LTRID encourages their stakeholders and beneficial users to attend the GPC and Board of Director meeting. Agendas, meeting packets, additional and vital information will be posted on the website and will also be sent out to the subscribed users.

Regular Meetings are held according to the following schedule: *(Regular meetings are subject to change, notice will be sent out to the subscribed users.) Meetings will be held at the Lower Tule Irrigation District Office located at 357 East Olive Avenue, Tipton, CA 93272, unless otherwise changed.*

- **Board of Directors Meeting:** Held every 2nd Tuesday of every month at 9AM.
- **Groundwater Planning Commission (GPC):** Held every 4th Friday of every Month at 10 AM
- **SGMA Technical Committee Meeting:** Held every 2nd Wednesday of every Month at 2PM.

(For event information visit www.ltrid.org/calendar/events)

5.2 Public Meeting and Presentation (educational/informative)

Educational and informative outreach is a vital part of this communication, engagement and outreach plan. LTRID has developed ways to distribute the meeting contents and way to advertise the upcoming meetings. LTRID has developed a SGMA section in the website to answer various questions. Presentations are also included in the website. LTRID GSA also developed the following:

5.2.1 Public Outreach

- Reach out to Tulare County Farm Bureau with information about the program and encourage them to provide the public with information about the process and contact information from LTRID
- Send direct mail to holders of groundwater rights within defined parameters.
- Send regular GSP update, email-blasts to stakeholders.
- Word of mouth through stakeholders that attend meetings to spread the word.

5.2.2 Organization Outreach

- Send direct information through the Tule Sub basin Water Quality Coalition who is operating in Tule Sub-basin and communicates with the same stakeholders, encouraging them to visit LTRID website and review SGMA contents online

5.2.3 Public Officials and Government Agencies Outreach

- Meet with elected and appointed officials regarding the process and the role they can play in the development of the GSP

5.2.4 Stakeholder Advisory Committee

- LTRID has created a Groundwater Planning Commission (GPC), which is advisory to the GSA board. The GPC is comprised of landowners within the GSA as well as a representative of the CSD's and PUD's covered under the plan. The GPC is tasked with developing the GSP and will assess outreach efforts and provide input and advice for reaching audience and engaging other local stakeholders. Meetings are held monthly and publicly noticed.

5.3 Printed Material, Digital Communication and Postage

LTRID GSA will rely heavily of the use of digital communication to provide notice, communication and materials related to the implementation of GSP. LTRID GSA will also developed printed material to be sent out to the stakeholders and beneficial user. Communication effort will include:

- LTRID Website: www.ltrid.org/sgma

- Meeting postings and Notices: Email Blast
- Meeting Agendas and Packet: will be sent out to the subscribed user and printed and provided during the meeting.
- Presentation: will be posted on the website and sent out to the subscribed user.

Section 6: Implementation and Timeline:

The GSP has a specific timeline established by the Department of Water Resources to meet certain obligations of the SGMA:

- Phase 1: GSA Formation and Coordination – 2015 through 2017
- Phase 2: GSP Preparation and Submission – 2017 through 2019
- Phase 3: GSP Review and Evaluation – 2019 through 2020
- Phase 4: GSP implementation and Reporting: 2020 and ongoing

This timeline is subject to change with the progression of the GSP development and implementation phases

Section 7: Evaluation and Assessment

LTRID GSA will utilize traditional and new media tools to assess success in achieving its communication goals. If the outreach program is not meeting its' goals and lacking success, LTRID GSA will re-assess and expand its efforts. The assessment will include the following:

- Website monitoring: LTRID has the ability to check how many people are viewing the website daily, monthly and yearly. LTRID can see the traffic and get information on the traffic in the website.
- Public comment section during the LTRID meeting regarding outreach, how they got the information regarding the meeting.

Figure A-4: GSP Timeline & Schedule for Draft Plan

