# Ojai Basin Groundwater Management Agency

Updated Process and Criteria for Administering Water Well Registration and Verification Requests
Effective September 26, 2024

This document describes the process and criteria that will be used by the Ojai Basin Groundwater Management Agency (OBGMA) to administer requests for written verifications for new well permits following Governor Newsom's issuance of Executive Order N-3-24, which had the effect of rescinding Paragraph 4 of Executive Order N-3-23. Ventura County Public Works Agency (VCPWA) is responsible for processing applications for well permits in the County, including permits for extraction facilities located in the Ojai Valley Groundwater Basin (OVGB - DWR Bulletin 118 Basin No. 4-002.). OBGMA is the statutorily designated Groundwater Sustainability Agency (GSA) with management responsibility for the OVGB. (See California Water Code § 10723(c)(1).) Currently VCPWA, in consultation with OBGMA, is processing water well permit applications for the OVGB in accordance with Ventura County Ordinance No. 4468.

The OVGB is a designated high-priority basin subject to the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act of 2014 (SGMA). In compliance with SGMA requirements, OBGMA adopted a Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) for the OVGB which was approved by the California Department of Water Resources (DWR) in October 2023. Irrespective of Executive Orders issued by the Governor, OBGMA is statutorily obligated by SGMA to ensure the groundwater of the OVGB is sustainably managed and is authorized by California Water Code § 10725.2(a) to perform any act necessary or proper to carry out this purpose. In compliance with this statutory mandate, and to ensure the goals of the GSP are met, OBGMA will review all requests for written verifications for new well permits, including permits to construct new wells or for the replacement of existing wells, to determine if groundwater extraction by the proposed well would be inconsistent with any sustainable groundwater management program established in the GSP, or would decrease the likelihood of achieving any sustainability goal for the OVGB covered by the GSP.

**Process Outline:**

Requests for the OBGMA to issue a written well verification will be administered as set forth below. The attached flow chart illustrates the process. Those requesting a written verification must submit the following documentation to the OBGMA:

1. Copy of completed County Well Application (including all related records and information)
2. Completed OBGMA Water Well Registration and Verification Request (including all related records and information) (signed by property owner)
3. OBGMA Acknowledgment Form (signed by property owner)
4. OBGMA Indemnification Agreement (signed by property owner)
5. OBGMA Deposit/Reimbursement Agreement (signed by property owner )
6. Deposit of $5,000.00 payable to "OBGMA".

Forms (2) through (5) are available on the OBGMA website (www.obgma.com/forms). Upon receipt of all required documentation and deposit, a request for a written verification will be reviewed to initially determine if it can be administered on an expedited basis. Expedited processing may apply to requests relating to water wells located outside the principal alluvial aquifer comprising the OVGB, and wells that are anticipated to extract no more than 2 acre-feet per year for domestic purposes. Requests not subject to expedited review will undergo additional technical review by OBGMA staff and consultants to determine if groundwater extraction by the proposed well would be inconsistent with any sustainable groundwater management program established in the GSP or would decrease the likelihood of achieving a sustainability goal for the OVGB covered by the GSP. All information and documentation submitted to the OBGMA in connection with a request for a written verification shall be deemed public information unless specific exemptions apply as determined by the OBGMA.

**Submittals (1) through (6) above and questions about the written verification process can be sent to Miranda Patton, General Manager of the OBGMA at P.O. Box 1779, Ojai, CA 93024, or sent electronically to obgmagm@gmail.com. For inquiries by telephone, please contact Ms. Patton at 805.661.4037.**

**Criteria Outline:**

As set forth above, OBGMA requires an evaluation to address whether groundwater extraction by a proposed well would be inconsistent with any sustainable groundwater management program established in the GSP, or would decrease the likelihood of achieving a sustainability goal for the OVGB covered by the GSP. SGMA defines sustainable groundwater management as "the management and use of groundwater in a manner that can be maintained during the planning and implementation horizon without causing undesirable results" (California Water Code § 10721).

The OBGMA, with input from its consultants, has developed a set of criteria for evaluating the impacts of a proposed new or modified well on the long-term sustainability in the OVGB. The GSP adopted by the OBGMA on January 6, 2022, and approved by the California Department of Water Resources on October 26, 2023, outlines the Sustainability Goal for the Basin, which defines long-term sustainability for the OVGB. As stated in Chapter 3 of the GSP:

> "*The OBGMA's sustainability goal is to preserve the quantity and quality of groundwater in the Ojai Basin in order to protect and maintain the long-term water supply for the common benefit of the water users in the Basin. The GSP is intended to also meet the overarching sustainability goal of SGMA to ensure that the OVGB continues to operate within its sustainable yield and does not exhibit undesirable results within the planning and implementation horizon of the GSP (50 years). (See GSP for the Ojai Valley Groundwater Basin, Section 3.1.3.)*
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> *Conditions within the OVGB have been sustainable over the modeled period from 1971-2019 (49-year period) and will continue to be considered sustainable so long as the following sustainability goal components continue to be met:*
>
> 1. *Long-term, aggregate groundwater use is less than or equal to the OVGB's estimated sustainable yield, as defined by SGMA;*
> 2. *Groundwater levels are maintained at elevations necessary to avoid undesirable results.*

*Lowering of groundwater levels potentially leading to significant and unreasonable depletions of available water supply for beneficial use could occur if groundwater levels fall below minimum thresholds set at representative monitoring points (RMPs);*

3. *Groundwater quality, as measured in municipal and domestic water wells, generally exhibits a stable and/or improving trend for identified contaminants of concern (COCs): total dissolved solids (TDS), sulfate, chloride, boron, nitrate, iron, and manganese; and*
4. *Groundwater quality is suitable for existing beneficial uses."*

(See GSP for the Ojai Valley Groundwater Basin, Section 3.1.3., www.obgma.com/sustainability)

Based on the sustainability goal components outlined in the GSP, the OBGMA will use the following criteria, as well as possibly additional criteria, to evaluate the consistency of a proposed new or modified well with the Sustainability Goal for the Basin:

- Will the projected drawdown cause groundwater level minimum threshold exceedances at the nearest representative monitoring points?
- Is the projected production likely to cause long-term exceedance of the sustainable yield of the OVGB?
- Is the project likely to cause exceedance of the minimum thresholds for groundwater quality at the nearest representative monitoring points?
- Will the projected drawdown impact ongoing or future projects aimed at maintaining sustainability or addressing critical data gaps in the OVGB?

While impacts to ongoing or future projects are not explicitly identified as a sustainability goal component in the GSP, certain data gaps were identified in the GSP that limit understanding of the hydrogeologic conceptual model and characterization of all beneficial uses and users of groundwater in the OVGB. The GSP identifies projects that support additional data collection and field investigations to reduce these data gaps. As such, criteria 4 was added to the evaluation to ensure that these projects are not significantly impacted by a proposed well or well modification.

Requests for written verification not subject to expedited review will undergo technical review by OBGMA, its staff and consultants, to determine if groundwater extraction by the proposed new or modified well meets the foregoing criteria. If OBGMA determines that groundwater extraction by the proposed new or modified well does not meet one or more of the foregoing criteria, the proposed well will be considered inconsistent with the GSP, and inconsistent OBGMA's statutory obligation to ensure that groundwater of the OVGB is sustainably managed. In these situations, written verification will be denied. Applicants may request the OBGMA Board to reconsider a decision that denies a well verification.

Thank you for your cooperation in this important process.

Miranda Patton, General Manager
Ojai Basin Groundwater Management Agency
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Attachment: OBGMA Well Verification Process Flowchart