

# Gov. Brown signs Calif. groundwater bills

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California Gov. Jerry Brown, seated, signs a package of groundwater bills Sept. 16. The legislation gives the state broad controls over groundwater use. COURTESY OF GOV. JERRY BROWN

**Gov. Jerry Brown has signed a package of legislation giving the state sweeping new controls over groundwater use in California. The bills set deadlines for establishing and implementing management plans in various groundwater basins.**

Capital Press

SACRAMENTO — Gov. Jerry Brown signed a legislative package Sept. 16 that will give the state broad controls over groundwater use in California.

Companion bills by Assemblyman Roger Dickinson, D-Sacramento, and Sen. Fran Pavley, D-Agoura Hills, will give the State Water Resources Control Board sweeping oversight over groundwater use and empower local

agencies to regulate extraction from aquifers through “groundwater sustainability plans” while charging fees to implement the new rules.

In his signing statement, Brown said the bills accomplish goals outlined in his California Water Action Plan, which he unveiled earlier this year. He said the plan will combine with conservation, water recycling, expanded storage and other efforts to secure California’s water future.

“A central feature of these bills is the recognition that groundwater management in California is best accomplished locally,” Brown said in his statement. “Local agencies will now have the power to assess the conditions of their local groundwater basins and take the necessary steps to bring those basins in a state of chronic long-term overdraft into balance.”

Some farm groups have complained that the bills could lead to uncertainties in agricultural operations as well as litigation. California Farm Bureau Federation president Paul Wenger said Sept. 16 that the organization will “actively monitor” implementation of the new rules, which he complains were developed too hastily.

“We consider ourselves a progressive state, yet we embrace measures that will reduce our quality of life, our economic

growth and our ability to grow food for our state, nation and world,” Wenger said in a statement.

But other agricultural groups joined environmentalists in praising the legislation. Better controls will help growers know how much water is in the ground and how it is recharged, contends David Runsten, policy director with the Community Alliance with Family Farmers.

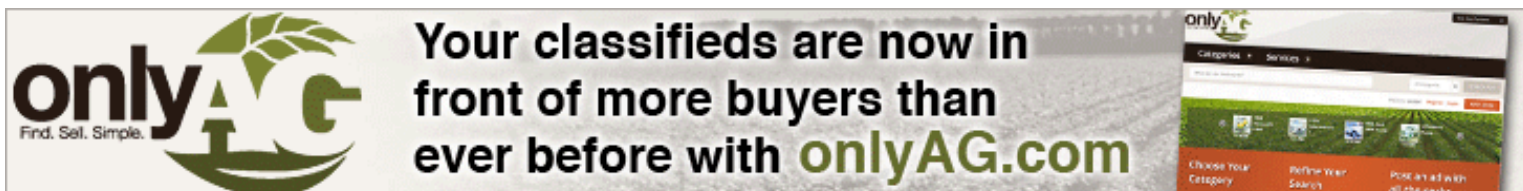
Under current law, the state water board could regulate the waste and unreasonable use of water, including groundwater, but management mostly has consisted of voluntary local plans that exist in some watersheds but not others.

The three bills signed Sept. 16 require local groundwater management agencies to be identified by 2017, sustainability plans for overdrafted basins to be in place by 2020, plans for other basins to be established by 2022 and sustainability in all basins to be achieved by 2040, the governor’s office explained.

In addition, the legislation identifies objectives and milestones for achieving sustainability and enables the state to intervene when local agencies are unable or unwilling to adopt management plans, according to Brown’s office.

The measures come as environmentalists have long maintained that California is the only state in the country not to regulate use of groundwater, which accounts for 30 percent of total water usage and 43 percent of residents’ drinking water, according to state water officials.

Farm groups including the CFBF, the California Cattlemen’s Association and California Citrus Mutual have said they, too, want better groundwater management but are worried about the bills’ broad scope and specific impacts.



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