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THIRD READING

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Bill No: AB 568  
Author: Macedo (R)  
Amended: 7/18/25 in Senate  
Vote: 21

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SENATE NATURAL RES. & WATER COMMITTEE: 7-0, 7/16/25  
AYES: Limón, Seyarto, Allen, Grove, Hurtado, Laird, Stern

SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE: Senate Rule 28.8

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 72-0, 6/4/25 - See last page for vote

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**SUBJECT:** Tule East Groundwater Sustainability Agency Act

**SOURCE:** County of Tulare

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**DIGEST:** This bill creates the Tule East Groundwater Sustainability Agency (GSA) to oversee groundwater management and compliance with the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) in portions of the Tule subbasin in eastern Tulare County.

**ANALYSIS:**

Existing law, under the SGMA:

- 1) Requires high- or medium-priority basins that are subject to critical conditions of overdraft to be managed by a groundwater sustainability plan (GSP) or coordinated GSPs by January 31, 2020, and requires all other high- or medium-priority basins to be managed under a GSP or coordinated GSPs by January 31, 2022. (Water Code (WAT) §10720.7(a)).
- 2) Authorizes a local agency or combination of local agencies overlying a groundwater basin to decide to become a GSA for that basin. (WAT §10723)

- 3) Requires a GSA, upon adoption of a GSP, to submit the GSP to the Department of Water Resources (DWR) for review. (WAT §10733.4(a)).
- 4) If GSAs develop multiple GSPs for a basin, requires the GSPs not be submitted until the entire basin is covered by GSPs. When the entire basin is covered by GSPs, the GSAs are required to jointly submit to DWR (1) the GSPs, (2) an explanation of how the GSPs implemented together satisfy SGMA for the entire basin, and (3) a copy of the coordination agreement between the GSAs to ensure the coordinated implementation of the GSPs. (WAT §10733.4(b)).

This bill:

- 1) Creates the Tule East GSA in the County of Tulare to develop and implement a GSP and specifies the initial boundaries of the Tule East GSA, as provided.
- 2) Requires the Tule East GSA to be governed by a board of directors (board) that consists of five members, as follows:
  - a) One member chosen by Hope Water District from the members of the board of directors of Hope Water District.
  - b) One member chosen by Ducor Water District from the members of the board of directors of Ducor Water District.
  - c) One member chosen by the County of Tulare, as specified.
  - d) Two members chosen by the other three board members to represent groundwater-dependent agricultural interests within the East Tule GSA territory, as specified.
- 3) Authorizes the board to adopt an ordinance to provide compensation to its members, as provided. Prohibits a board member from being compensated for more than a total of 10 days in any calendar month.
- 4) Authorizes the East Tule GSA to exclude groundwater pumpers from any part of its policies, rules, or regulations if the pumper extracts less than a minimum amount of groundwater annually specified by the board.
- 5) Authorizes the East Tule GSA to collect data and conduct technical and other investigations to carry out these provisions.

- 6) Authorizes the East Tule GSA to exercise any of the powers and authorities granted to GSAs by SGMA.
- 7) Authorizes the East Tule GSA to impose fees to fund the costs of a groundwater sustainability program.
- 8) Adds the East Tule GSAs to the list of “exclusive” local agencies with authority to manage groundwater and comply with SGMA within their respective agency boundaries.
- 9) Adds a savings clause providing that if there is any conflict between SGMA and this bill, the provisions of SGMA apply.

## **Background**

*SGMA.* SGMA was enacted in 2014 to create a statewide requirement for sustainably managing groundwater resources. The objective of SGMA is to ensure the long-term reliability of groundwater resources and connected surface water resources. SGMA provides for the management of groundwater resources by local agencies subject to state oversight and, in the event that actions of local agencies are insufficient, state intervention by the State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board).

*Tule subbasin.* Located in California’s Central Valley in the southern portion of the San Joaquin Valley, the Tule Subbasin covers approximately 475,895 acres, or about 744 square miles. DWR designates the subbasin as “high” priority and subject to conditions of critical overdraft. Communities within the subbasin include the City of Porterville, Allensworth, Alpaugh, Ducor, Earlimart, East Porterville, Pixley, Poplar-Cotton Center, Richgrove, Terra Bella, Teviston, Tipton, and Woodville. According to the 2022 Census data, the Tule Subbasin has an estimated population of 152,577 people. Most of the land within the subbasin and surrounding areas is used for growing crops and raising livestock. Groundwater in the subbasin is used for drinking water, agriculture, wildlife habitat, and oil and gas extraction.

*GSAs for the Tule subbasin.* As recently as 2023, there were seven GSAs responsible for managing groundwater in the subbasin: Pixley Irrigation District GSA, Tri-County Water Authority GSA, Alpaugh GSA, Delano-Earlimart Irrigation District GSA, Eastern Tule GSA, Tulare County GSA, and the Lower Tule River Irrigation District GSA. Today there are 12 GSAs managing portions of the Tule subbasin. The increase in GSAs is a result of the breakup of the

## Eastern Tule GSA.

*Eastern Tule GSA.* Formed in 2016, the Eastern Tule GSA is a joint powers authority that took on responsibility for managing groundwater in the eastern portion of the subbasin. This GSA initially had eight members: the County of Tulare, City of Porterville, Saucelito Irrigation District, Tea Pot Dome Water District, Vandalia Water District, Terra Bella Irrigation District, Kern-Tulare Water District, and Porterville Irrigation District. For various reasons, all of the original members of the GSA, except Tulare County, have since split off to form new GSAs. Tulare County is the sole remaining participant in the joint powers agreement.

*Probationary status for Tule subbasin.* The State Water Board designated the Tule subbasin as a “probationary” basin in September 2024 due to significant deficiencies in several of the GSPs for the subbasin and the adverse impacts that land subsidence resulting from over-pumping of groundwater is having on the Friant-Kern canal. Due to this designation, the basin is subject to “state intervention” under which the State Water Board will work with GSAs to develop an interim plan that will get the subbasin back on track to achieve sustainable groundwater management. Delano-Earlimart Irrigation District GSA and Kern-Tulare Water District were partially excluded from the State Water Board’s probationary designation and pumpers within the jurisdiction of these agencies will not be subject to reporting requirements and fees imposed by the State Water Board. These two agencies will retain this status so long as they comply with specified management actions. Some of the agencies that have split off from the Eastern Tulare GSA appear to think that they may obtain a limited exemption from the State Water Board’s probationary designation as well.

*Hope and Ducor Water Districts.* Based on information available on the State Water Board’s website, Hope Water District has seven connections and primarily serves an elementary school. Ducor is a community services district serving 176 connections in rural towns. Both districts are dependent on groundwater and located south of the city of Porterville in eastern Tulare County.

**FISCAL EFFECT:** Appropriation: No   Fiscal Com.: Yes   Local: Yes

**SUPPORT:** (Verified 8/18/25)

County of Tulare (Source)  
Valley Ag Water Coalition

**OPPOSITION:** (Verified 8/18/25)

None received

**ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT:** According to the author, “Water is life, and Tulare County has been deeply impacted by the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act. Assembly Bill 568 restores stability to the community by creating a dedicated Groundwater Sustainability Agency, empowering the County to protect its water resources, support its agricultural economy, and secure a sustainable future for its residents.”

According to the County of Tulare, when the other entities that made up Eastern Tule GSA left the County as the sole member, “[t]he County does not have the resources to run a GSA and looked to the Kings River East Model (SB 37, 2016) to form a new GSA to cover the remaining area.”

**ASSEMBLY FLOOR:** 72-0, 6/4/25

**AYES:** Addis, Aguiar-Curry, Ahrens, Alanis, Arambula, Ávila Farías, Bains, Bauer-Kahan, Bennett, Berman, Boerner, Calderon, Caloza, Carrillo, Castillo, Chen, Connolly, Davies, DeMaio, Dixon, Ellis, Flora, Fong, Gabriel, Gallagher, Garcia, Gipson, Jeff Gonzalez, Mark González, Hadwick, Haney, Harabedian, Hart, Hoover, Irwin, Jackson, Krell, Lackey, Lowenthal, Macedo, McKinnor, Muratsuchi, Nguyen, Pacheco, Papan, Patel, Patterson, Pellerin, Petrie-Norris, Quirk-Silva, Ramos, Ransom, Celeste Rodriguez, Michelle Rodriguez, Rogers, Blanca Rubio, Sanchez, Schiavo, Schultz, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Soria, Stefani, Ta, Tangipa, Valencia, Wallis, Ward, Wicks, Wilson, Zbur, Rivas

**NO VOTE RECORDED:** Alvarez, Bonta, Bryan, Elhawary, Kalra, Lee, Ortega

Prepared by: Genevieve Wong / N.R. & W. / (916) 651-4116

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