



Point Blue Publication Brief

Water and the Future of the San Joaquin Valley

Nathaniel E. Seavy

nseavy@pointblue.org

The San Joaquin Valley faces some of California's most difficult water management problems—including groundwater overdraft, drinking water contamination, and declines in habitat and native species. Over the next 20 years, the state's Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) will require local water users to bring groundwater use to sustainable levels.

Point Blue and others recently produced a report that explores three key challenges facing the San Joaquin Valley: 1) balancing water supplies and demands, 2) addressing groundwater quality challenges, and 3) fostering beneficial water and land use transitions.

A major finding in the report is that balancing water supplies and demands is expected to require fallowing more than 500,000 acres of agricultural land. This fallowing will lead to a massive transition in land use for the Valley.

Potential uses for this fallowed land captured under the current planning process include solar energy and multi-

benefit restoration of some of the valley's historic riparian, wetland, and desert ecosystems.

But even if relatively ambitious targets for ecosystem restoration are met over the next two decades, this land would account for only one-third of all land to be fallowed. Identifying strategies for the stewardship of all fallowed land will require planning and technical assistance above and beyond what is currently available to private landowners.

To support the stewardship of fallowed land, it will be critical to increase the availability of technical assistance from resource conservation districts, environmental nonprofits, and state and federal advisors.

Achieving groundwater sustainability will require creative approaches to manage water and land for the benefit of people and nature. Scaling up these types of approaches could help the San Joaquin Valley emerge as a national leader in multiple-benefit, ecosystem-based management.

Main Points

The Sustainable Groundwater Management Act requires San Joaquin water users to bring groundwater use to sustainable levels by the early 2040s.

Achieving groundwater sustainability will require fallowing more than 500,000 acres of agricultural land.

Multiple-benefit approaches to managing fallowed land can provide benefits for people and wildlife.

Land transitions in the Valley will require planning and technical assistance above and beyond what is currently available.

Hanak E., et al. 2019. [Water and the Future of the San Joaquin Valley](#). Public Policy Institute of California report.