NOTICE OF EXEMPTION

To:
Office of Planning and Research
P.O. Box 3044, Room 113
Sacramento, CA 95812-3044

Ventura County Clerk
800 South Victoria Ave
Ventura, CA 93009

From:
United Water Conservation District
1701 North Lombard Street, Suite 200
Oxnard, CA 93030

Project Title: Monitoring Wells Project (Project)
Fillmore and Piru Basins Groundwater Sustainability Agency

Project Location: Piru and Fillmore, Ventura County. The Project includes multiple well site locations in the Santa Clara River Watershed, specifically in Piru and Fillmore ground water basins (Figure 1).

Name of Public Agency Approving Project (Lead Agency): Fillmore and Piru Basins Groundwater Sustainability Agency (FPBGSA)

Name of Person or Agency Carrying Out Project: FPBGSA

Project Description: The FPBGSA is a joint powers authority agency established through a Joint Exercise of Powers Agreement between the City of Fillmore, the County of Ventura, and the United Water Conservation District (United) for the purpose of sustainably managing the Piru groundwater basin and the Fillmore groundwater basin in compliance with the California Sustainable Groundwater Management Act of 2014 (SGMA). The City of Fillmore and County of Ventura are local agencies with land use and water use authorities. United is a California special district with a service area that includes the Ventura County portion of the Santa Clara River Valley. United serves as a steward for managing the surface water and groundwater resources within all or part of seven groundwater basins, including the Piru and Fillmore basins.

Both the County of Ventura and United conduct groundwater and surface water monitoring. Past and current monitoring has included both groundwater elevation monitoring and water quality sampling and analysis. The two agencies share monitoring data. They also share monitoring data with the State of California. Although the County of Ventura and United have a reasonably robust well monitoring network, there are areas within the basins where additional data may be useful in reducing uncertainty and refining understanding of hydrologic conditions. The areas of interest are in important locations where additional insight into groundwater recharge, discharge, and surface water-groundwater interaction would benefit local agencies' efforts in effectively monitoring and managing sustainability of the basins. In compliance with the SGMA, the FPBGSA, as a local Groundwater Sustainability Agency, must develop and implement Groundwater

Sustainability Plans for managing the Piru and Fillmore basins. These plans consider sustainability indicators, such as chronic groundwater level decline and interconnected surface water depletion, among others. Data collected from the proposed wells will aid in evaluating the effectiveness of the plan and basin management.

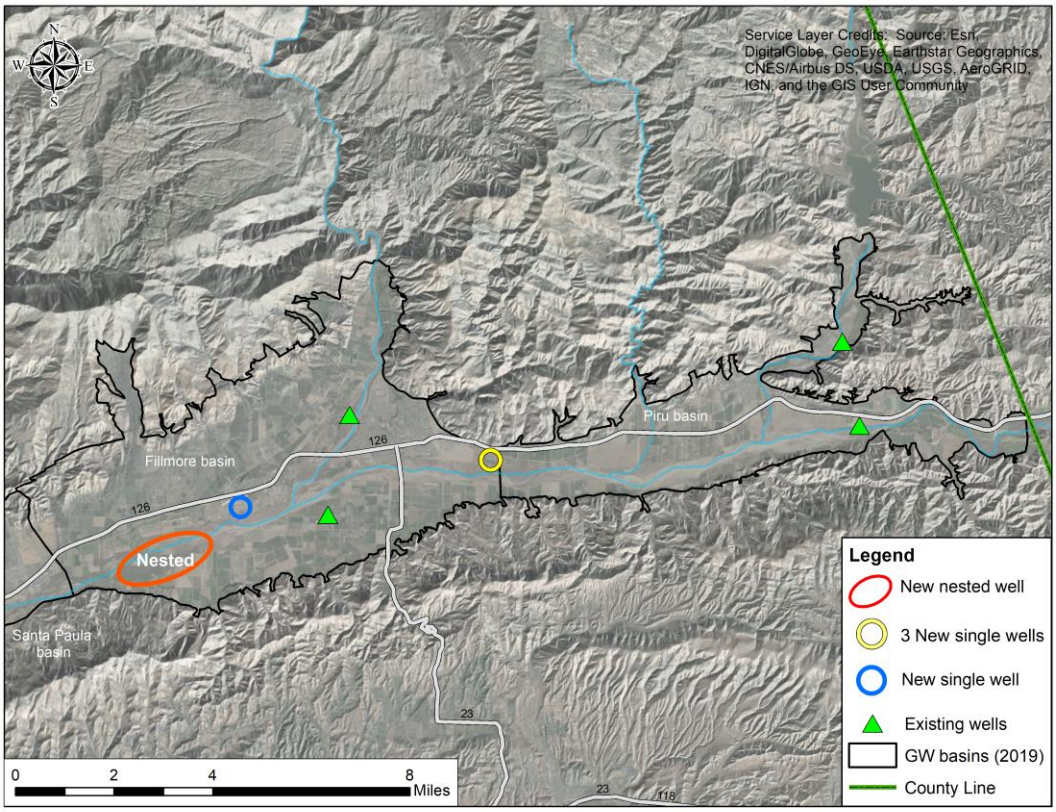
The proposed Project includes retrofit of up to four existing wells, and installation of four shallow monitoring wells and one nested monitoring well (Figure 1). The proposed well retrofits include installation of a pressure transducer in the existing well for automated data collection. Modifications to the wellheads will include reaming the access port on the top plate of the well to a larger diameter sufficient to fit a pressure transducer unit, or installation of a new top plate. A licensed water well contractor (C-57) will perform the work. The work will include removal of the existing well seal and top plate, and reinstalling after the access port has been modified. Work is expected to be completed in one day, per well. The retrofit will not result in an expansion of the existing well footprint.

The four shallow monitoring wells will be constructed using an auger drilling rig to drill the borehole and install the well. The well will be constructed of three-inch Schedule-40 PVC perforated pipe installed to approximately 100 ft below ground surface (bgs). After installation, the well will be grouted with a surface seal and a cement pad will be poured at or above grade. In addition, a well cap and bollards will be installed to protect the well from damage. The permanent footprint of each new monitoring well installation will include a cement pad no larger than 10 by 10 feet. Typically, a well of this design can be drilled in a week or less. Once drilling commences, the drill-rig will operate continuously (24 hours a day) until the borehole is completed to the total depth, estimated to be 100 ft bgs. See Attachment A for an example of a completed well (Figures 2 and 3), auger drill rig set-up (Figure 4), and generalized schematic (Figure 5).

The nested monitoring well will be constructed using a reverse-rotary drill rig to drill the boreholes and install the well. The nested well includes a single borehole with multiple wells installed at a range of depths. The well(s) will be constructed of three-inch Schedule-40 PVC perforated pipe installed at a range of depths with the maximum depth of approximately 400 ft bgs. The permanent footprint of the nested monitoring well installation will include a cement pad no larger than 10 by 10 feet and will include a well cap and bollards to prevent damage to the well. Typically, a well of this design will take approximately 4 weeks to complete. Once drilling commences, the drill-rig will operate continuously (24 hours a day) until the borehole is completed to the total depth, estimated to be 800 ft bgs. See Attachment B for an example reverse-rotary drill rig set-up (Figure 6) and generalized schematic (Figure 7).

For all monitoring well construction, an onsite hydrogeologist will collect sample cuttings and prepare a lithologic log of the boreholes. Excavated material will be used to back-fill the boreholes to achieve appropriate well depth and any remaining materials will be removed from site. After well installation, the (above surface) site(s) will be cleaned and returned to pre-construction conditions to the extent possible. Project work for constructing monitoring wells will include a temporary staging area for the drill rig, material storage and associated equipment.

Figure 1. Project area and proposed monitoring well locations.



Exempt Status:
__ Ministerial (Sec. 21080(b)(1); 15268)
__ Declared Emergency (Sec. 21080(b)(3); 15269(a))
__ Emergency Project (Sec. 21080(b)(4); 15269(b)(c))
X Categorical Exemption. State type and section number: Class 6, Section 15306 – Information Collection and Class 1, Section 15301 Existing Facilities
__Statutory Exemptions

Reasons Why Project is Exempt: The Project is categorically exempt pursuant to California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines Section 15306 *Information Collection* and Section 15301 *Existing Facilities*. Section 15306 *Information Collection* consists of basic data collection, research, experimental management, and resource evaluation activities which do not result in a serious or major disturbance to an environmental resource. The Project's purpose it to collect groundwater data to support groundwater research to fill an existing data gap and to fundamentally support local groundwater sustainability management. The Project will not impact an environmental resource. Therefore, the *Information Collection* exemption is applicable. Section 15301 *Existing Facilities* provides for the operation, repair, maintenance, permitting, leasing,

licensing, or minor alteration of existing public or private structures, facilities, or mechanical equipment involving negligible or no expansion of existing or former use. The Project includes retrofitting four existing wells to support automated data collection. The retrofit will not result in an expansion of existing use or expansion of the existing well footprint and work conducted to complete the retrofit will not result in adverse impacts. The temporary staging area will be minimal including space for a work truck and completed in one day per well. Therefore, the *Existing Facilities* exemption is applicable to the proposed retrofit wells.

Section 15300.2 *Exceptions – (a) Location,* a project exempt under Class 6 that is ordinarily insignificant in its impact on the environment may in a particularly sensitive environment be significant. In Ventura County, the Santa Clara River floodplain has federal critical habitat defined for least Bell's vireo (*Vireo bellii pusillus),* southwestern willow flycatcher (*Empidonax traillii extimus*), and southern California steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*). No Project activities will occur within the streambed or channel of the Santa Clara River (avoiding potential to impact to southern California steelhead and its designated critical habitat). During nesting bird season (February 1 – September 15), all well construction will take place a minimum of 500-feet from riparian vegetation, (avoiding potential impact to least Bell's vireo and southwestern willow flycatcher). Proposed well site locations within 500-feet of riparian vegetation will be conducted after September 15 and no riparian vegetation will be removed or trimmed (avoiding potential impact to least Bell's vireo and southwestern willow flycatcher designated critical habitat). Construction of the shallow monitoring well(s) scheduled to occur within the nesting bird season and greater than 500 feet outside of riparian habitat, a qualified biologist will conduct a nesting bird survey of the well site and the area within a 500-foot vicinity of the well site. If a nesting bird is found, the location of the nest will be documented and to avoid all impacts, construction will not begin until the qualified biologist has confirmed breeding/nesting is complete, the nestlings have fledged or the nest to have been abandoned. Therefore, by integrating these measures, the Project will avoid impacts to biological resources. Thus, no significant impacts are expected occur and the exceptions to categorical exemption set forth in CEQA Guidelines Section 15300.2 would not apply.

Lead Agency Contact Person: Anthony A. Emmert, Executive Director
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Kelly Long 6/9/21
Kelly Long Date
Chair, Fillmore and Piru Basins Groundwater Sustainability Agency

Date OPR received for filing:_____

Attachments

Attachment A – Monitoring well examples:

Figure 2: Completed monitoring well and surface casing with bollards.

Figure 3: Completed monitoring well with flush pad and vault.

Figure 4: Example auger drill rig.

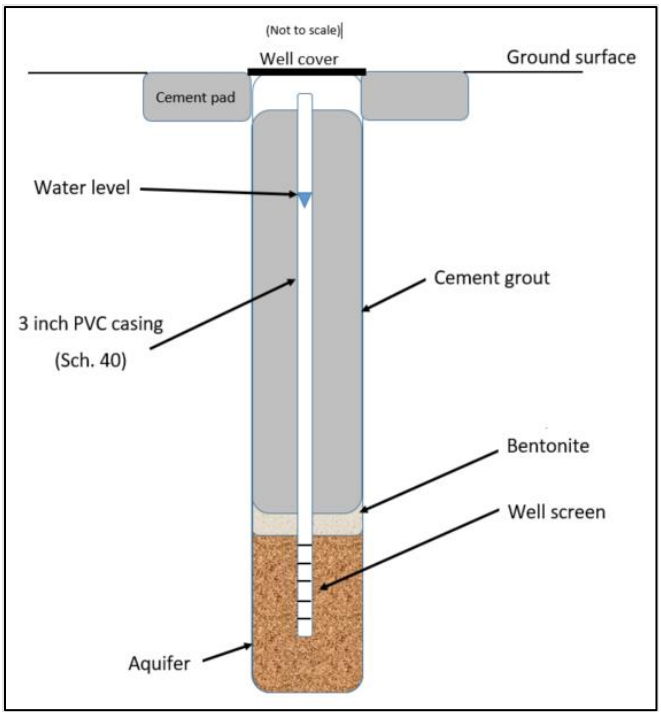

Figure 5. Generalized schematic of a monitoring well.

Attachment B – Nested monitoring well examples:

Figure 6. Reverse-rotary drill rig.

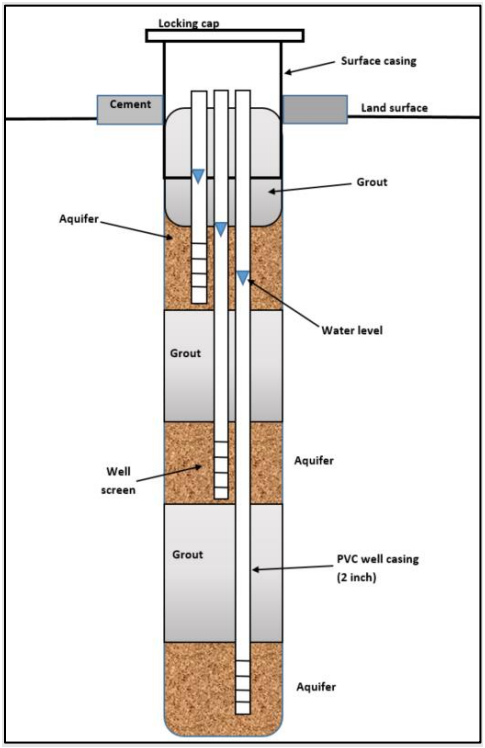

Figure 7. Generalized schematic of a nested monitoring well.