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Vina Groundwater Sustainability Agency

STAFF REPORT

To: Vina GSA Board of Directors

From: Dillon McGregor, GSA Program Manager

Date: July 8, 2026

Subject: North Sacramento River Corridor Interbasin Coordination Update: Framework Progress and Regional Interconnected Surface Water Initiative

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Background: North Sacramento River Corridor Interbasin Coordination

California's Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) requires local Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSAs) to develop and implement Groundwater Sustainability Plans (GSPs). Because the groundwater subbasins of the North Sacramento River Corridor (NSRC) are hydrologically connected, sharing boundaries, stream systems, and subsurface flows, effective SGMA implementation requires cross-boundary coordination.

The NSRC Interbasin Coordination (IBC) effort brings together GSAs from seven subbasins: Red Bluff, Antelope, Los Molinos, Corning, Vina, Colusa, and Butte. This effort is facilitated through the California Department of Water Resources' (DWR) Facilitation Support Services (FSS) program. The coordination effort is grounded in the Northern Sacramento Valley Inter-Basin Coordination Framework, first established between 2020 and 2022, which organizes collaborative work around five pillars:

1. Information Sharing;
2. Joint Analysis and Evaluation;
3. Coordination on Mutually Beneficial Activities;
4. Coordinated Communication and Outreach; and
5. Issue Resolution.

Each participating subbasin formally incorporated the framework into its GSP between 2021 and 2024, reflecting the shared recognition of the benefits of a collaborative, long-term approach to sustainable management of these hydrologically connected subbasins.

In preparation for the GSP Periodic Evaluations (PE) due to DWR in January 2027, the participating GSAs, with technical support from Montgomery & Associates completed a Joint GSP Evaluation that compared hydrogeologic conceptual models, water budgets, sustainable management criteria, and monitoring networks across subbasins. This work identified differences and data gaps at subbasin

boundaries, particularly around stream-aquifer interactions and cross-boundary groundwater flows and directly informed the 5-year implementation update of the North Sacramento Valley IBC Framework (attached). The effort was jointly funded through DWR SGM Grant program funds awarded to the Vina and Wyandotte Creek subbasins.

Two public webinars supporting public participation in the preparation of the PE process have been conducted. The first webinar was held in January 2026 and drew approximately 95 participants. This webinar introduced the Interbasin Coordination Framework, particularly the 5 Pillars, and provided updates on related work. A second webinar held June 16, 2026, provided an update on the IBC Implementation Coordination Framework, gathered feedback on its direction, and encouraged ongoing engagement with their respective GSAs.

Priority Regional Initiative: Interconnected Surface Waters

Regulatory Context

Under SGMA, each GSA must demonstrate that groundwater management does not result in undesirable results caused by depletions of interconnected surface waters (ISW), including rivers, streams, and other water bodies whose flows are influenced by groundwater pumping. ISW is one of six sustainability indicators that all GSPs must address. Upon its initial review of the NSRC subbasins' GSPs, DWR issued every subbasin a Recommended Corrective Action (RCA) related to ISW, underscoring both the regulatory significance of this topic and the shared nature of the challenge across the corridor.

Why Regional Coordination Is Essential

In the NSRC, hydrological connectivity is the rule, not the exception. The Sacramento River runs through the corridor and forms subbasin boundaries, while tributaries such as Butte Creek cross multiple subbasins. Groundwater and surface water interact throughout the region, and the effects of pumping on streamflow do not stop at subbasin lines. As a result, understanding whether management in one subbasin adversely affects neighboring subbasins, as SGMA requires, will benefit from a coordinated, regionally consistent approach.

Existing local groundwater models have limitations for regional ISW analysis, and existing regional tools require refinement. If each subbasin pursued ISW compliance independently, costs would be higher and results difficult to compare, making cross-boundary analysis more difficult. A coordinated approach produces commonly accessible tools and reduces cost to individual agencies.

The Proposed Regional ISW Work Plan

Consistent with Pillar 3- Coordination on Mutually Beneficial Activities of the Interbasin Coordination Framework, , the NSRC subbasins have designated ISW as a central priority regional technical activity for the 2026–2032 period. The Northern California Water Association (NCWA), contracting with MBK Engineers, is working with water managers to support a regional ISW approach. The proposed work is organized around three interrelated steps:

- **Regional Data Collection:** Field teams collect measurements along the Sacramento River, Feather River, Butte Creek, and other shared streams to improve understanding of how water moves between rivers and underground aquifers across subbasin boundaries.

- **Refined Regional Modeling:** Using collected data, technical teams would work with DWR to improve an existing regional groundwater-surface water model to better simulate how groundwater pumping affects streamflow across subbasin boundaries.
- **Local Policy Support:** Drawing on modeling results, a regional guidance document would provide each agency with options and examples for defining its own ISW sustainability standards, while preserving each GSA's full authority over its own decisions.

A draft ISW work plan describing these three steps has been developed and is currently under review by all participating GSAs. As part of this report, each GSA is engaged in reviewing the technical work plan and considering a coordinated approach that would establish the regional ISW effort as a shared priority direction for the NSRC IBC group. Funding has not yet been secured; future grant funding through Proposition 4 has been identified as a potential source. Coordinating with DWR on this effort is expected to reduce costs to individual subbasins and produce shared tools that are commonly accessible across the region.

The full work plan is available for review online. A fact sheet that describes this effort is attached to this memo (Attachment A).

Benefits of the Regional Approach

Participation in this coordinated ISW effort offers several benefits in meeting its SGMA obligations:

- Better information: A shared regional model provides more reliable, consistent data for ISW evaluations and cross-boundary impact assessments.
- Lower cost: Collaborative data collection and modeling costs significantly less than seven subbasins independently duplicating similar work.
- SGMA compliance support: The regional approach is designed to help each subbasin respond to its DWR Recommended Corrective Action on ISW
- Local authority preserved: This joint effort does not transfer any GSA's local authority. Shared information informs each GSA's decisions, and every agency sets its own sustainability criteria.

Next Steps and Timeline

MILESTONE	DESCRIPTION
Summer 2026	GSA boards are invited to review the draft, regional ISW work plan and IBC Framework 5-Year Implementation Update and share any significant questions or concerns; feedback will be carried back to the GSA IBC group, which includes representatives from each subbasin.
January 2027	GSP Periodic Evaluations due to DWR; each subbasin to incorporate the Framework five-year implementation update, including IBC commitments and ISW status in Periodic Evaluations.
2027–2032	Ongoing IBC activities per five-pillar framework; ISW modeling and policy support deliverables developed.

More information: https://www.buttecounty.net/2221/North-Sacramento-River-Corridor-Inter-Ba

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Staff recommend that the Committee receive this report and provide feedback on the North Sacramento River Corridor Interbasin Coordination Framework 5-Year Implementation Update and the proposed regional Interconnected Surface Water approach.

More information: https://www.buttecounty.net/2221/North-Sacramento-River-Corridor-Inter-Ba

Attachments:

Attachment A. Factsheet: North Sacramento River Corridor Interbasin Coordination Overview
Attachment B. Interbasin Coordination Framework 5-Year Implementation Update
Attachment C. Factsheet: Working Together on Interconnected Surface Water