

Ventura Local Agency Formation Commission

# Ojai Basin Groundwater Management Agency

Municipal Service Review



Prepared By:  
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**Accepted by the Commission on March 20, 2024**

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## Introduction

### ***Purpose of the Municipal Service Review***

Local Agency Formation Commissions (LAFCo) exist in each county in California and were formed for the purpose of administering state law and local policies relating to the establishment and revision of local government boundaries. According to the Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg Local Government Reorganization Act of 2000 (California Government Code § 56000 et seq.), LAFCo's purposes are to:

- discourage urban sprawl;
- preserve open space and prime agricultural land;
- ensure efficient provision of government services; and
- encourage the orderly formation and development of local agencies.

To achieve these purposes, LAFCos are responsible for coordinating logical and timely changes in local government boundaries (such as annexations), conducting special studies that identify ways to reorganize and streamline governmental structure, and determining a sphere of influence for each city and special district over which they have authority.

A **sphere of influence** is a plan for the probable physical boundaries and service area of a local agency, as determined by LAFCo (Government Code § 56076). Beginning in 2001, each LAFCo was required to review, and as necessary, update the sphere of each city and special district on or before January 1, 2008, and every five years thereafter (Government Code § 56425(g)). Government Code § 56430(a) provides that in order to determine or update a sphere of influence, LAFCo shall prepare a **Municipal Service Review (MSR)** and make written determinations relating to the following seven factors:

1. Growth and population projections for the affected area.
2. The location and characteristics of any disadvantaged unincorporated communities within or contiguous to the sphere of influence.
3. Present and planned capacity of public facilities, adequacy of public services, and infrastructure needs or deficiencies including needs or deficiencies related to sewers, municipal and industrial water, and structural fire protection in any disadvantaged, unincorporated communities within or contiguous to the sphere of influence.
4. Financial ability of agencies to provide services.
5. Status of, and opportunities for, shared facilities.
6. Accountability for community service needs, including governmental structure and operational efficiencies.
7. Any other matter related to effective or efficient service delivery, as required by Commission policy.

MSRs are not prepared for counties, but are prepared for special districts including those governed by a county Board of Supervisors. Additionally, while LAFCos are authorized to prepare studies relating to their role as boundary agencies, they have no investigative authority.

LAFCo staff prepared this MSR for the Ojai Basin Groundwater Management Agency (OBGMA) using information obtained from multiple sources, including, but not limited to:

- **MSR Questionnaire:** A questionnaire supplied by LAFCo elicited general information about the OBGMA (e.g., contact information, governing body, financial information), as well as service-specific data;
- **Budget:** The adopted budget provided information regarding services and funding levels;
- **General Plans:** General plans of the County of Ventura and City of Ojai provided information regarding land use, populations, and service levels;
- **OBGMA Documents:** Various OBGMA documents provided supplementary information relating to service provision (primarily the Final Groundwater Sustainability Plan prepared in compliance with the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act);
- **Historical MSR:** The 2004 MSR provided certain data that remain relevant and accurate for inclusion in the current MSR;
- **OBGMA Website:** The OBGMA's website provided supplementary and clarifying information; and
- **OBGMA Staff:** OBGMA staff provided supplementary and clarifying information.

### ***Organization of the MSR***

This report is organized into several sections, as follows:

- **Maps:** A general location map and the official LAFCo map of the OBGMA;
- **Profile:** Summary profile of information about the OBGMA, including contact information, governing body, summary financial information, and staffing levels;
- **Growth and Population Projections:** Details of past, current, and projected population for the OBGMA;
- **Review of Municipal Services:** Discussion of the municipal services that the OBGMA provides;
- **Sphere of Influence:** Discussion of the existing sphere of influence of the OBGMA and potential modifications to the sphere; and
- **Written Determinations:** Recommended determinations for each of the seven mandatory factors for the OBGMA.

The Commission's acceptance of the MSR and adoption of written determinations will be memorialized through the adoption of a resolution that addresses each of the seven mandatory factors based on the Written Determinations section of the MSR.

# Maps

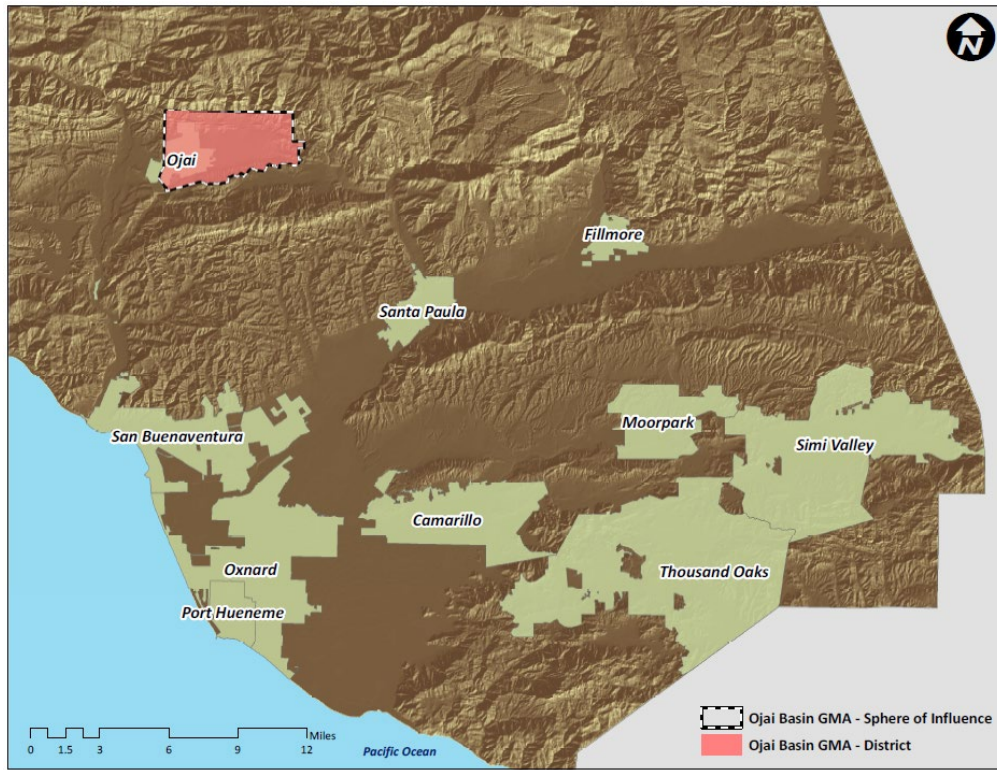


Figure 1: Location Map

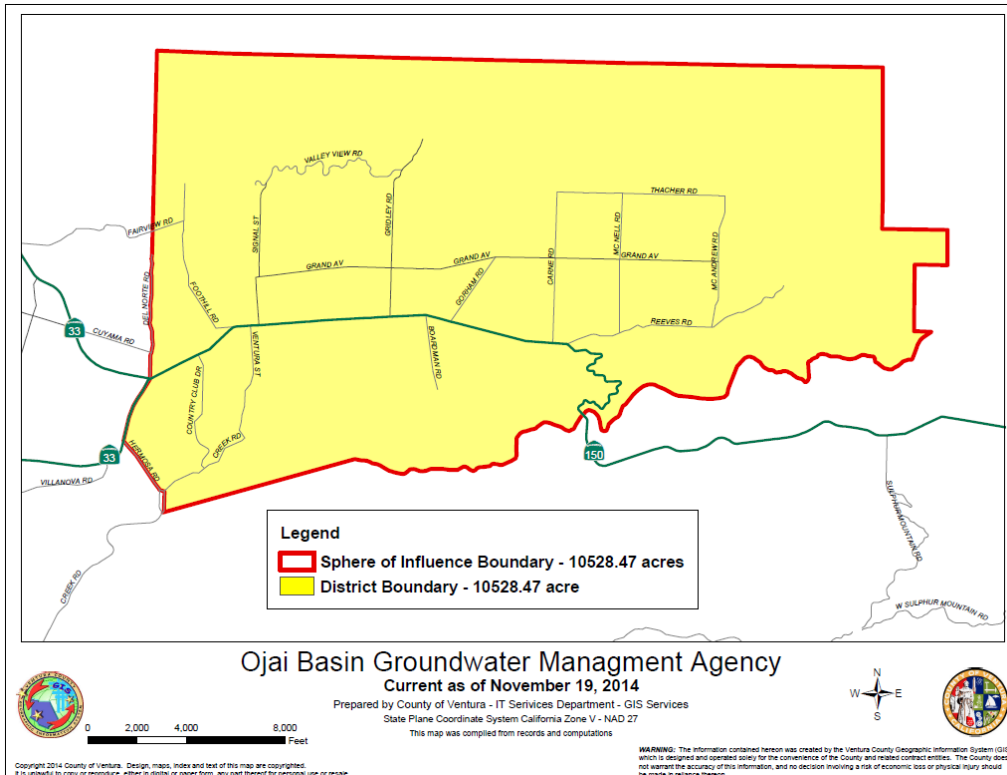


Figure 2: Official LAFCo Map

## Profile

The OBGMA monitors the extraction and use of groundwater and manages groundwater quality in the Ojai Valley Groundwater Basin, in order to protect and maintain the long-term water supply for water users within its jurisdictional area. It conducts groundwater management and planning activities, documents groundwater extraction, collects extraction fees from well owners, coordinates with the County of Ventura and private entities (e.g., consultants and private well owners) to monitor basin conditions, maintains a groundwater model of the basin, monitors water levels in the basin, performs groundwater-related outreach and education activities, and promotes the operation and maintenance of the San Antonio Creek Spreading Grounds (which is currently operated and maintained by the Ventura County Watershed Protection District).

The OBGMA’s mission is provided as follows:

*To preserve the quantity and quality of groundwater in the Ojai Basin in order to protect and maintain the long-term water supply for the common benefit of the water users in the basin.*

### Contact Information

General Manager	Julia Aranda, P.E.
OBGMA Office	417 Bryant Circle, Suite 112, Ojai, CA 93023
Mailing Address	P.O. Box 1779, Ojai, CA 93023
Phone Number	(805) 640-1207
Website	<a href="http://obgma.com">obgma.com</a>
E-mail Addresses	<a href="mailto:obgmagm@gmail.com">obgmagm@gmail.com</a>

### Governance Information

Formation Date	October 8, 1991
Legal Authority	<u>Ojai Basin Groundwater Management Agency Act</u>
Type of District	Dependent
Board of Directors	Five members. One member appointed by each of the governing boards of the Ojai City Council, Casitas Municipal Water District, Ojai Water Conservation District, one member chosen by the OBGMA Board as the Community Facilities District resident director, and one member chosen by the governing boards of the following mutual water companies: Senior Canyon Mutual Water Company, Siete Robles Mutual Water Company, and Hermitage Mutual Water Company.
Board Meetings	Last Thursday of most months, beginning at 3:00 p.m., located at the Ojai City Council Chambers, Ojai City Hall, 401 S. Ventura Street, Ojai, CA 93023. Recorded meetings are broadcast for viewing on the OBGMA’s website upon conclusion of the meeting.

### Services Provided

The OBGMA monitors the extraction and use of groundwater in the Ojai Valley Groundwater Basin.

Population and Area Information		
	Population <sup>1</sup>	Area (square miles)
Jurisdictional Area	8,170	16.45
Sphere of Influence Area	8,170	16.45

Staffing – Full Time Equivalent Positions <sup>2</sup>			
Executive/Management	Professional/Support	Operational	Total
0	½	0	½

Revenues	Expenditures
Primary Revenue Sources	Primary Expenses
GSP <sup>3</sup> Extraction Fees	Office Expenses
Extraction Charges <sup>4</sup>	Professional Fees & Consultant Support
Well Head Fees	Payroll Expenses & Outside Services
FY 2023-24 Revenues (Budget)	FY 2023-24 Expenditures (Budget) <sup>5</sup>
\$272,025	\$249,100

Public Agencies with Overlapping Jurisdiction	
Casitas Municipal Water District	Ventura County Resource Conservation District
City of Ojai	Ventura County Service Area No. 14
Gold Coast Transit District	Ventura County Service Area No. 32
Ojai Water Conservation District	Ventura County Transportation Commission
Ojai Valley Sanitary District	Ventura County Watershed Protection District
Ventura County Air Pollution Control District	Ventura Regional Sanitation District
Ventura County Fire Protection District	Ventura River Water District

<sup>1</sup> Source: Final Groundwater Sustainability Plan for the OVGB (prepared January 2022 and adopted October 2023) (2020 estimate).

<sup>2</sup> Source: OBGMA staff.

<sup>3</sup> Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) extraction charges apply to pumpers within the Groundwater Sustainability Agency (GSA). Note that not all pumpers within the OBGMA’s jurisdictional area are within the GSA.

<sup>4</sup> Extraction charges apply to all pumpers within the OBGMA’s jurisdictional boundaries. According to the independent audit prepared for the OBGMA on January 25, 2024 for FY 2017-18 and FY 2018-19, “Operating revenues for the Agency are highly dependent on groundwater extractions in the basin, which, in turn, are dependent on the weather (rainfall in the winter and high temperatures in the summer, for example).”

<sup>5</sup> The FY 2023-24 budget (“Final - 08/31/2023” makes reference to “proposed” figures for FY 2023-24).

## **Growth and Population Projections**

*LAFCo is required to project the growth and population for the affected area (Government Code § 56430(a)(1)).*

Based on the *Final Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) for the Ojai Valley Groundwater Basin (January 2022)*, population estimates for the Ojai Valley Groundwater Basin (OVGB) are derived from data supplied by the U.S. Census Bureau, the City of Ojai General Plan, the Ventura County General Plan, and the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG). Population within the OVGB was estimated in 2010 to be 7,749, and in 2020 to be 8,170. The population is projected to reach 8,705 by 2035 and 8,905 by 2040. The boundaries of the OVGB and the OBGMA are somewhat different, yet contain overlap to such an extent that population projections within the OVGB are expected to adequately represent population within the OBGMA. According to the *2020-2045 Regional Transportation Plan/Sustainable Communities Strategy (RTP/SCS)* (adopted by SCAG in 2020), the 2016 population of the City of Ojai (i.e., the population center of the OBGMA) was 7,500 and is expected to reach 7,900 by 2045. Based on the information above, population growth within the OBGMA is anticipated to remain relatively stable.



## Review of Municipal Services

The review of the OBGMA’s services is based on provisions of state law which require LAFCo to make determinations regarding the present and planned capacity of public facilities, the adequacy of public services, infrastructure needs and deficiencies, and the OBGMA’s financial ability to provide these services (Government Code § 56430(a)(3)).

### Water Services

#### *OBGMA History and Ojai Valley Groundwater Basin Location*

The OBGMA was formed in 1991, through special legislation known as the Ojai Basin Groundwater Management Agency Act (Senate Bill 534), during a drought and at a time when local water agencies, water users, and well owners became greatly concerned about potential overdraft of the OVGB. The OBGMA Act specifically prescribes that “the boundaries of the agency include that portion of the Ojai Basin watershed which lies within the boundaries of the Casitas Municipal Water District (CMWD) or the Ojai Water Conservation District (OWCD), but do not include any land within the boundaries of the Ventura River County Water District.” In general, this area covers the area of the Ojai Valley located east of Del Norte Road (e.g., most of the City of Ojai, the unincorporated east end of the Ojai Valley, the Dennison Grade, and portions of the Los Padres National Forest), and includes nearly all of the area overlying the OVGB (as mapped by the California Department of Water Resources (DWR) in 2019) as shown in Figure 3. The northern and eastern boundaries of the OBGMA align with those of the CMWD; thereby limiting the expansion of the OBGMA’s jurisdictional boundaries in these areas.

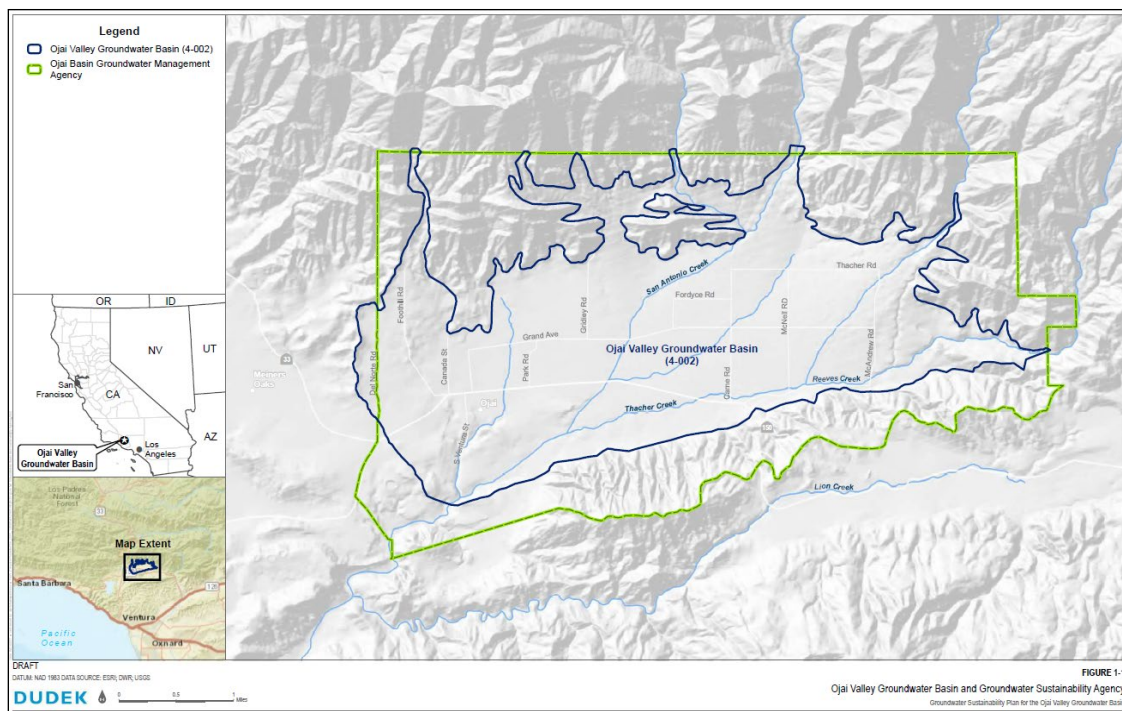


Figure 3: Boundaries of the OBGMA & OVGB Boundaries (Figure 1-1 of Final GSP for the OBGMA)

The OVGB underlies the City of Ojai and the Ojai Valley’s East End and is a source of municipal and agricultural water. Approximately two-thirds of the OBGMA jurisdictional area is within the unincorporated County area, and the remaining approximately one-third is within the City of Ojai. The OBGMA estimates that approximately 45 percent of the land covered by the OVGB is being used for agriculture, about 27 percent is used for single-family residential purposes, and the remaining land contains a range of uses including commercial and industrial use, other residential types, and open space.

According to the *Groundwater Management Plan - 2018 Update Ojai Valley Groundwater Basin*, the OVGB is relatively deep and bowl-shaped, and is bounded on the west and east by rocks, on the south by the Santa Ana Fault and Black Mountain, and on the north by the Topatopa Mountains. Major drainages that recharge the basin include San Antonio Creek and tributary streams draining from the East End of the Ojai Valley into San Antonio Creek. According to the OBGMA’s Final GSP,<sup>6</sup> recharge “occurs through percolation of surface waters through alluvial channels, infiltration of precipitation that falls directly on the valley floor, subsurface flow, and septic and irrigation return flow.” Some water from the basin is also naturally discharged to San Antonio Creek, supporting native habitats and wildlife, as well as supplying downstream water users. There are 180 groundwater extraction wells within the OVGB, which provide water for a full range of uses within the City of Ojai and surrounding unincorporated area.

The OBGMA monitors the extraction and use of groundwater and manages groundwater quality in the OVGB, in order to protect and maintain the long-term water supply for water users within its jurisdictional area. It conducts groundwater management and planning activities, documents groundwater extraction, collects extraction fees from well owners, coordinates with the County of Ventura and private entities (e.g., consultants and private well owners) to monitor basin conditions, maintains a groundwater model of the basin, monitors water levels in the basin, performs groundwater-related outreach and education activities, and promotes the operation and maintenance of the San Antonio Creek Spreading Grounds (which is currently operated and maintained by the Ventura County Watershed Protection District).

According to the OBGMA’s Final GSP, the Ventura County Public Works Agency is responsible for issuance of groundwater well permits within the OVGB. The Ventura County Public Works Agency implements regulations that address the construction, maintenance, operation, modification, and destruction of groundwater wells, and include requirements for flow meters and protections to guard against contamination and pollution. Of the 180 known groundwater wells within the OBGMA’s jurisdictional area, 141 wells are metered, and of the metered wells, 106 are registered with OBGMA.<sup>7</sup> Well registration involves the property owner providing OBGMA with information on the meter size, manufacturer, and serial number. Owners of unmetered wells must estimate their usage using an irrigation factor for the type of crop, as well as a dwelling unit factor for the number of dwelling units. The OBGMA recently established

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<sup>6</sup> The OBGMA’s GSP was approved by the California Department of Water Resources on October 26, 2023.

<sup>7</sup> During the OBGMA’s existence, requirements for metering within OBGMA’s jurisdiction has varied. Most wells installed in recent years are metered. As of September 2017 all wells must be metered and there are no exemptions.

a Meter Compliance Ad-Hoc Committee to discuss outreach to pumpers of unmetered wells to encourage compliance with metering requirements and possibly enforce penalties for continued non-compliance. All well owners are subject to a \$260 annual fee (\$65 per quarter) regardless of extractions. Additionally, an extraction fee of \$25 per acre-foot (AF)<sup>8</sup> applies to all pumpers within OBGMA's boundaries; there is a minimum charge for 2 AF per year (AFY) (i.e., \$50 annually). A Groundwater Sustainability Plan Fee<sup>9</sup> of \$75 per AF applies to pumpers within the boundaries of the OVGB's Groundwater Sustainability Agency (GSA) (i.e., the OBGMA) who pump more than 2 AFY.

#### *Water Purveyors within the OBGMA*

The OBGMA's role and activities are limited to management of the OVGB; it neither provides water nor owns/operates any water-related infrastructure. Several water purveyors provide water service within the OBGMA's jurisdictional area in the Ojai Valley (including the CMWD as the primary service provider and several private water companies (e.g., Siete Robles Mutual Water Company, Senior Canyon Mutual Water Company, Hermitage Mutual Water Company, Gridley Road Water Group, and the County of Ventura (managed by the Ventura County General Services Agency Parks Department, which serves groundwater to Soule Park Golf Course)). Water supplies consist of local groundwater and surface water.

As the OBGMA is not a water purveyor, it does not anticipate that it would receive water directly from Lake Casitas; instead, it could potentially enter into an agreement with the CMWD for use of the lake and the basin through a conjunctive use program, which would entail coordination of water withdrawals from both surface and groundwater sources. The Final GSP addresses development of a Comprehensive Conjunctive Management Plan as one of the management actions OBGMA should implement.

#### *San Antonio Spreading Grounds Rehabilitation Project*

According to the Final GSP prepared for the OVGB, the OWCD, previously known as the San Antonio Water Conservation District, was formed in 1949 to divert flows from San Antonio Creek into settling ponds in order to recharge the groundwater. The spreading grounds allow for the artificial recharge of the OVGB and are estimated to provide an average of 126 AFY, up to a maximum of 914 AFY, of recharge to the OVGB, depending on a variety of conditions. Except for the manufactured San Antonio Creek spreading grounds, recharge to the OVGB consists primarily of natural infiltration of precipitation.

An undated fact sheet published by the Watersheds Coalition of Ventura County explains that the San Antonio Creek Spreading Grounds Rehabilitation Project (SACSGRP) aims to increase groundwater storage and recharge in the OVGB by "rebuilding the abandoned diversion works, rehabilitating the spreading ground basins, and constructing passive percolation wells adjacent

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<sup>8</sup> An acre-foot (AF) is the volume of water that would cover a one-acre area in one foot of water, or approximately 326,000 gallons.

<sup>9</sup> The GSP Fee was increased from \$37 per AF to \$75 per AF effective January 1, 2024.

to San Antonio Creek” in an effort to address water supply concerns in the Ojai Valley and to generally improve water supply reliability within the Ventura River Watershed. According to the Final GSP, the SACSGRP was funded by means of grants that were secured through the Ventura County Integrated Regional Water Management Program (which encourages agencies to develop plans using regional water management strategies and projects to protect communities from drought, protect and improve water quality, and improve local water security by reducing dependence on imported water).

### *OBGMA Groundwater Management Plan*

The OBGMA Act states that the OBGMA shall generally “limit its activities to monitoring, planning, managing, controlling, preserving, and regulating the extraction and use of groundwater” within its boundaries. Further, it prescribes that the OBGMA, through the preparation of a groundwater management plan (GMP), “develop, adopt, and implement a plan to protect the basin’s groundwater quality and to balance long-term average annual water replenishment and extractions in the basin.” The most recent GMP update prepared by the OBGMA for the OVGB was completed on August 30, 2018. The GMP supported the OBGMA’s efforts and responsibilities related to groundwater management, including that the OBGMA may require conservation practices and measures, commence and prosecute legal actions against parties who exhibit unreasonable uses or methods of use of water which adversely affect groundwater supply within the agency, conserve and reclaim water, regulate groundwater replenishment programs and the recapture of supplemental groundwater resulting from those programs, enter into contracts related to conservation and enhancement of conjunctive use and impose reasonable operating regulations on extraction facilities, and levy groundwater extraction charges, among other activities.

Until adoption of the GSP, the OBGMA’s GMP was instrumental in guiding the OBGMA’s operations, through the implementation of its policies, rules, regulations, and ordinances. In support of the GMP, the OBGMA prepared annual reports on groundwater supplies and conditions within the agency, with the goal of protecting the OVGB’s groundwater quality and to balance the long-term average annual water replenishment and extractions in the basin, control groundwater extractions by regulating, limiting, or suspending extractions from extraction facilities. The most recent annual report was prepared during FY 2017-18.<sup>10</sup> The GMP explains that while the OVGB can be rapidly depleted during periods of drought, it is reported to also quickly recharge during wet periods. Over the long-term, groundwater storage levels have generally remained stable.

### *OBGMA Groundwater Sustainability Plan*

The Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) of 2014 requires the formation of local GSAs for high-priority or medium-priority water basins, as determined by the State. GSAs are required to evaluate local water basin conditions and develop GSPs. The purpose of a GSP is to

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<sup>10</sup> The GSP supersedes prior GMPs and will be used moving forward to guide OBGMA in the implementation of programs and projects identified in the GSP and future GSP updates.

define sustainability for an individual basin and establish a path toward sustainability by 2040 for high-priority basins, and 2042 for medium-priority basins. The OVGB is listed as a high-priority basin, pursuant to the State Department of Water Resources (DWR) based on the potential for overdraft conditions to exist. The OBGMA is the GSA for the OVGB.

The OBGMA originally submitted to the DWR a GSP alternative for evaluation, in compliance with the provisions of the SGMA. The GSP alternative was based on an analysis of basin conditions that demonstrated the OVGB had operated within its sustainable yield during the preceding decade and that undesirable results related to sustainability indicators were not present and were not likely to occur. Specifically, the GSP alternative request explained that the combination of groundwater pumping and surface water delivery from Lake Casitas by the CMWD provided adequate water supply within the Ojai Valley for at least 10 years and that the OBGMA has the ability to maintain average groundwater elevations and groundwater in storage. Despite these assertions, DWR staff determined that the GSP alternative did not satisfy the objectives of SGMA, and as a result the OBGMA prepared a GSP. The GSP was submitted to the DWR in January 2022 and was approved by DWR in October 2023.

The Final GSP acknowledges that a few areas of the OVGB are not located within the OBGMA boundary. These areas outside the OBGMA boundary total 143.7 acres and include “narrow, shallow alluvial filled stream channels along the southern flank of the Topatopa Mountains (northern boundary of OVGB),” and an approximately 134.5-acre area along the western margin of the OVGB. It appears that since the formation of the OBGMA, the DWR has revised its mapping of the OVGB, expanding it such that certain areas are slightly outside the boundaries of the OBGMA. However, the northern and eastern boundaries of the OBGMA remain consistent with the provisions of the OBGMA Act that provide for the OBGMA to be contained entirely within the boundaries of the CMWD. The Final GSP states that “the areas outside the OBGMA boundary but within the OVGB are effectively managed under this GSP.”

The Final GSP documents that the OVGB has a capacity of approximately 85,000 AF (although not all of this water is recoverable). As of January 23, 2024, the water level measured at the Ojai Basin Key Well was 87.96 feet below ground level, which equates to approximately 66,400 AF in storage, or 83 percent of basin capacity.<sup>11</sup> Agricultural demand accounts for about 60 percent of the water drawn from the basin and urban demand accounts for the remaining approximately 40 percent. In general, pursuant to the Final GSP, groundwater quality within the OVGB meets drinking water standards without treatment.

Proposed projects and management actions in support of understanding of the OVGB are contained within the Final GSP, which include: (1) monitoring of groundwater level, quality, and streamflow, (2) monitoring of groundwater extraction, (3) preparation of a sampling and analysis plan and quality assurance project plan, (4) preparation of a groundwater dependent ecosystems assessment, (5) development of a data management system, and (6) simulation of extreme climate scenarios. Furthermore, proposed projects and management actions in

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<sup>11</sup> According to the Final GSP, the lowest recorded groundwater level for the OVGB was 312 feet below the ground surface (September 1951).

support of long-term sustainability of the OVGB include: (1) development of a comprehensive conjunctive plan, (2) development of a groundwater allocation program, (3) development of a water conservation program, and (4) encouragement of voluntary pumping reductions. Lastly, the Final GSP includes proposed projects and management actions related to encouraging cooperative efforts with other agencies, stakeholders, and water users; implementation of public outreach and engagement; and pursuit of grant funding opportunities to defray the cost of the described actions. The estimated cost to implement the Final GSP over a 20-year period is approximately \$8,114,000, which is anticipated to be covered through a combination of groundwater extraction fees and grants.

The OBGMA reports that between 1985 and 2018, groundwater pumping averaged 4,926 AFY, ranging from a low of 3,420 AF in 1986 to a high of 5,377 AF in 2014. Between 1971 and 2014, total outflow from the OVGB was estimated to average 8,400 AFY, consisting of extractions (about 49 percent, or 4,100 AFY) and discharges to streams (about 51 percent, or 4,300 AFY). Groundwater extraction throughout the OVGB is expected to be maintained at approximately 4,000 AFY for the foreseeable future, which is just under the conservatively estimated historical sustainable yield of 4,100 AFY; however, the Final GSP states that actual sustainable yield may actually be as high as 5,000 AFY.

The Final GSP documents that between 1971 and 2014, the OVGB recharged at an average rate of about 6,504 AFY, derived primarily from precipitation and irrigation return flows (about 73 percent) and alluvial flow (about 25 percent), with the remaining approximately 2 percent coming from septic systems (e.g., individual on-site sewage disposal systems and leach fields), wastewater disposal (e.g., leaking sewer pipes), and surface water spreading (e.g., San Antonio Creek spreading grounds). During dry water years, the OVGB has historically recharged at an average rate of about 3,300 AFY (approximately 65 percent less than during average water years). Actual groundwater storage volume by year fluctuates, sometimes dramatically, which the OBGMA attributes to the climatic dependence of groundwater conditions. Between 2015 and 2019, the OVGB was recharged at an annual rate of approximately 7,100 AFY, with an annual average net increase in storage of approximately 2,025 AF. During the same period, CMWD imported an average of approximately 3,600 AF of surface water to the OVGB annually (i.e., the volume of water that CMWD customers within the OVGB received directly from the CMWD).

Based on the analysis contained in the Final GSP, the volume of stored groundwater is anticipated to increase by approximately 140 AFY into the foreseeable future, with the expectation that groundwater storage would be depleted during dry years and replenished during wet years.

## **Sphere of Influence**

There have been no changes to the OBGMA's service area that would require alterations to its sphere of influence boundary, and no changes are anticipated in the foreseeable future.

## Written Determinations

The Commission is required to prepare a written statement of its determinations with respect to each of the subject areas provided below (Government Code § 56430(a)).

### 1. Growth and population projections for the affected area

- Based on the *Final Groundwater Sustainability Plan for the Ojai Valley Groundwater Basin (January 2022)*, population estimates for the Ojai Valley Groundwater Basin (OVGB) are derived from data supplied by the U.S. Census Bureau, the City of Ojai General Plan, the Ventura County General Plan, and the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG). Population within the OVGB was estimated in 2010 to be 7,749, and in 2020 to be 8,170. The population is projected to reach 8,705 by 2035 and 8,905 by 2040. The boundaries of the OVGB and the OBGMA are somewhat different, yet contain overlap to such an extent that population projections within the OVGB are expected to adequately represent population within the OBGMA. According to the *2020-2045 Regional Transportation Plan/Sustainable Communities Strategy (RTP/SCS)* (adopted by SCAG in 2020), the 2016 population of the City of Ojai (i.e., the population center of the OBGMA) was 7,500 and is expected to reach 7,900 by 2045. Based on the information above, population growth within the OBGMA is anticipated to remain relatively stable.

### 2. The location and characteristics of any disadvantaged unincorporated communities within or contiguous to the sphere of influence

- A disadvantaged unincorporated community is defined as a community with an annual median household income that is less than 80 percent of the statewide annual median household income (Government Code § 56033.5). No disadvantaged unincorporated communities are located within or contiguous to the OBGMA's sphere of influence. According to Ventura LAFCo Commissioner's Handbook Section 3.2.5, Ventura LAFCo has identified Nyeland Acres (within the City of Oxnard's sphere of influence to the north of the city), the Piru community, and Saticoy (within the City of San Buenaventura's sphere of influence to the east of the city) as disadvantaged unincorporated communities.

### 3. Present and planned capacity of public facilities, adequacy of public services, and infrastructure needs or deficiencies

- The OBGMA does not provide direct water service.
- The OBGMA Act specifically prescribes that "the boundaries of the agency include that portion of the Ojai Valley Groundwater Basin watershed which lies within the boundaries of the CMWD or the Ojai Water Conservation District (OWCD), but do not include any land within the boundaries of the Ventura River County Water District." The



Ojai Valley Groundwater Basin lies under the City of Ojai and the Ojai Valley's east end and is a source of domestic, municipal, and agricultural water.

- The OBGMA conducts groundwater management and planning, documents groundwater extraction compared with reported pumping, collects extraction charges from well owners, coordinates with the County and private entities to monitor basin conditions, maintains a groundwater model of the basin, monitors water levels in the basin, and performs groundwater-related outreach and education activities.
- Of the 180 groundwater extraction wells within the OBGMA's jurisdictional area, 141 are metered. Owners of all wells are responsible for payment to the OBGMA of annual fees as well as fees based on usage (per acre-foot). OBGMA sends out quarterly statements for these fees. The OBGMA recently established a Meter Compliance Ad-Hoc committee to identify each of the unmetered wells within the OVGB and ensure compliance with metering requirements, in order to improve equity in responsibility for sustainability and to better track and predict demand patterns within the OVGB.
- Based on the analysis contained in the Final GSP, the volume of stored groundwater is anticipated to increase by approximately 140 AFY into the foreseeable future, with the expectation that groundwater storage would be depleted during dry years and replenished during wet years.
- In addition to its contracted part-time General Manager, the OBGMA employs two part-time staff members for a total of 24 hours per week.

#### **4. Financial ability of agencies to provide services**

- The most recently approved budget for the OBGMA is for FY 2023-24 for the period spanning October 1, 2023, through September 30, 2024, and is posted on the OBGMA's website. The OBGMA should consider clarifying on the website that the budget is adopted, given that the references within the budget document describe the figures for FY 2023-24 as proposed. The OBGMA has a balanced budget and appears to have the ability to finance the services it currently provides. Furthermore, according to the independent audit prepared for the OBGMA on January 25, 2024, for FY 2017-18 and FY 2018-19, the OBGMA's net position increased from \$61,718 in FY 2016-17 to \$130,827 in FY 2017-18, and to \$177,104 in FY 2018-19.
- In January 2024, the OBGMA proactively adopted financial policies and procedures for the stated reasons to: (1) ensure the financial integrity of the agency, (2) manage the financial assets in a sound and prudent manner, (3) improve financial information for decision-making purposes, (4) maintain transparency and accountability to the public.
- The OBGMA has experienced difficulty in retaining auditors to perform audit work in recent years, as the scope of work is relatively small. The most recent independent audit for the OBGMA was prepared on January 25, 2024, for FY 2017-18 and FY 2018-19. The previous independent audit was prepared on March 6, 2020, for FY 2016-17. In January 2024, the OBGMA Board of Directors accepted a proposal for the preparation of independent audits for FY 2019-20, FY 2020-21, FY 2021-22, and FY 2022-23. Upon completion of the audits through FY 2022-23, the OBGMA will be current with regard to the preparation of all necessary audits to date and will make those documents available

to the public (e.g., on the OBGMA website). Therefore, while it does not appear that at this time the OBGMA is in compliance with the requirements to prepare and submit regular audits after FY 2018-19 and submit them to the State Controller's Office within nine months after the conclusion of the audited period (as required by Government Code Section 12410 et seq.), it is working diligently and productively to meet all requirements related to the preparation of independent audits.

**5. Status of, and opportunities for, shared facilities**

- None were identified.

**6. Accountability for community service needs, including governmental structure and operational efficiencies**

- For several years, the OBGMA did not consistently provide updated information regarding its activities (including Board of Directors meetings) on its website, and was unresponsive to requests by LAFCo staff for public information (i.e., Board of Directors meeting agendas, adopted meeting minutes, adopted budgets, and audits). As of April 2023, the OBGMA has contracted with the CMWD for general manager staffing services, and has been working diligently to ensure that public documents related to the OBGMA are prepared as required, available to the public, and promptly and consistently posted on its website. To that end, the OBGMA now consistently prepares and posts meeting agendas and minutes, adopted minutes for past meetings where none existed, adopted financial policies and procedures, coordinated the preparation of independent audits for several past fiscal years, and updated its website to improve functionality for the public and the OBGMA. Additionally, the OBGMA is accountable to its constituents through its Board of Directors and open and accessible meetings and dissemination of publicly available information. It is working to adhere to all applicable government code sections related to the preparation of financial audits. Furthermore, the OBGMA has adapted to the changing needs of public access as a result of the disease caused by the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, by providing live internet access and public participation opportunities for its meetings.
- Due to the difficulty in obtaining copies of the OBGMA's records for evaluation to be included in this MSR, on September 22, 2022, LAFCo staff submitted a formal request for records pursuant to the California Public Records Act (Government Code Section 6250 et seq). The following public records were requested: meeting agendas for all meetings of the Board of Directors from 2018 through the present, adopted minutes for all meetings of the Board of Directors from 2018 through the present, adopted budgets and audits for Fiscal Years 2018-19 through the present, monthly financial statements from 2018 through the present, and all contracts and/or agreements with the OWCD. As discussed above, the OBGMA is currently contracting with the CMWD for general manager services, and has diligently worked to produce the requested documentation to the best of its ability. For example, an independent audit was prepared for the OBGMA on January 25, 2024, for FY 2017-18 and FY 2018-19, and the OBGMA has in

recent months adopted meeting minutes for meetings that have occurred during the last several years.

- Several years ago, the OBGMA launched a website. The website contains the OBGMA's history, enabling legislation, mission, description of the OVGB, summary of services, boundary map, studies and reports, contact information and roster of Board members, historical meeting minutes and recorded meeting archives through July 2018, upcoming meeting information, library of ordinances and resolutions, news and announcements, information related to SGMA, and a feature that allows the public to sign up for Board meeting agenda notifications. The OBGMA could improve its transparency by identifying Board member term expiration dates (if applicable), and by posting most recent municipal service review completed by LAFCo, and the State Controller's "By the Numbers" (agency financial reporting information) and "Public Pay" (employee salary) webpages.
- The OBGMA appears to achieve operational efficiencies by sharing management and staffing resources with the OWCD. The functions and operation of the OWCD are closely tied to and coordinated with the OBGMA, and the OWCD is represented on the OBGMA Board of Directors. One person provides administrative services for both agencies. Except for Board meeting agendas and minutes, all of the information on the OWCD's website links directly to data managed by the OBGMA located on the OBGMA's website. According to the MSR prepared by LAFCo in 2003 for water and wastewater agencies within Ventura County, the OBGMA is authorized to "preserve the quantity and quality of groundwater in the Ojai Basin and to protect and maintain the long-term water supply for all the water users in the Basin" and the OWCD is authorized to "monitor the use of groundwater, acquire water rights, store/spread water, and construct dams or other water facilities." The MSR acknowledged that: (1) the OWCD's service area overlaps (i.e., is contained almost entirely within) that of the OBGMA, (2) these two agencies provide "apparently duplicative services," (3) a reorganization involving these two agencies (e.g., dissolution of one agency and assignment of the other as a successor agency) would be logical and would potentially reduce costs, and (4) a reorganization would involve challenges and complexities; however, it does not appear that efforts to further evaluate this issue have been made. The circumstances surrounding the opportunity for reorganization involving the OWCD and OBGMA do not appear to have changed since 2003 when the concept was first identified, and the opportunity to explore reorganization of agencies continues to exist. Potential challenges for reorganization may include issues related to water rights, differences in principal acts, composition of the governing boards, and interest level of the districts' governing bodies. Facilitating aspects may include existing overlap of purpose, authority, jurisdictional area, governing board members, staff, and consultants. The OBGMA and OWCD should investigate government restructuring options to address these overlaps, to potentially provide the advantage of pooling staff, facilities, technology, and other resources to achieve more streamlined service provision and improved economies of scale.

**7. Any other matter related to effective or efficient service delivery, as required by Commission policy**

- In 2014, the Santa Barbara ChannelKeeper, a nonprofit organization with the mission to protect and restore the Santa Barbara Channel and its watersheds, sued the State Water Resources Control Board (an agency responsible for preserving, enhancing, and restoring the quality of California’s water resources) and the City of San Buenaventura, in an effort to require that the State Water Resources Control Board conduct further study (a “Reasonable Use Analysis”) of the City of San Buenaventura’s (City) use of water from the Ventura River (i.e., alleged overpumping of the river). According to the Santa Barbara ChannelKeeper, the City has currently and historically overpumped water from the river. In its response to the litigation, the City denied it has overpumped water from the Ventura River and filed a cross-complaint against other surface water and groundwater users in the Ventura River Watershed, including the Casitas Municipal Water District, Meiners Oaks Water District, and Ventura River Water District. As of the date of this document, the issue remains unresolved and adjudication of the Ventura River Watershed is pending. Since the OBGMA does not own any groundwater wells it is not a party to these lawsuits; however, the outcome(s) may impact monitoring and other functions of the OBGMA.