

Groundwater Management

Groundwater is a vitally important resource in California. Some communities rely solely on groundwater for their urban and agricultural needs and about 85% of Californians depend on groundwater for some portion of their water supply. Meanwhile, a number of groundwater basins have experienced overpumping, and 21 of the state's 515 basins are now considered "critically overdrafted." Yet managing groundwater is often a legally complicated process in California.

Traditionally, basins have been comprehensively evaluated and managed only through the courts in a process known as "adjudication." While an adjudication will usually settle competing claims to groundwater rights in a basin, the process is typically protracted, costly, and often results in ongoing court oversight of basin management, which means ongoing legal expenses for those involved. Unsurprisingly, only 22 of the state's groundwater basins have been adjudicated. Richards, Watson & Gershon has represented public and private clients in 10 of them, including the Mojave basin, the Santa Maria basin, and the Antelope Valley Basin.

In 2015, the Legislature enacted the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) to require systematic management of the state's groundwater basins. Under SGMA, the State has authorized itself to step in and impose its own regulations if local jurisdictions do not form groundwater sustainability agencies and adopt plans to manage problematic basins. Many jurisdictions and landowners are wrestling with what form of management will work best for their basins. Richards, Watson & Gershon is here to help. The firm is presently counseling numerous clients, including the Cities of Beverly Hills and Manteca, in the process of complying with SGMA. This includes petitioning the State to determine whether their basins are truly "critically overdrafted" and forming various types of groundwater sustainability agencies.

Whether your basin is headed toward adjudication or is dealing with SGMA compliance, our skilled attorneys will advise and represent you through that process. We will stand by your side and bring to bear our years of experience representing public agencies and landowners in both the adjudication and SGMA processes to achieve your goals. Let Richards, Watson & Gershon take the legal complexities out of managing your groundwater basin.

TEAM

B. Tilden Kim

James L. Markman

RELATED PRACTICES

Environment & Natural
Resources