Groundwater Benefit Zone Study Frequently Asked Questions

1. **What is a groundwater benefit zone?**

   Maintaining sustainable groundwater is a key part of Valley Water’s mission to provide safe, clean water to Silicon Valley for a healthy life, environment and economy. A groundwater benefit zone is an area where our services help protect and replenish groundwater supplies. Groundwater pumping charges collected in the groundwater benefit zones fund these services. These charges are paid by well users based on the amount of water they pump. Valley Water charges only those well users in areas that benefit from Valley Water services.

   If you live within a groundwater benefit zone but do not pump groundwater, you do not have to pay the groundwater charge.

2. **Why did Valley Water do this study?**

   The groundwater benefit zones were first developed in the 1960s and 1970s. Since that time, Valley Water services have changed. Knowledge about the zones that benefit from the services has increased. To ensure that well users are charged fairly and equitably, Valley Water hired a team of experts to conduct a science-based study of how to best define the groundwater benefit zones.

   The study is intended to provide the district with a scientific, transparent basis for evaluating the current groundwater benefit zones and proposing any changes.

3. **How were the proposed groundwater benefit zones developed?**

   The study first looked at how water flows underground within a given zone. Local groundwater basins can cover large areas (up to about 300 square miles). Geologic data from the U.S. Geological Survey and other agencies was sourced for the study. Local data was also used to understand the effect of Valley Water services on groundwater levels.

   The proposed groundwater benefit zones were created by grouping areas that benefit from similar Valley Water services, which include:
   - replenishing groundwater with local and imported surface water,
   - delivering surface water as an alternative supply in lieu of groundwater pumping (in-lieu recharge)
   - protecting groundwater from pollutants,
   - water conservation, and
   - constructing, operating, and maintaining facilities that help sustain groundwater supplies and prevent land subsidence.

   The study was conducted by a consulting company specializing in developing, protecting, and managing groundwater and surface water resources. The study was also reviewed by an independent committee of technical experts. They found the study approach and results to be thorough and equitable.

   To learn more about the study and findings, you can view the preliminary study report at: [https://www.valleywater.org/gwbenefits](https://www.valleywater.org/gwbenefits).
The proposed updates to the groundwater benefit zones would only become effective if approved by Valley Water’s Board of Directors. If the Board makes a decision by mid-2019, rates for the new zones would not be effective until July 2020.

4. **How much will this cost me if the proposed changes are approved?**

Some zones benefit from different Valley Water activities than other zones. The cost to individual well users will vary depending on which groundwater benefit zone they are in and the amount of groundwater they pump. If you are added to a groundwater benefit zone, our preliminary analysis shows that your groundwater charge assessed by Valley Water would be within the range of $18 to $75 per month. This is based on an average domestic groundwater use of 2,500 cubic feet per month (0.7 acre-feet per year). Charges for domestic well users already within a groundwater benefit zone are estimated to increase by less than $1 a month or decrease by up to $21 a month depending on location.

For a preliminary estimate for your individual well, search your address or Assessor's Parcel Number at: [https://www.valleywater.org/gwbenefits](https://www.valleywater.org/gwbenefits)

5. **If Valley Water removes my well from a groundwater benefit zone, will I receive a refund? Why have I been paying if I receive no services?**

The existing groundwater benefit zones (W-2 and W-5) were established based on the best available information in the 1960s and 1970s. Valley Water determined at that time that your area was benefitting from district services. Our services have changed over the last 40 years, and we know more about the groundwater basins. We now have decades of additional data to update the zones to ensure they fairly and equitably reflect benefits received.

The charges collected relate to the groundwater benefit zones adopted by the Board and remain in effect until the Board adopts changes. Staff will recommend to the Board that Valley Water neither make refunds to those that are removed from a groundwater benefit zone, nor seek payment for past pumping from those that are added to a zone.

6. **Who can I contact for more information?**

Project manager George Cook can be reached via email at gcook@valleywater.org or by phone at (408) 630-2964.