

## 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 activities help protect and replenish groundwater supplies. Groundwater pumping charges collected in the groundwater benefit zones fund these activities. These charges are paid by owners and operators of groundwater wells (Well Users) based on the amount of water they pump. Valley Water charges only those Well Users in areas that benefit from Valley Water activities.

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 activities to protect and replenish groundwater have changed. Knowledge about the zones that benefit from our activities has increased. To ensure 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 was intended to provide Valley Water with a scientific, transparent basis for evaluating the current zones and proposing any changes. Total Valley Water revenue did not change as a result of the changes to the zones.

### 3. How was the study conducted?

The study was conducted by a consulting company specializing in developing, protecting, and managing groundwater and surface water resources. The study looked at how water flows underground using data from the U.S. Geological Survey and other agencies. Local data was also used to understand the effect of Valley Water activities on groundwater levels. The study was reviewed by an independent committee of technical experts, who found the study approach and results to be thorough and equitable. To learn more about the study, you can view the preliminary study report at: <https://www.valleywater.org/gwbenefits>.

The zones proposed in the preliminary study report were created by grouping areas that benefit from similar Valley Water activities, which include:

- replenishing groundwater with local and imported surface water,
- delivering surface water as an alternative supply in lieu of groundwater pumping,
- protecting groundwater from pollutants, and
- promoting water conservation.

### 4. Did the recommended zones change as a result of the stakeholder engagement process?

Yes. The consultant's preliminary study report recommended replacing the existing two zones with six zones. In addition to the consultant's technical study, Valley Water also sought and considered input and site-specific information from Well Users. Considering all available information, Valley Water adopted a total of four zones. There is ample evidence of benefit from Valley Water activities within these zones. Other areas may receive benefit from Valley Water activities; however, additional geologic and groundwater data would be needed to fully justify adoption of groundwater charges for these other areas.

**5. How do I know if my well is included in a groundwater benefit zone and what the potential impacts would be in my location?**

Our Groundwater Benefit Zone Web App allows you to search your address, State Well number (e.g., 06S02W22G005), or Assessor's Parcel Number. This app provides information on the new and modified zones: <https://gis.valleywater.org/ZoB/>.

**6. When did the proposed zone changes take effect?**

The Valley Water Board of Directors adopted the new and modified zones on April 28, 2020. The zones were implemented on July 1, 2020.

**7. How much are the groundwater charges?**

- Groundwater charges are set on an annual basis. For information on the current groundwater charges visit <https://www.valleywater.org/your-water/current-water-charges>

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

The previous 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 our activities. Our activities 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. Valley Water neither made refunds to those that were removed from a groundwater benefit zone, nor sought payment for past pumping from those that were added to a zone.

**9. Where can I find more information?**

Please visit our study website at [www.valleywater.org/gwbenefits](http://www.valleywater.org/gwbenefits). Project manager George Cook can also be reached via email at [gcook@valleywater.org](mailto:gcook@valleywater.org) or by phone at (408) 630-2964.