

# Groundwater Sustainability

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Position Paper

The National Ground Water Association, founded in 1948, is a not-for-profit professional society and trade association for the groundwater industry. Our international membership includes some of the leading public and private sector groundwater scientists, engineers, water well contractors, manufacturers, and suppliers of groundwater-related products and services. NGWA has been and continues to be a forum for discussing and promoting the responsible protection, utilization, and cleanup of the nation's groundwater.

## Call to Action

Groundwater is a critical component of the nation's water resources. Globally, groundwater resources dwarf surface water supplies. But because groundwater is hidden, the resource is often forgotten or misunderstood. Groundwater is, in fact, vital to public health, the environment, and the economy.

Groundwater sustainability is the development and use of groundwater to meet both current and future beneficial purposes without causing unacceptable consequences. It is important that we understand the factors that contribute to local, regional, or statewide groundwater shortages; the strategies that can be implemented to promote a sustainable groundwater supply; and what resources or tools are needed to implement these strategies successfully. It is time to take action to develop public understanding of the:

- Factors affecting groundwater supplies and use
- Methods that promote the wise use of groundwater supplies
- Need to determine strategies that promote groundwater sustainability
- Need for cooperative efforts to fill data gaps and undertake priority research
- Need for increased collaborative educational efforts.

The National Ground Water Association calls upon the federal government to assist states, local agencies, and the groundwater profession in meeting this call to action.

Approximately 75 percent of community water systems and nearly all of rural America use groundwater-supplied water systems (U.S. EPA 2000). In many parts of the country, surface water supplies are inadequate or unavailable, and groundwater is the only practical source of water supply. Groundwater feeds streams and rivers, especially during periods of drought or low flow. Approximately 42 percent of agricultural irrigation water is groundwater (Hutson 2004). But the water shortages of recent drought years coupled with the increasing cases of surface water and groundwater contamination warn us that we stand at a critical juncture regarding the availability of adequate water supplies.

While states are gathering the necessary data to inform decision making, no state has met its groundwater data collection goals. Only two of the 28 states responding to an NGWA survey are very confident that they know the potential yield from all of the state's major aquifers. We lack fundamental data necessary to adequately understand the nation's groundwater resources and make informed decisions regarding its use and management (NGWA 2003a, 2003b).



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The federal government is currently playing and should continue to play a vital role. While actual groundwater management decision making is most effective when taking into account site-specific considerations, federal funding of cooperative data collection and aquifer mapping leverages the expertise and resources of the federal government with partners around the country.

Increased federal funding for cooperative groundwater quantity data collection is the most useful action the federal government can take, according to groundwater professionals around the country. Federal support of cooperative data collection of water quality, aquifer mapping, and pertinent scientific research is also important (NGWA 2003a, 2003b). Data and research provide the underpinning for sound local water management decision making that advances the well-being of the nation's citizens, economy, and environment.

We can either drift forward reacting to crises in a piecemeal manner with no concept of efficient management to maximize the use of our groundwater resources, or we can press ahead with prescience and forethought into a future of sustainable water resources. The latter option is our desired goal and can be attained as we respond to this call to action.

## Contact

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## Date

*Adopted by the NGWA Government Affairs Committee February 24, 2004.*

## Additional Information

*For further information about legislation and regulations that impact the groundwater industry, please click on the following links:*

- [White paper](#)
- [Bibliography](#)
- [Groundwater level and quality monitoring](#)
- [Groundwater quality and desalination questions.](#)