

May is water month in Fresno County. Let's make this month count.

May is Water Awareness Month, as recently declared by the Fresno County Board of Supervisors. Let's make sure that we take this opportunity to protect our precious water resources before we see thousands of families' wells go dry again.

Don't let all the seasonal rain fool you. We're all grateful for the downpours, but if we don't address the way we manage water, the showers are just delaying a disaster that will be made worse by climate change. We have been living outside our means for a long time; we have been using more water than our Valley can give us for decades, and are now in a water crisis unless we turn the tides on how we use our water.

Our water-intensive agricultural operations and thirsty cities have drawn down groundwater levels, using more of this precious resource than can be recharged every year into the aquifer. During the last drought, we saw whole communities' wells go dry. In [Tombstone Territory](#), a neighborhood directly south of Sanger, half of the community's wells went dry in 2014 shortly after nearby farmers dug new wells. Carolina Garcia, her husband, and their five children spent four months without water, and had to get water from a neighbor's hose.

"We couldn't bathe for weeks, and our children were embarrassed to go to school dirty," Garcia said. "We never dreamed that our children would have to deal with this kind of difficulty." Some of her neighbors had to move because they could not afford to deepen their wells.

With more drought projected in the future, Garcia's and her neighbors' homes will be the first to lose water again. And with [the most recent projections on climate change](#), we now know we are going to feel the impacts of climate change even sooner than we thought. In the San Joaquin Valley, this means much less predictable rainfall and snowmelt, and a lot less water. ([2014 report](#))

Spurred to action by the last drought in 2014, the California legislature passed the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act, which mandates that new groundwater management agencies, called Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSAs), create projects and regulations to effectively manage our use of this vital resource. GSAs are currently in the process of developing their plans to manage our groundwater resources. We are depending on these agencies to make sure that communities like Tombstone Territory do not become climate refugees.

GSAs must prepare for the worst, and make sure that we save enough groundwater to protect drinking water for communities like Tombstone Territory, even in dry years. We cannot afford any more families' wells going dry in the San Joaquin Valley.

And it's not simply a matter of moving to where the water is. Carolina and her neighbors don't want to leave their homes and their community behind; in a state with serious affordable housing shortage, low-income families are hard pressed to find a house that they can afford to buy, and many of them bought homes or rent in this area because prices are lower and the area is close to their jobs. Over time they have grown their community of family and friends in the area. Leaving a home and community behind because of water issues is emotionally hard, and can be a complete financial loss for an already financially unstable family.

Meanwhile, the climate crisis is being recognized around the world with greater and greater urgency. Recently, students across the globe walked out of their classrooms to protest the lack of action by governments to stop natural disasters from climate change, and Earth Day saw many celebrations and resolutions for stronger action to stop climate change. YOU can contribute to a more sustainable planet by staying involved and engaged to protect our Central Valley's water resources. Now is an excellent time to engage in local groundwater planning efforts and make sure that our local are paying attention to the needs of our most vulnerable groundwater users.

Attend your local GSA meetings, serve on an advisory committee, give feedback to your GSA at public hearings, and comment on drafts of groundwater management plans. The clock is ticking. Make sure your local GSA knows how important it is to protect our precious drinking water resources. Find your local GSA on the Department of Water Resources' website [here](#).

If we don't change the way we manage our water, more families will suffer. If we deplete our groundwater supplies, we will eventually see impacts on community water systems, city water supplies, and agriculture operations. We must take care of what we've got; we cannot make water appear out of thin air, or buy our way out of this problem.

There is no Plan(et) B.