



COUNTY OF SONOMA

575 ADMINISTRATION
DRIVE, ROOM 102A
SANTA ROSA, CA 95403

SUMMARY REPORT

Agenda Date: 12/9/2025

To: Board of Directors of the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District

Department or Agency Name(s): Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District

Staff Name and Phone Number: Misti Arias, General Manager, 565-7264; Sheri Emerson, Stewardship Manager, 565-7358; Fraser Ross, Stewardship Specialist, 565-7347

Vote Requirement: Majority

Supervisory District(s): 3rd District

Title:

Oken Groundwater Monitoring Station Easement Agreement (Property No. 0262)

Recommended Action:

Approve and authorize the Board of Directors' President to execute a 20-year well easement, with associated construction, maintenance, repair and access rights, to be granted to the Santa Rosa Plain Groundwater Sustainability Agency at the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District's Oken property for groundwater monitoring and delegate authority to Ag + Open Space's General Manager to take all necessary steps finalize and record of the easement agreement. No remuneration is being sought for the easement.

(Third District)

Executive Summary:

The Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District ("Ag + Open Space") holds fee title over the Oken property, located at 5151 Petaluma Hill Road, Santa Rosa. In 2025, Sonoma Water contacted Ag + Open Space to inquire about the possibility of installing a groundwater monitoring station in conjunction with the Santa Rosa Plain Groundwater Sustainability Agency ("GSA") on an Ag + Open Space-owned property in the close vicinity of Petaluma Hill Road.

By monitoring groundwater levels at the Oken property, the GSA will be able to track groundwater conditions in a critical greenbelt area where groundwater is utilized by agricultural land uses, rural residential land uses, and groundwater-dependent ecosystems along streams, including the riparian and agricultural uses of the Oken property. Filling this monitoring network gap will allow the GSA to monitor changes and take action to protect groundwater supplies should levels decline.

In order to install, access, and operate and maintain this groundwater monitoring station, the GSA requires a temporary construction easement, a well access easement, and a well easement, all of which are conveyed by a single instrument.

The Easement granted will be for a fixed term with the potential to extend if desired by Ag + Open Space or

any subsequent owner of the property. No remuneration is being sought for the easement as it is deemed to be beneficial in its purpose of gathering information on groundwater levels in the area and is expected to have no negative impact on the property or its use.

Ag + Open Space is requesting Board approval to grant and record the easement agreement in the form attached.

Discussion:

Background

The Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District (“Ag + Open Space”) acquired the 76-acre Oken Property on April 13, 1998, for \$890,000. This property was purchased under the Greenbelt category in the Ag + Open Space Acquisition Plan. The acquisition was intended to allow agricultural use of the area and to maintain the property’s open space character. Oken is currently grazed through a grazing lease. Wetlands and remnant riparian areas are present on the property.

The proposed multi-level monitoring well on the Oken property fills an important data gap in the groundwater-level monitoring network for the Santa Rosa Plain Groundwater Subbasin. In the southeastern corner of the Subbasin, where the Oken property is located, there is significant municipal and agricultural pumping, and many properties rely on wells as their primary water source. Though existing monitoring infrastructure is limited, localized groundwater-level declines have been observed in this area in the past. As water-level trends are typically more pronounced along the eastern Subbasin boundary, a monitoring well in this location will allow the GSA to identify changes sooner than in existing monitoring wells in the central-southern portion of the Subbasin.

This easement agreement will serve Ag + Open Space’s interests and will not harm Ag + Open Space’s intended use of the property, which is for continued grazing and other potential agricultural operations, as well as for vegetation management and restoration along waterways and within wetland areas. The well will allow for data collection on health of the groundwater supply in this region, which can in turn lead to more efficient and environmentally responsible water uses on the Oken property and in the wider region. This public benefit will not negatively affect current operations or prevent a future conservation easement being placed on the property if ownership is transferred.

The Oken property was selected as an optimal location to sample the groundwater in this region due to its topography, access, and appropriate drilling conditions, as well as having Ag + Open Space as a supporter of the mission to collect data on the health of the groundwater supply. The specific location within the property was selected to avoid sensitive areas, such as wetlands, not to impede with current or likely future operations, and to allow for easy access to construct and maintain the well. Long-standing access to the property has been from an existing farm gate from Petaluma Hill Road. The well location has been designed to be within a short distance of this access point to minimize any potential disruption to ongoing operations (e.g. grazing cattle, riparian restoration) and to preserve the property conditions.

Scenic impacts will be minimal, as the well will be flush with the ground surface, and access will be limited to

business hours except in cases of emergency or unusual circumstances.

CEQA

The GSA's well installation project, and Ag + Open Space's easement grant in support thereof, is exempt pursuant to the following Categorical Exemptions in the CEQA Guidelines:

14 CCR 15304: Minor Alternations to Land - The monitoring well permitted by the easement to be granted is designed to make only minimal alterations to the land that will not negatively impact the surrounding environment. The project site is located so as to avoid any biologically sensitive areas.

14 CCR 15306: Information Collection - The groundwater monitoring consists of data collection, research, and resource evaluation activities that will not adversely impact the environment, natural, scenic, or historical resources.

The General Manager will file the Notice of Exemption on file with the Clerk upon approval of the requested action.

Prior Board Actions:

None

FISCAL SUMMARY

Expenditures	FY 25-26 Adopted	FY 26-27 Projected	FY 27-28 Projected
Budgeted Expenses			
Additional Appropriation Requested			
Total Expenditures			
Funding Sources			
General Fund/WA GF			
State/Federal			
Fees/Other			
Use of Fund Balance			
Contingencies			
Total Sources			

Narrative Explanation of Fiscal Impacts:

No costs are anticipated aside from administrative staff time to coordinate the Oken Groundwater Monitoring Station easement agreement. Adequate appropriations exist in the FY 25-26 budget to cover any associated costs. There is no remuneration for the easement and no general fund impact.

Narrative Explanation of Staffing Impacts (If Required):

None

Agenda Date: 12/9/2025

Attachments:

1. ☐ Oken - GSA Groundwater Monitoring Station Easement Agreement
2. Notice of Exemption

Related Items “On File” with the Clerk of the Board: