

https://www.ridgecrestca.com/news/grove-lambastes-peters-ridgecrest-city-council-during-hearing-as-water-bill-advances/article_c52a1ce5-d4e0-4079-9dfe-5d727f7de69e.html

Grove lambastes Peters, Ridgecrest City Council during hearing as water bill advances

By Aaron Crutchfield acrutchfield@ridgecrestca.com

Jul 10, 2025



Sen. Shannon Grove, seated next to the California flag, criticizes County Supervisor Phillip Peters, seated to the right at the table, during a Senate committee meeting Tuesday.

Screenshot from official California Senate footage

State Sen. Shannon Grove took Kern County Supervisor Phillip Peters — and the Ridgecrest City Council — to task during a Senate committee meeting on Tuesday discussing groundwater adjudication bill AB1413 before the committee voted to pass it on to the next step in the process.

The Senate Natural Resources and Water Committee met that day to consider a wide variety of bills, one of which was AB1413. Peters traveled to Sacramento on behalf of the Indian Wells Valley Groundwater Authority to attend the meeting and advocate for the bill's passage.

“I’m here today to urge your support of AB1413 because this bill is not just helpful, it’s existential for the continued viability of [the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act],” Peters said. “The fact of the matter is that if courts are free to disregard state-approved groundwater sustainability plans and the science behind them, then SGMA as a policy framework ceases to function.”

He also said that local agencies are told to follow one set of rules only to have courts impose another, which creates chaos and discourages compliance, especially among small farmers and disadvantaged communities that can’t afford the lawyer fees for years of litigation. SGMA has already cost the state more than \$1 billion and local agencies millions more implementing the law and developing groundwater sustainability plans.

“The simple fact of the matter is that either SGMA matters or it doesn’t,” Peters said. “If SGMA doesn’t matter, then the state has forced small communities to foot the bill for a failed experiment. If SGMA does matter, then its core tools, like groundwater sustainability plans, must carry legal weight. Without that, we are back to fragmentation, race to the bottom pumping, and a flood of litigation that benefits no one.”

After Peters’ remarks, representatives of five separate agencies came to the microphone to offer support. One was Chris Peterson with Capital Core Group on behalf of the city of Ridgecrest.

The opposition then had a chance to speak. First up was Chris Anderson for the California Chamber of Commerce, who brought up due process concerns and said that filing a validation action against a GSP, if it’s even within the statute of limitations, would open the entire GSP to judicial review, not just the sustainable yield determination, which could lead to a rash of lawsuits and courts striking down plans.

Second up was Brenda Bass on behalf of the Indian Wells Valley Water District and Searles Valley Minerals, who said they are part of a coalition proposing many sets of amendments on the bill, though she said she hasn’t seen much movement on those yet. Both entities

oppose the bill unless amended.

“The district and Searles are both currently in a comprehensive groundwater adjudication for their basin, and the adjudication was filed as a measure of last resort in order to protect the district’s and Searles’ due process rights and property rights to groundwater,” Bass said. “The GSP process is fantastic for planning for groundwater sustainability, but it was never intended and in fact was prohibited from interfering with water rights. So it does not protect any user’s groundwater rights.”

After being asked to wrap up her comments due to time constraints, Bass said the bill attempts to avoid adjudications, but creates a patchwork of different legal actions a water rights holder would have to undertake in order to protect their rights.

“That’s not an improvement to judicial efficiency, nor is it an improvement for SGMA implementation,” she said. “We believe our amendments would achieve that.”

The other witnesses in opposition then came forward to state such, including a wide variety of agricultural interests and 14 other groundwater sustainability agencies.

Next came comments from the senators on the committee, with Grove going first.

She started by telling the bill’s author, Assembly Member Diane Papan (D-San Mateo), that she sees where she’s trying to go with this bill, but that it won’t work and would make the problem worse.

“And I think the GSAs are opposed, and I could be wrong, but, and they can correct me, is because of the lack of transparency and eliminating the adjudication process, the GSAs can be challenged and have to start from ground zero again and get rid of all the work that they’ve already done,” Grove said.

She then turned her attention to Peters.

“Respectfully to my county supervisor, I think, again, I’ve known you all your life and I love you and I deeply respect you, but you are on the wrong side of this issue,” she said. “And you are circumventing the only adjudication process that’s available to people who don’t agree with what happens in the process, which is granted to them by SGMA when it was started.”

She then brought up the meeting the Kern County Board of Supervisors held to discuss the issue in early May, at which Peters requested the board support the bills. She asked him if his motion got a second, to which he truthfully replied that it did not.

Grove then asked why the county had a public process regarding the adjudication issue in the Indian Wells Valley, and he said he's the supervisor that deals with water issues the most, and because it was deemed that there could be opposition on the board, they decided to discuss it in public, as per the bylaws.

She then asked if he can identify a date that the Ridgecrest City Council held a public hearing, or if there was just a closed-door meeting.

"I wasn't involved in any of the stuff with Ridgecrest," Peters said. "From my understanding, which I'm not 100% sure on, that it was on a consent agenda item because they didn't expect any opposition on it, and it was passed that way. So they didn't have a public discussion about it, is what I understand about it. But again, I wasn't privy to any of that information."

Grove then said that Peters was right that the council did not have a public discussion on it, nor did they put it on a consent calendar agenda item, but that they withheld it from the public in the city.

"And they produced this document that signed by the vice mayor, and it's a document that identifies Mayor Eric Bruen as the mayor of Ridgecrest," Grove said regarding a letter of support from the city. "This document is dated in April, and Mayor Bruen was unseated in November by a new mayor, and that mayor refused to sign this document. But the city council, three members, got together. They produced this document."

She then went into her final comments:

"The bill or the agenda item that you guys brought forward on this particular adjudication was not even given a second on the county board of supervisors, and now here you sit before me at the state trying to appeal to the state of California to address the issues that we have in our district, which disenfranchises adjudication in the entire state of California for every groundwater sustainability program or GSP that's been put in place where they have to start at ground zero because this bill is not thoughtfully brought out. And like I said earlier, I'll reserve that to say that you're on the wrong side of this issue, my friend."

After comments from another senator on the committee against the bill, and an opportunity for Papan to respond, the committee ultimately voted 4-3 "do pass" and to send the bill to the Judiciary Committee. Grove was one of the no votes.

On Wednesday, the same committee voted 5-2 to pass the other groundwater adjudication bill, AB1466, and send it to the Judiciary Committee. Grove voted no on that one as well.



Grove comments on AB1413

Updated Jul 10, 2025