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AB1466 signed into law

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Gov. Gavin Newsom signed Assembly Bill 1466 on Oct. 11, completing a long process for the law that was initially controversial but saw the biggest local opponents change their positions to support after a number of changes were made in Senate committees.

The law will take effect on Jan. 1, 2026, and it allows courts to exempt or treat separately users who extract minor quantities of water. That keeps these “de minimus” users from being dragged into expensive and lengthy court battles.

“This is a major win for Ridgecrest and for every community in California working to protect its groundwater rights, especially among small well users,” said Scott Hayman, chair of the Indian Wells Valley Groundwater Authority. “AB1466 gives local groundwater authorities a clearer path to move forward in groundwater adjudication actions and reinforces our role as the technical experts in our respective groundwater basins.”

“We have supported AB1466 because it is essential for courts to consider the work GSAs and small communities have put in to comply with SGMA,” said Kern County District 1 Supervisor Phillip Peters, board member of the Indian Wells Valley Groundwater Authority. “And we are very glad that the Indian Wells Valley Water District changed its position to eventually support the bill. This is about protecting our water now as well as future generations.”

Searles Valley Minerals, one of the law’s opponents that changed to supporters, said in a release that it is pleased that Gov. Newsom signed the bill, and thanks Assemblymember Hart for developing amendments that reduce burdens on small groundwater users during adjudications while protecting water rights and promoting responsible management.

“Our change of position to support AB1466 reflects SVM’s willingness to collaborate for solutions that strengthen the basin and ensure sustainable water resources,” said Dennis Cruise, SVM President and CEO.

According to a release from the IWVGA, under AB1466, courts are now required to request that a Groundwater Sustainability Agency, such as IWVGA, provide a technical report that quantifies and describes the groundwater use of pumpers that have not otherwise appeared in court. IWVGA said this puts the burden of proof on those filing an adjudication in a groundwater basin.

Reports provided by GSAs will help the courts evaluate the basin's condition using science-based evidence, IWVGA stated in the release.

“This legislation respects the hard work and expertise that goes into developing sustainability plans,” Hayman said. “It ensures that decisions made by local agencies, based on years of data and stakeholder input, are considered in court.”