

Paso Robles Area Groundwater Authority (PRAGA) Proposed Groundwater Sustainability Fee Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

May 20, 2026

	Stakeholder Question	Draft Response
1	Is it legal to charge fees retroactively?	Groundwater sustainability fees are not retroactive charges. They are prospective fees based on a recent use period according the water use that occurred on a parcel (property). This is an established practice when using a volume-based fee.
2	Will charges going forward always be a projection based on last year's consumption, or is there a plan to be able to charge based on the current year's pumping?	The proposed fee is only for fiscal year 2026-27. The Board has not proposed a plan for future years' charges.
3	What about properties that changed ownership — why should a new owner pay for water they didn't pump?	The fee is tied to the impact of the parcel on the groundwater basin. The consumptive use calculation was established using data from the land itself. The water use that occurs on a given parcel contributes to the need for regulation and necessitates PRAGA's budget to ensure SGMA compliance.
4	What about land that was leased to another grower during the data collection period but is no longer leased out?	The fee will be placed on the property tax roll. Owners and tenants must make arrangements between themselves for responsibility for payment.
5	What if a property was irrigated last year but is being fallowed this year? Will there be a refund issued for the projected charge since no consumption occurred in the period that the groundwater fee is targeting?	The proposed fee is based on a recent use period according the water use that occurred on that parcel (property). If the Board adopts a similar rate approach next year, and no water use occurred in the current fiscal year, then the landowner would not be charged for a similar-based fee the following year.
6	Why do landowners have to look on a list to find their charges? Will you send an itemized bill?	<p>The published groundwater consumptive use calculations allow landowners to verify or contest their water usage in advance. Owners must verify accuracy by June 8.</p> <p>Paso Robles Area Groundwater Authority (PRAGA) is following the regulatory requirements to consider establishing a fee under Water Code Section 10730 which include posting the basis for the fee in a report online 20 days ahead of a public meeting and noticing for two consecutive weeks in a local newspaper. In addition to these requirements, the PRAGA Board directed staff to make the consumed water use</p>

		<p>calculations available for public inspection ahead of potentially placing the charges on the tax roll, for a 30-day period which includes an appeals process.</p> <p>Charges are placed on the tax roll in early August. Landowners will be able to reference the consumed water use estimate of their parcel by referencing the consumed water use data hosted on the PRAGA website.</p>
7	When will bills be sent?	The County will mail property tax bills in fall 2026.
8	How does Land IQ calculate consumptive use and what data do they use?	The net consumptive use (evapotranspiration or ET) results developed by Land IQ is available for review on the PRAGA's website . The results are equivalent to ET of applied water, or the amount of irrigation water actually consumed by the crop. In addition to ET, precipitation is provided basin-wide and is developed through rigorous ground truthing calibration measurements from 5 research-grade physical weather stations located in the basin designed specifically for measuring actual ET.
9	What confidence do we have in the accuracy of the Land IQ results?	On average, Land IQ ET estimates are accurate to +/- 10%. While some rare outliers may occur under unique situations, the basin-wide, block-by-block results are, at a minimum, relative to each other and therefore equitable. The purpose of the ground truthing calibration is to make the results accurate to actual environmental conditions. Land IQ calculated the ET of applied water (accounting for effective precipitation) and is described in further detail in the draft fee report located on the PRAGA website. The results of Land IQ calculations have been reviewed by several representatives of member Groundwater Sustainability Agencies who confirmed the data to be reasonable and accurate. However, landowners are encouraged to review the consumed water use calculations published May 7, 2026, for any potential inaccuracies.
10	How was rainfall accounted for?	Land IQ employs a dense network of approximately 20 continuously maintained rain gauges throughout the Paso Robles Subbasin. These rain gauge results show trends of higher and lower rainfall areas within the Subbasin and accurately represent those variations. The results are then spatially averaged between gauges so that every block has a representative precipitation amount.
11	Who will review appeals, and what are their qualifications?	Each appeal application will be reviewed by SCI Consulting Group and Land IQ. These are the technical consultants and experts working with the Groundwater Sustainability Agency (GSA) team. The PRAGA staff will ensure each appeal is thoroughly

		<p>reviewed by the experts and that landowners receive a timely response.</p>												
<p>12</p>	<p>What documentation is required to appeal?</p>	<p>Landowners must provide a completed appeal form and documentation to support the appeal claim by June 8, 2026. Documentation requirements were outlined in the official notice sent to stakeholders on May 7, 2026, and are on the PRAGA website.</p> <p>Below are the documentation requirements for various types of appeals:</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>No.</th> <th>Appeal</th> <th>Documentation Required</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>1</td> <td>Fee exemption due to riparian source of pumped water</td> <td>Statement of Water Diversion and Use as required by the SWRCB</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2</td> <td>Parcel incorrectly attributed, or not attributed groundwater consumption</td> <td>Information on well, meter (if applicable), description of land use, crop yield history</td> </tr> <tr> <td>3</td> <td>Parcel is non-commercial de minimis, but not identified correctly</td> <td>Information on well, meter (if applicable), description of land use</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	No.	Appeal	Documentation Required	1	Fee exemption due to riparian source of pumped water	Statement of Water Diversion and Use as required by the SWRCB	2	Parcel incorrectly attributed, or not attributed groundwater consumption	Information on well, meter (if applicable), description of land use, crop yield history	3	Parcel is non-commercial de minimis, but not identified correctly	Information on well, meter (if applicable), description of land use
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<p>13</p>	<p>How does a landowner identify whether they have a riparian well?</p>	<p>To exempt groundwater use due to riparian use, PRAGA requires documentation as required under California Water Code §5101 which requires each person or organization that uses diverted surface water or pumped groundwater from a known subterranean stream after December 31, 1965 to file with the State Water Board a Statement of Water Diversion and Use prior to February 1 of the following year.</p>												