“The Sustainable Groundwater Management Act and the Human Right to Water”

Wednesday, March 3rd
12:00 - 1:00pm

In light of the community concerns regarding COVID-19, this talk will be given as a webinar. The link will be provided on March 2nd to those that have registered by 5:00 pm on Monday, March 1st at uccs.ucdavis.edu.

California’s passage of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) in 2014 initiated a period of monumental reform for groundwater users around the state. Under SGMA, 127 high- and medium-priority groundwater basins were required to form Groundwater Sustainability Agencies. These new agencies were charged with developing Groundwater Sustainability Plans. In doing so, they have a legal responsibility to “consider the interests of all beneficial users and users of groundwater” including specifically Disadvantaged Communities (DACs). Ensuring DAC involvement in the process is critical for advancing the human right to water in California as affirmed in 2012 by AB 685. The majority of small DACs are partially or exclusively reliant on groundwater for their drinking water supply, including many that rely on a single public supply well or private domestic wells. Based on their physical and social vulnerabilities, small DACs are disproportionately affected by California’s water management woes such as groundwater overdraft and pollution. Yet these same communities have historically been excluded from opportunities to improve water management outcomes at the state and regional level such as through the Integrated Regional Water Management (IRWM) program. How and in what ways could SGMA be different? Will it be? Based on more than three years of mixed methods social science research on SGMA implementation, Kristin’s talk will explore the successes and challenges of integrating drinking water and environmental justice needs into SGMA and opportunities for improving policy alignment between these two critically important state water priorities.

Kristin Dobbins is a PhD candidate in the Graduate Group in Ecology at the University of California Davis where her research focuses on the intersection of environmental justice and water governance. Her dissertation looks at the challenges and opportunities associated with California’s landmark groundwater reform law known as the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) for advancing the human right to water. Prior to coming to Davis, Kristin served as Regional Water Management Coordinator at Community Water Center in Visalia, California. Kristin has a B.A. in Environmental Analysis from Pitzer College. She is a National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellow, Switzer Environmental Fellow, Fulbright Fellow and Udall Scholar.