



SANTA CRUZ COUNTY  
ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH



# Small Water System Consolidation Survey Results

Water Advisory Commission Meeting  
April 2, 2025

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# Overview of Results



- **29 responses received**
  - Out of 103 Santa Cruz County regulated systems (**28%**)
- The survey opened on March 20<sup>th</sup> and closed on March 31<sup>st</sup>
- These responses are intended to inform Santa Cruz County on what resources are desired regarding consolidation
- Our first questions were related to vulnerabilities that might lead a water system to pursue consolidation



# Water System vulnerabilities, most to least concerning



Expanding regulatory requirements	
1st choice:	10 (34%)
2nd choice:	9 (31%)
3rd choice:	8 (28%)
4th choice:	1 (3%)
5th choice:	1 (3%)

Aging infrastructure	
1st choice:	7 (24%)
2nd choice:	6 (21%)
3rd choice:	4 (14%)
4th choice:	4 (14%)
5th choice:	3 (10%)
6th choice:	5 (17%)

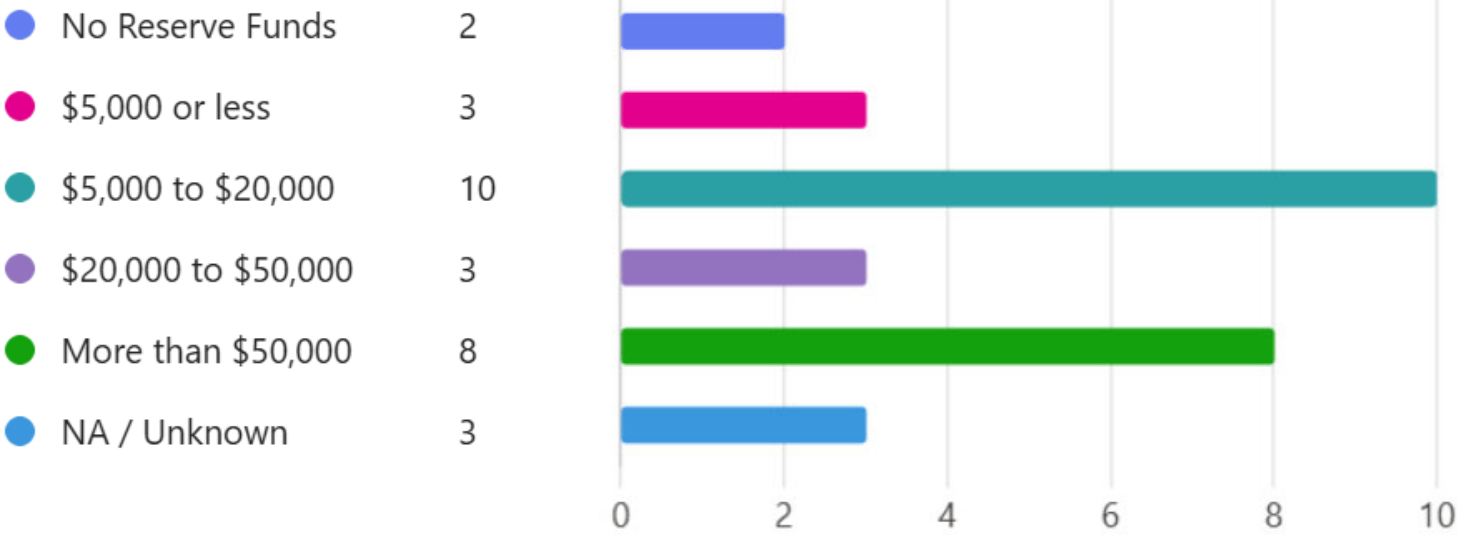
Lack of personnel able to work on the system	
1st choice:	3 (10%)
2nd choice:	8 (28%)
3rd choice:	4 (14%)
4th choice:	4 (14%)
5th choice:	3 (10%)
6th choice:	7 (24%)

Fiscal sustainability	
1st choice:	2 (7%)
2nd choice:	3 (10%)
3rd choice:	8 (28%)
4th choice:	6 (21%)
5th choice:	7 (24%)
6th choice:	3 (10%)

Loss of water supply	
1st choice:	5 (17%)
2nd choice:	1 (3%)
3rd choice:	4 (14%)
4th choice:	5 (17%)
5th choice:	9 (31%)
6th choice:	5 (17%)

Degrading water quality	
1st choice:	2 (7%)
2nd choice:	2 (7%)
3rd choice:	1 (3%)
4th choice:	9 (31%)
5th choice:	6 (21%)
6th choice:	9 (31%)

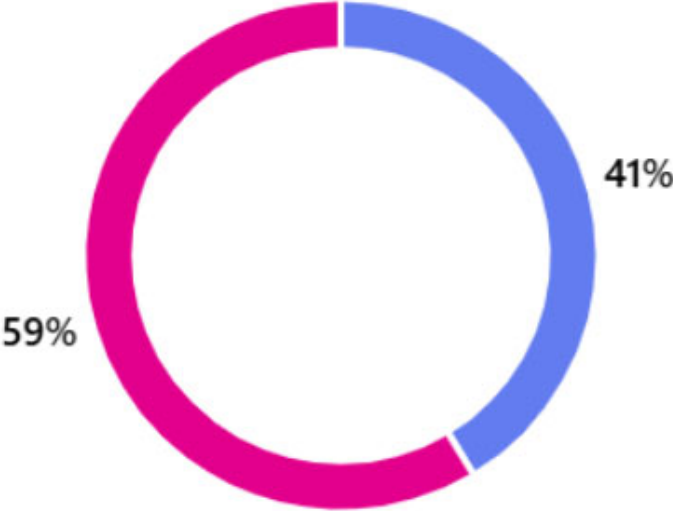
# Available Financial reserves



**Does your system have more than one source of water?**



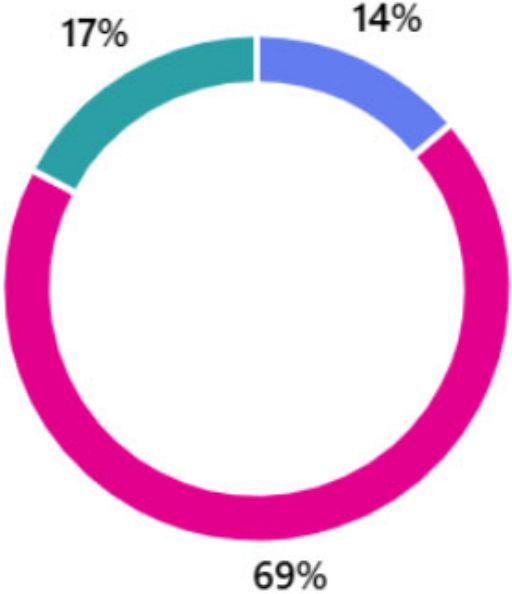
- Yes 12
- No 17



# Have you considered installing an Inter-tie?



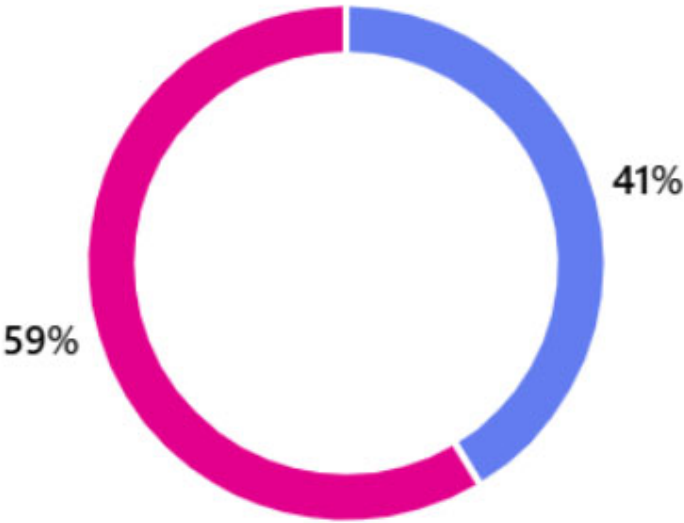
- Yes 4
- No 20
- Already in place 5



**Would you consider consolidating with another water system?**



- Yes 12
- No 17





## Consolidation challenges, most to least concerning



Ability to pay for consolidation work	
1st choice:	10 (34%)
2nd choice:	10 (34%)
3rd choice:	5 (17%)
4th choice:	4 (14%)

Getting your customers consensus to consolidation. This could be due concerns...	
1st choice:	8 (28%)
2nd choice:	6 (21%)
3rd choice:	8 (28%)
4th choice:	4 (14%)
5th choice:	3 (10%)

Lack of nearby systems for consolidation	
1st choice:	9 (31%)
2nd choice:	4 (14%)
3rd choice:	6 (21%)
4th choice:	4 (14%)
5th choice:	6 (21%)

Staff/volunteer capacity to design and manage consolidation	
1st choice:	1 (3%)
2nd choice:	7 (24%)
3rd choice:	5 (17%)
4th choice:	6 (21%)
5th choice:	10 (34%)

Getting the receiving water system to support consolidation	
1st choice:	1 (3%)
2nd choice:	2 (7%)
3rd choice:	5 (17%)
4th choice:	11 (38%)
5th choice:	10 (34%)



**Would you consider cost sharing agreements with a nearby water system?**



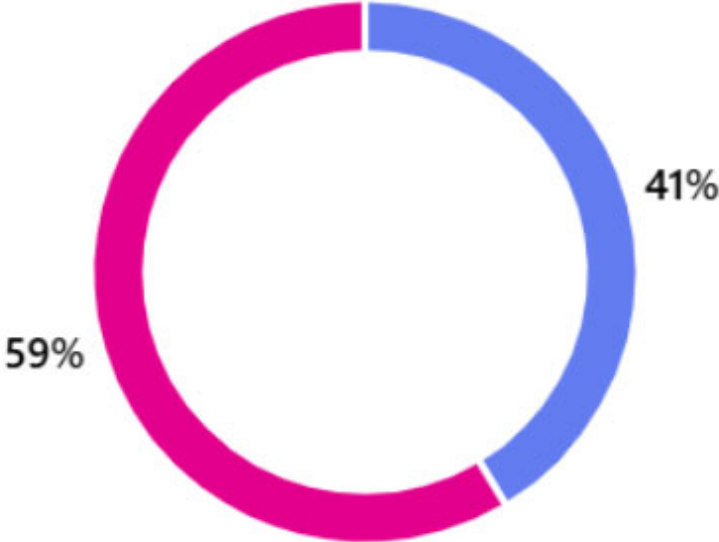
- Yes 18
- No 11



**Would you consider another water system or well owner consolidating with your system?**



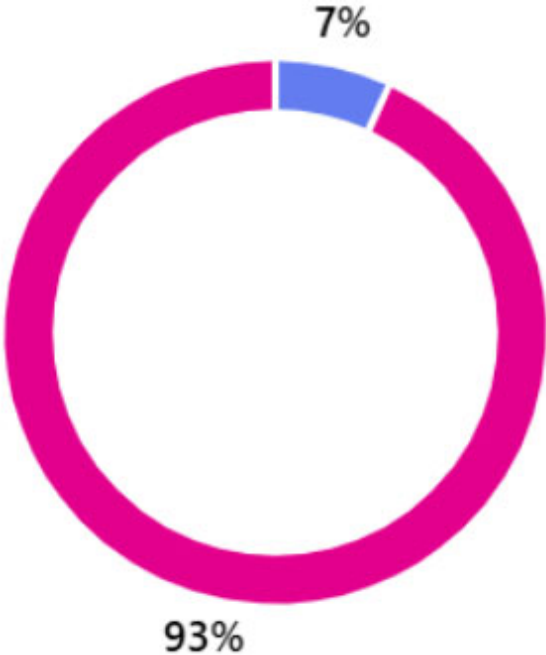
- Yes 12
- No 17



**Do you believe that your system has the capacity to manage a consolidation project?**



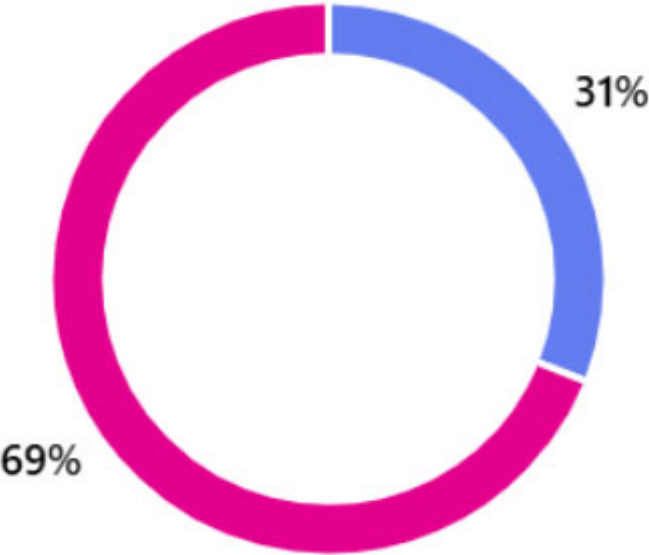
- Yes 2
- No 27



**Would you be interested in a public agency managing your consolidation project, with your approval?**



- Yes 9
- No 20



## **Valuable Feedback Provided**

1. Benefits of consolidation are not obvious
2. Forced Consolidation “should only be used for systems that cannot provide adequate, safe, clean drinking water”.
3. Consolidation is extremely expensive with no source of funds unless your system serves low-income households.
4. Our by-laws do not allow for additional homes on our system.
5. Wildfire exposure is a high-level concern. Mitigation methods are not generally available and those found in the literature are inconsistent.
6. Important that the Water Testing Lab in Santa Cruz continues to stay open.



## **Questions generated**

Most responders felt they could not manage a consolidation, but the majority did not feel comfortable with a public agency managing the consolidation.

If you were considering a consolidation, what kind of management assistance would be appealing to your system?



## **Questions generated**

Most responders did not feel comfortable with a public agency acting as a manager for their consolidation.



If you were considering a consolidation, what kind of assistance would your system like from us (Santa Cruz County)?

## Questions generated

Most responders would be interested in partnerships with nearby systems to reduce costs.



Would template cost sharing agreements be valuable for your system?



## **Questions generated**

At the State level, the overwhelming majority of “failing” water systems are small (<500 connections). This has led to a state level focus on consolidation of small, failing, water systems as the best long-term solution. As such, the topic of consolidation is often discussed in meetings between the county and the state.



Do you have any feedback you would like us to share with the state on this subject?

## Questions generated

Regulatory burden was highly listed as a vulnerability for our water systems.



What specific regulatory burdens are concerning for your system?



**What else should we be considering?**