County of Santa Cruz

Water Advisory Commission

701 Ocean Street, Room 312, Santa Cruz, CA 95060
(831) 454-2022 TDD/TTY -Call 711 www.scceh.com
EnvironmentalHealth@santacruzcounty.us

AGENDA

SANTA CRUZ COUNTY WATER ADVISORY COMMISSION

Wednesday June 4, 2025, 4pm

This meeting will be held in hybrid format. Commissioners are expected to attend in person.
In-Person: 701 Ocean Street; **5th Floor Redwood Room**
Remote via Teams: **Join the meeting now** Meeting ID: 280 136 550 008 3 Passcode: sE6Mg6rB
Dial in by phone +1 831-454-2222 Phone conference ID: 720 117 288#

A. OPENING

1. Call to Order
2. Roll Call

B. PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS

Opportunity for the public to comment on items under the purview of the Water Advisory Commission but not on today's agenda.

C. CONSENT AGENDA

Items on the consent agenda are considered to be routine in nature and will be acted upon in one motion. Specific items may be removed by members of the advisory body or public for separate consideration and discussion. Routine items that will be found on the consent agenda are meeting minutes, drought response updates, and Groundwater Sustainability Agency updates.

1. Approval of Meeting Minutes for April 4, 2025
2. Update from Groundwater Sustainability Agencies

D. COMMISSIONERS' REPORTS

Opportunity for Commissioners to provide brief updates

E. STAFF REPORTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Opportunity for staff to provide brief updates

F. NEW BUSINESS

1. Intercommission Working Group
   Provide guidance to staff as to the Commission's interest in reviving the Intercommission Working Group. Questions to consider: which commissions? Any specific topics?

G. UNFINISHED BUSINESS and UPDATES

1. Domestic Well Water Quality Testing Program Updates
   Update on the progress and results of the domestic well testing program kicked off in April of 2024.
   Attachments:
   a. Staff Report
   b. Presentation

2. Draft Small Water System Support Guidebook
   Provide feedback on the draft Guidebook for small water systems to use as a reference when considering water supply partnerships and possible consolidations.
   Attachments:
   a. Draft Guide Book

H. CORRESPONDENCE

Email from Becky Steinbruner

I. BOARD OF SUPERVISORS ACTION ON ITEMS AFFECTING WATER:

April 8, 2025

Authorize the Director of General Services to file Claims Forms to participate in settlement of multi-district litigation against Tyco Fire Products LP, Chemguard, Inc., and BASF Corporation, and execute releases of claims against the defendants (General Services Department)

J. ITEMS OF INTEREST

- https://santacruzlocal.org/2025/05/23/unhealthy-tap-water-at-farmworker-housing-prompts-fixes/
- https://santacruzlocal.org/2025/04/07/county-seeks-payout-water-contamination/
- Measure Q Citizens Oversight Advisory Board website

K. AGENDA ITEMS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS

L. ADJOURNMENT

County of Santa Cruz

Water Advisory Commission

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Minutes

SANTA CRUZ COUNTY WATER ADVISORY COMMISSION

Wednesday April 2, 2025, 4:00 PM

This meeting will be held in hybrid format. Commissioners are expected to attend in person. In-Person: 701 Ocean Street; **Fifth Floor Redwood Room** Remote via Teams

A. OPENING

1. Call to Order 4:02 PM
2. Roll Call

Commissioner	Attendance
Frank Cheap (1)	Present
Vacant Seat (2)	N/A
Linda A. Wilson (3)	Present
Brian Lockwood (4)	Present
Vacant Seat (5)	N/A
Paul G. Lego, Chair – Rep. of Private or Mutual Water Companies)	Present
Nate Gillespie – Rep. of Public Water Purveyors	Present

County Staff present: Sierra Ryan, Sean Abbey, Kevin Harmon, Erin McCarthy, Nathan Salazar, Alyson Tom

3. Elections of Officers as outlined in Santa Cruz County Code 2.38.120:

(1) Commission officers shall be elected during the commission's first meeting

after the commission is established at which a majority of the members are present. Annually, thereafter, commission officers shall be elected during the first meeting in April, or if the commission does not meet in April, at the next subsequent meeting. Commission officers may serve for up to two consecutive years and shall be eligible to serve again after a one- year "sit-out" period.

Motion to nominate Commissioner Gillespie as Chair by Commissioner Lockwood, seconded by Commissioner Cheap. Unanimous approval.

Motion to nominate Commissioner Lockwood as Vice Chair by Commissioner Cheap, seconded by Commissioner Lego. Unanimous approval.

B. PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS

Becky Steinbruner- Rob Swartz with the Santa Cruz Mid-County Groundwater Agency (MGA) has been doing some work focusing on rising chloride levels in the Seascape area. She tried to convince the MGA to have a second helicopter travel the same flight path as the monitoring done in 2017 to establish changes in groundwater quality in the Mid-County basin. There was a well drilled in the 80s for the purpose of monitoring saltwater intrusion. She is disappointed in the lack of a new study being done before the Pure Water Soquel project is implemented.

C. CONSENT AGENDA

Items on the consent agenda are considered to be routine in nature and will be acted upon in one motion. Specific items may be removed by members of the advisory body or public for separate consideration and discussion. Routine items that will be found on the consent agenda are meeting minutes, drought response updates, and Groundwater Sustainability Agency updates.

1. Approval of Meeting Minutes for February 5, 2025
2. Update from Groundwater Sustainability Agencies
3. Drought Response and DROP implementation update

No comments or discussion. Motion to approve consent agenda by Commissioner Lockwood, seconded by Commissioner Cheap. Unanimous approval.

D. COMMISSIONERS' REPORTS

Commissioners agreed to forego their reports to preserve time for the consolidation

workshop.

E. STAFF REPORTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

None

F. NEW BUSINESS

1. Small Water Systems Consolidation Workshop

    1. Background (Sierra Ryan)
        a. SB 552 requirements for counties and role in consolidations
        b. DROP language and grant for locally relevant materials and guides
        c. SB 1188 and SB 552 requirements
        d. Introduce presentations and Q&A process

Question: Do you know where the State Water Board is on developing regulations for SB 1188?
Answer: Have not heard the current status.

Q: Do you know if the SB 552 requirements apply to small /smallest public water systems? Down to 15 connections?
A: SB 552 water system requirements only apply to community water systems and nontransient-noncommunity systems that are schools. County drought planning requirements are primarily focused on the other types of water systems and private well owners.

Q: Where are the fire code requirements found?
A: Usually in the building codes, applying these standards to larger scale water systems is a challenge. They do not scale well by connection when comparing requirements for a single home to a water supplier for many residences. Typically, water systems are only required to comply with fire flow requirements in place when the system was established. They are usually grandfathered in for future fire flow and fire storage requirements, similar when the building code changes, existing buildings do not need to be upgraded.

Q (Cheap): Do we know if the State Water Board has reached out to water systems before they come out with specific regulations?
A: No- if any systems have heard from the state on this, that would be helpful for us to know.
Q (Cheap): Do we know if any water systems were consulted or involved in the creation of that bill?
A: None that we know of.

Comment (attendee): New drought-related questions being asked in Electronic Annual Report (EAR).

Lego: SB 1188 requires the State Water Board to collect input/feedback before setting standards. Need to keep an eye on this so the standards are feasible.

SB 1188 applies to a big range of water systems based on size, do not want to see standards driven up to unreachable levels for smaller systems due to the capabilities of larger systems (up to 10,000 connections).

2. County's Consolidation Feasibility GIS Analysis (Kevin Harmon)
    a. Physical
    b. Technical-Managerial-Financial (drive time)

Q (virtual meeting chat): Are costs allocated by ratio of number of connections? Is there an overlap?

Comment (attendee): Costs are currently higher than listed in this analysis for consolidation pipeline from San Lorenzo Valley Water District (SLVWD) to Forest Springs and Bracken Brae.

Q (Lockwood): Shared pipeline opportunities listed in the analysis- would that be a shared trench with a single pipeline, or two pipelines in the same trench?
A: Single pipeline

Q (Lego): On the difference between physical and managerial consolidation; physical is connecting pipes, and an example of managerial consolidation would be that Soquel Creek Water District takes over and manages their business, but the smaller system still owns the facilities and sources?
A: More of a shared cost approach for expenses such as certified operators and business/financial managers.

SB 552 sets a deadline of 2032 for metering each service connection.

The state does have up to $5 million in funding for each larger system to consolidate a smaller system.

Comment (attendee): Many issues stem from agricultural water users in the Central Valley overtaxing water supplies and from population growth more than climate change, which is indeed a real issue but less of a contributor than the state has stated.

Comment (attendee): Perspective from a Forest Springs (FS) board member and resident- they currently have intertie connections to BBWC and SLVWD. Project to upgrade main to connect FS and Bracken Brae with 10 and 12-inch mains, the cost is already well over $4 million. One of the biggest questions is whether you have a distribution system in the system being consolidated that is viable. FS distribution system is on the older side, looking like the project will be over $30 million when all is said and done. Advantages- steady water supply, not viable for the neighborhood to maintain compliance on its own. However, it is also not feasible to expect a small system to handle the $30 million price tag, the state needs to step up.

Gillespie: Cost estimate for pipeline installation has been closer to $300-$500 per linear foot currently.

Q: Map of private wells did not show Pine Tree Lane, Bluff Residents, or private wells in the area near New Brighton.
A: Bluff Residents now an Individual Water System (1-4 connections), parcels not served by a regulated water system will not be shown on the map.

3. LAFCO roles/steps for physical connection (Joe Serrano)
    i. ESA for emergency intertie
    ii. Annexation of a small system into a big system

Q: Are financial analyses within LAFCO's purview?
A: No, but LAFCO is not restricted from assessing financial options and resources, developed a report for Big Basin Water Company (BBWC) to review their governance options. Also helped to connect Moonshot Missions to BBWC. Moonshot then completed the work and final report on long-term options for BBWC free of charge.

Q: How did you find Moonshot?
A: Hired Piret Harmon, former Scotts Valley Water District General Manager, as consultant, who knew someone from Moonshot and that they may be able to help with that type of analysis. One of the Moonshot employees also lived near/within BBWC.

Q: We know that LAFCO has helped with some consolidation studies for fire districts/agencies. Would LAFCO be willing to help with something similar for water systems?
A: Yes, LAFCO would definitely be interested in helping with this.

4. Guidebook development and Survey (Sean Abbey)
    a. Survey results

b. Discussion:
    1) What assistance is needed/where should we focus our work?
    2) What should we be communicating to the State?

Comment (attendee): Issue is that there is a lack of knowledge of what to do to move consolidation process forward. Do not know where to start. Legal guidance and other types of guidance needed.

Legal assistance is a large need, most systems cannot afford the rates attorneys charge.

Would be helpful to publish current standards for water systems that would need to be met before consolidation, for example with Soquel Creek Water District.
Forming an assessment district/benefit assessment district is easier than a standard assessment district (50% protest vs. 50%+1 in approval vote)

Comment (attendee): As a small public water system, Forest Springs has been able to use some helpful legal/technical resources. Technical assistance- Moonshot is one source but cannot provide legal advice. To use Moonshot's services, they have a grant from the EPA, Forest Springs qualified because about 1/3 of their homes burned in the CZU fire and their infrastructure was damaged. Most of their criteria are unfortunately tied to DAC status. CRWA and Cal Mutuals have offered free technical assistance if you apply and fit their eligibility criteria. Biggest hurdle is definitely the lack of DAC status and median income. Issues with long-time homeowners on small amounts of Social Security and cannot afford large expenses. Households with younger residents, including tech workers. FS constantly struggles with how to fund projects without being punitive for the group of residents that cannot afford large costs. SLVWD has been a great consolidation partner. They understand how to administer grants, has systems in place to handle accounting. Important question is how does a non-DAC system obtain a large enough grant to fund a consolidation project?

What other types of assistance could we provide with consolidations/related projects?

- Funding, and access to funding!
- Guidance on processes, requirements.
- Need to provide feedback to the state that consolidations cannot proceed without funding.

Steinbruner: Laird's bill (1188) has a significant focus on reserve funds, concern that this will put a lot of systems under intense scrutiny and pressure.

Comment (in meeting chat):

1. ChatGPT offers these options, which are almost all about underserved communities per Karen's observations:
2. **Rural Community Assistance Partnership (RCAP):** RCAP offers technical assistance, training, and financial resources to rural communities across the United States, aiming to improve water, wastewater, and solid waste infrastructure.US EPA

   DigDeep: This human rights nonprofit focuses on ensuring that every American has clean, running water and adequate sanitation. They work on collaborative projects to address water access challenges in underserved communities. DIGDEEP

   x**Water Finance Exchange (WFX):** WFX assists small water suppliers in securing financing for infrastructure projects, addressing challenges faced by low-income communities in funding water system improvements. DIGDEEP+6Public Policy Institute of California+6Stanford Law School+6

- **US Water Alliance:** A nonprofit organization committed to advancing sustainable water policies and programs across the United States, focusing on building cross-sector partnerships to address water challenges. sillylily
- **Water Engineers for the Americas (WEFTA):** WEFTA is a nonprofit organization that provides design and funding for clean water and basic sanitation systems in Latin American communities, focusing on sustainable and community-driven projects. Wikipedia+8Wikipedia+8US EPA+8

3. Assistance from SCC: Feasibility about which other systems to approach to consider consolidation (obviously close by, but when there are several getting advice), and any models of the TMF collaborations that are working.

Comment: Templates would be helpful!
$330/foot many years ago (Owen/San Andreas MWC)
Would be helpful to follow up with Trout Gulch to get more details on their pipeline installation cost (~$220/foot for 6-inch C900)

Comment: Systems being pushed toward non-compliance with increased reporting burden, for example drought reporting requirements that do not benefit water system, rather take away from their time running the system. There are many advantages that small systems have over larger systems, such as the ability to directly inspect each connection, which is not feasible for systems as large as Soquel Creek Water District.

Comment: significant drop in involvement with the water system. There is no one to replace him if he is no longer around.

Lego: At a macro level, when we send this information to the state, we can look at the larger cost of the pipe, you can roughly use $50,000 per connection plus intertie cost for the cost of consolidation.

Comment (in chat): Excellent point - we either have been here a long time and have collaborative neighbors - or new people, including absentee landlords - and we inherit an aging system.

Comment: Increasing treatment costs, need county's continued support for POE/POU treatment.

Comment: There are large private water companies that own small systems over a large area, including in San Benito County. If there were a number of small systems within the county that are not able to function, that might attract some larger companies to run these systems.

Other advise caution for this approach.

Environmental Health is aiming to complete a draft guidebook in the fall, must be submitted to the state in December along with a final report.

G. UNFINISHED BUSINESS and UPDATES

None

H. CORRESPONDENCE

No Discussion

I. BOARD OF SUPERVISORS ACTION ON ITEMS AFFECTING WATER:

No Discussion

J. ITEMS OF INTEREST

No Discussion

K. AGENDA ITEMS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS

- Intercommission Working Group

L. ADJOURNMENT 6:05 PM

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Subject: June 4, 2025 Water Advisory Commission Consent Agenda

Title: Groundwater Sustainability Agency Updates

Background

There are three groundwater basins in the County subject to the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act. The following updates come from the Groundwater Sustainability Agencies tasked with managing and monitoring those basins.

Pajaro Valley Water Management Agency

- Grant Funded Projects
    - Department of Conservation (DoC) Multibenefit Land Repurposing Grant, $8.89 million: Staff and consultants continue to meet monthly with DoC staff and the Statewide Support Entity (SSE); staff continue to work with Regional Block Grant partners to finalize the final sub-grantee agreements; Zanjero held a kickoff meeting with the Regional Block Grant Partners for Multibenefit Land Repurposing Plan; staff received a check from the DoC for Invoice No. 3 in the amount of $2,413,985 on April 17, 2025; it included $2.375 million to reimburse PV Water for College Lake Project expenses, and the balance to reimburse PV Water for grant administration related expenses.
    - Department of Water Resources (DWR) Critically Overdrafted Basins Grant: $7.6 million in support of the College Lake Integrated Resources Management Project- Staff received the retention payment in the amount of $538,559.83 on May 12, 2025; this grant is now officially closed, and PV Water received straight “A’s” for its performance in the grant program as documented in the attached Grant Closure Letter / Grant Performance Evaluation Form.
    - DWR Watershed Resilience Pilot Grant, $2 million: Work on the watershed delineation and watershed network development continues; staff and consultants held the third Advisory Group meeting on April 17, 2025 during which time the focus was on developing problem statements and hazard metrics; the second Watershed Network meeting is scheduled for June 10, 2025, participation will be by teleconference; staff received payment for Invoice No. 3 in the amount of $213,920.44 on March 24, 2025.
- College Lake Integrated Resources Management Project
    - Construction:
        - Water Treatment Plant & Intake Facility

        - Work continues on the Intake Facility and Water Treatment Plant; commissioning meetings are ongoing.
    - Supplemental Well No. 3 (SW3)
        - Contractors purged oil from the casing and cleaned the perforated screens at SW3 prior to performing a pump test.
    - Supplemental Well No. 4 (SW4)
        - SW4 has been drilled, developed, and pump tested.
    - Treated Water Pipeline
        - Meetings to discuss contract change orders due to impacts of the Differing Site Condition at Salsipuedes Creek and groundwater are ongoing; contract change orders are being issued for those items that have been resolved and agreed to. Pipeline flushing activities are scheduled to begin on Sunday, May 18.
  - Environmental: Biological resource monitoring is taking place as needed, and worker environmental training continues as needed.
  - Adaptive Management Plan: Hydrologic monitoring, waterfowl monitoring, and steelhead surveys are ongoing; staff and consultants are preparing an annual report and discussing vegetation management needs.
  - Outreach Activities: Staff continue to post information about the project online. Please check https://www.pvwater.org/construction regularly for construction related updates.
- Watsonville Slough System Managed Aquifer Recharge & Recovery Projects
  - Permitting: Work on preparing permit applications continues, in addition, staff and consultants have updated the Struve Slough Water Availability Analysis and have been meeting with Water Board Staff monthly.
  - Environmental: The Board approved the addendum to the Environmental Impact Report on March 19, 2025.
  - Outreach: Communications are ongoing; staff and the support team continue to meet with property owners; several properties have entered escrow.
- Sustainable Groundwater Management Act Well Monitoring Network Expansion
  - Permitting: Staff have held preliminary discussions with the permitting agencies of Santa Cruz and Monterey Counties to identify the necessary requirements. Well permits and encroachment permits will be required by both counties, and a coastal development permit may be required for proposed wells in the coastal zone of Santa Cruz County.
  - Property Rights: Staff has mailed letters to property owners for proposed wells that would be located on privately owned land.
  - Environmental: Staff engaged Environmental Service Associates (ESA) to consult on California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and environmental compliance. Staff received a memorandum describing the results of a cultural resources database search to aid in the determination if the sites qualify for an exemption from CEQA.

Santa Cruz Mid-County Groundwater Agency

- The Agency Board met on March 20, 2025, at the Capitola Branch Library. At the meeting, the Board:
    - Received a presentation on the Water Year (WY) 2024 Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) Annual Report and authorized submittal to the Department of Water Resources. The report indicates that the basin experienced undesirable results with respect to seawater intrusion, reduction of storage, and surface water depletion in WY 2024 as defined in its GSP.
    - Received a draft Agency budget for Fiscal Year 2026.
    - Approved the qualifications-based selection of Montgomery & Associates to continue to provide planning and technical services to the Agency.
    - Authorized the extension of an agreement with the County of Santa Cruz for administrative and planning services from the Regional Water Management Foundation, and data management system hosting and maintenance from Kisters for Fiscal Years 2026 and 2027.
    - Received an update from SCI Consulting Group related to public outreach with private domestic groundwater users as part of an assessment of funding options for expenses associated with complying with the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act. The Board provided direction to better define the process and need for a fee as well as identify other funding options before continuing engagement with private groundwater users. The Board requested additional information on what is known about water use and recharge at its next meeting.
- The next regular meeting of the Agency is on June 12, 2025, at 6:00 pm.

Santa Margarita Groundwater Agency

- The Agency Board met on February 27, 2025, at Scotts Valley Water District. At the meeting, the Board:
    - Received a presentation on the Water Year (WY) 2024 Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) Annual Report and authorized submittal to the Department of Water Resources. The report indicates that the basin did not experience undesirable results in WY 2024 as defined in its GSP.

    - Received a draft Agency budget for Fiscal Year 2026.
    - Authorized the extension of an agreement with the County of Santa Cruz for administrative and planning services from the Regional Water Management Foundation, and data management system hosting and maintenance from Kisters for Fiscal Years 2026 and 2027.
- The next regular meeting of the Agency is on May 22, 2025, at 6:00 pm.

By: Sierra Ryan, Water Resources Program Manager with information from Rob Swartz and Brian Lockwood

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Subject: June 4, 2025, Water Advisory Commission

Title: Drought Response & Outreach Plan (DROP) Update

Proposed Action:

Receive presentation on the testing program and plans for expansion.

Background:
On September 23, 2021, Senate Bill (SB) 552 was signed into law. SB 552 requires that "a county shall establish a standing county drought and water shortage task force to facilitate drought and water shortage preparedness for state small water systems and domestic wells within the county's jurisdiction". The Water Advisory Commission voted to adopt the responsibility for implementing SB 552 and receives regular updates on the progress of implementation.

Updates:

- There are currently 160 applicants for the Regional Waterboards free well testing program.
- No additional wells have been tested since the April 2nd meeting.
- County staff have been given early approvals to add PFAS testing for income qualified households that are enrolled in the program.
- Sierra Ryan continues to represent interests of local government at the State Drought Response Interagency Partnership (DRIP) Collaborative.

By: Sean Abbey
Water Quality Specialist III

Environmental Health Division

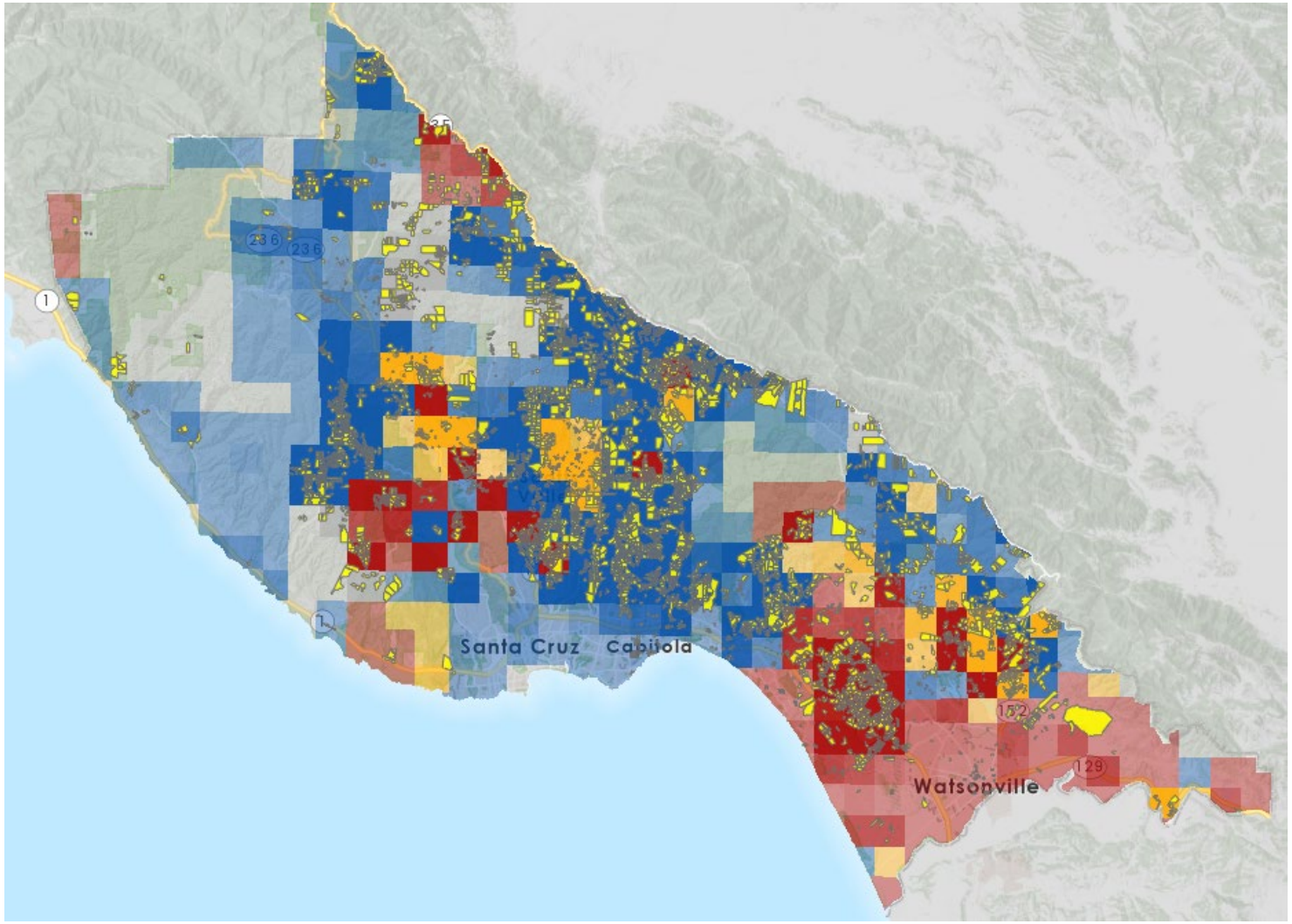
Santa Cruz County Household Well Assistance Program

Presentation to Water Advisory Commission

Sean Abbey, Water Quality Specialist

~8,000 household wells in Santa Cruz County

- ▶Most wells are in the mountains.
- ▶Many wells are at risk of contamination
- ▶South County has more water quality problems
- ▶Very little testing is required



In 2021, Santa Cruz County applied for Urgent Drinking Water Needs Funding.

In 2023, the contract was finalized through the Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Funds.

This grant provides funding for the following:

1. Identifying parcels served by wells
2. Outreach to well owners
3. Testing of water depth and water quality
4. Providing alternate water sources, such as bottled water or treatment systems

Santa Cruz County had no previous experience reaching out and assisting household well owners.

Santa Cruz County became aware of the Central Coast Drinking Water Well Testing Program (*Central Coast Program*) when their staff requested information on county resources.

The Central Coast Program proved highly complimentary to the Santa Cruz County Program.

The Central Coast Program complimented the Santa Cruz County Program

Central Coast Program

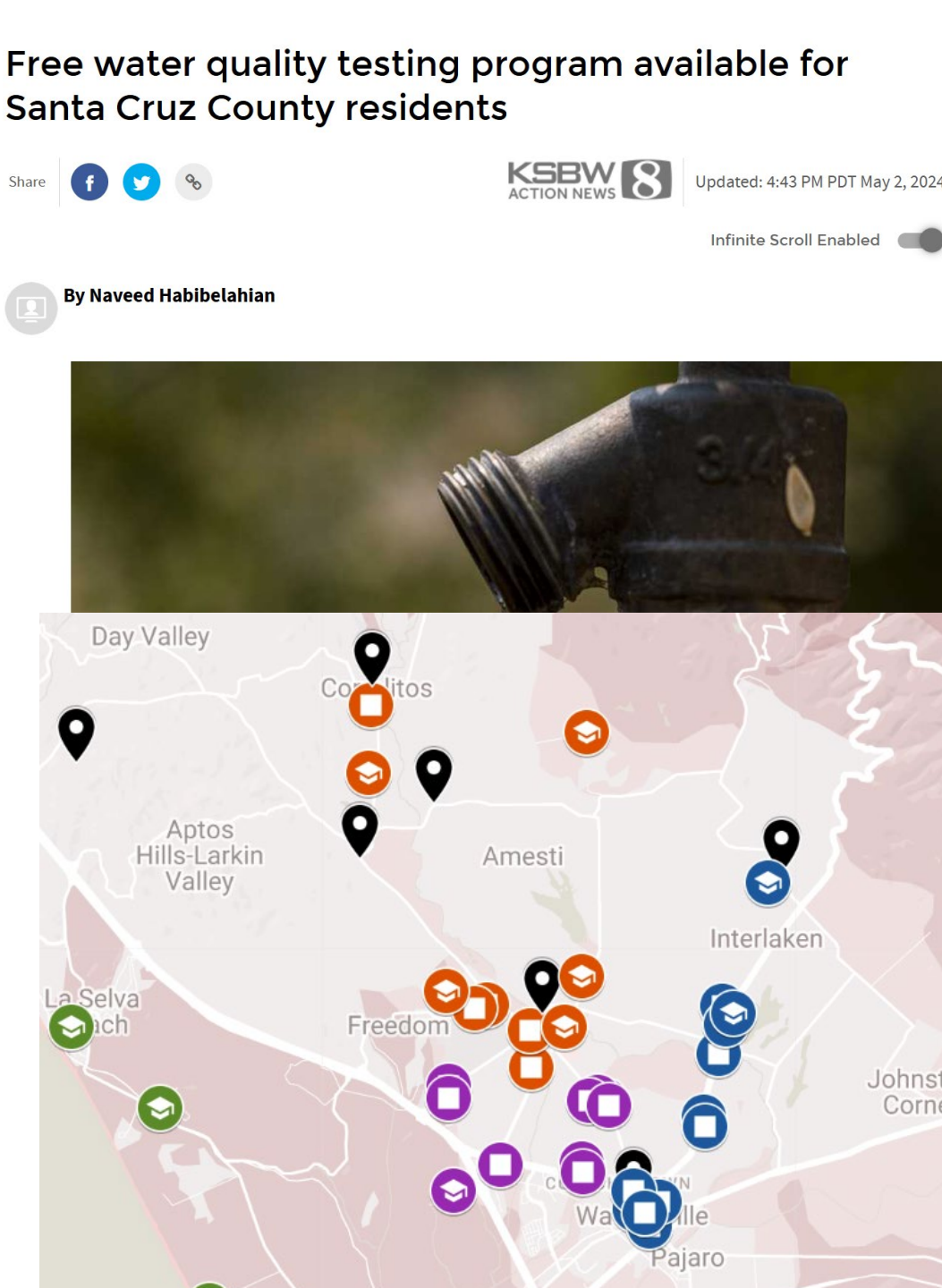
- Free to all county residents
- Existing process to collect and analyze well samples
- Experience with outreach to well owners in other counties
- Unable to provide treatment services
- Did not test for bacteria

Santa Cruz County Program

- Services are income limited
- No process to collect and analyze well samples
- Knowledge of local areas to apply past experiences
- Can provide treatment services to income limited residents
- Able to test for bacteria

The two programs collaborated on outreach methods

- Bilingual fliers, posters, press releases, social media posts, and news articles were jointly created
- Targeted locations for mailers, posters, and door to door outreach were identified using disadvantaged community maps and water quality risk maps
- Staff from both programs, as well as Community Water Center, participated in the outreach process



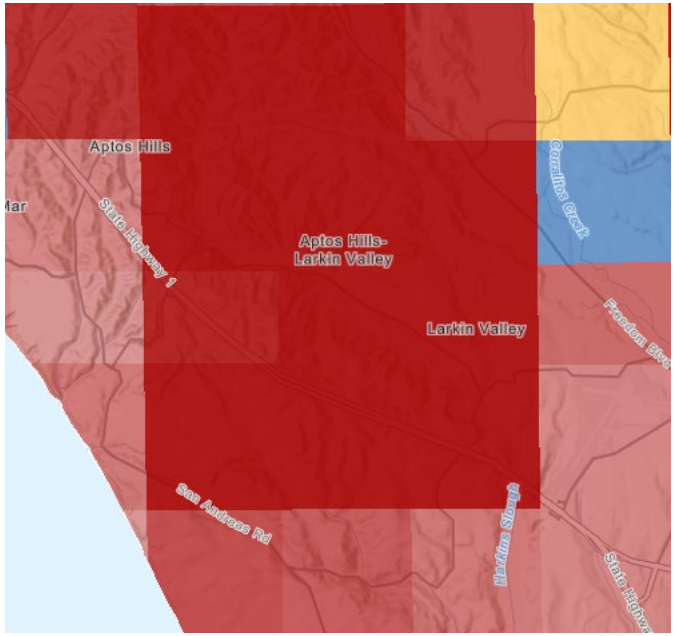
The outreach effort far exceeded expectations

- ~50 wells anticipated to apply
- More than **160** well owners have applied
- 70 wells tested and 18 exceed a drinking water standard
- 3 wells had 1 or more households enroll in county services
  - 2 households have received a POU treatment system.
  - 4 households are receiving bottled water because a POU device was not viable.

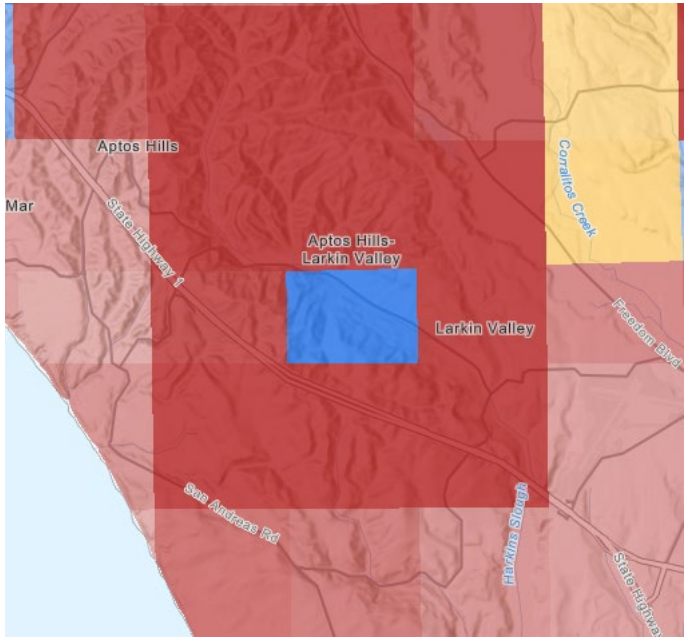
Our partnership is already bearing fruit

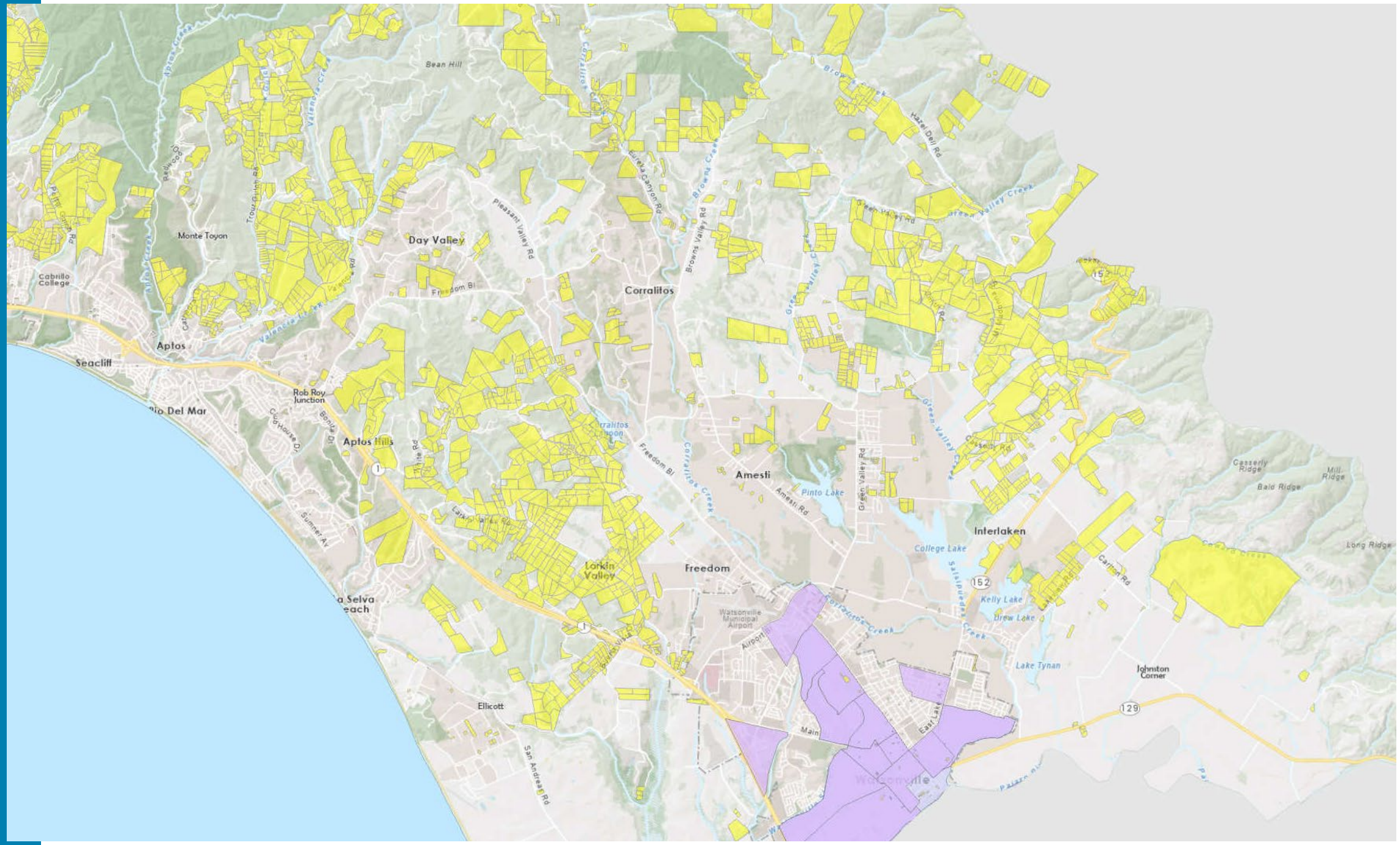
These results have sharpened the quality of the State Aquifer Risk Map

2024 Map



2025 Map

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Watsonville Municipal Airport
Ellicott
Johnston Corner
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Bald Ridge
Mill Ridge
Long Ridge
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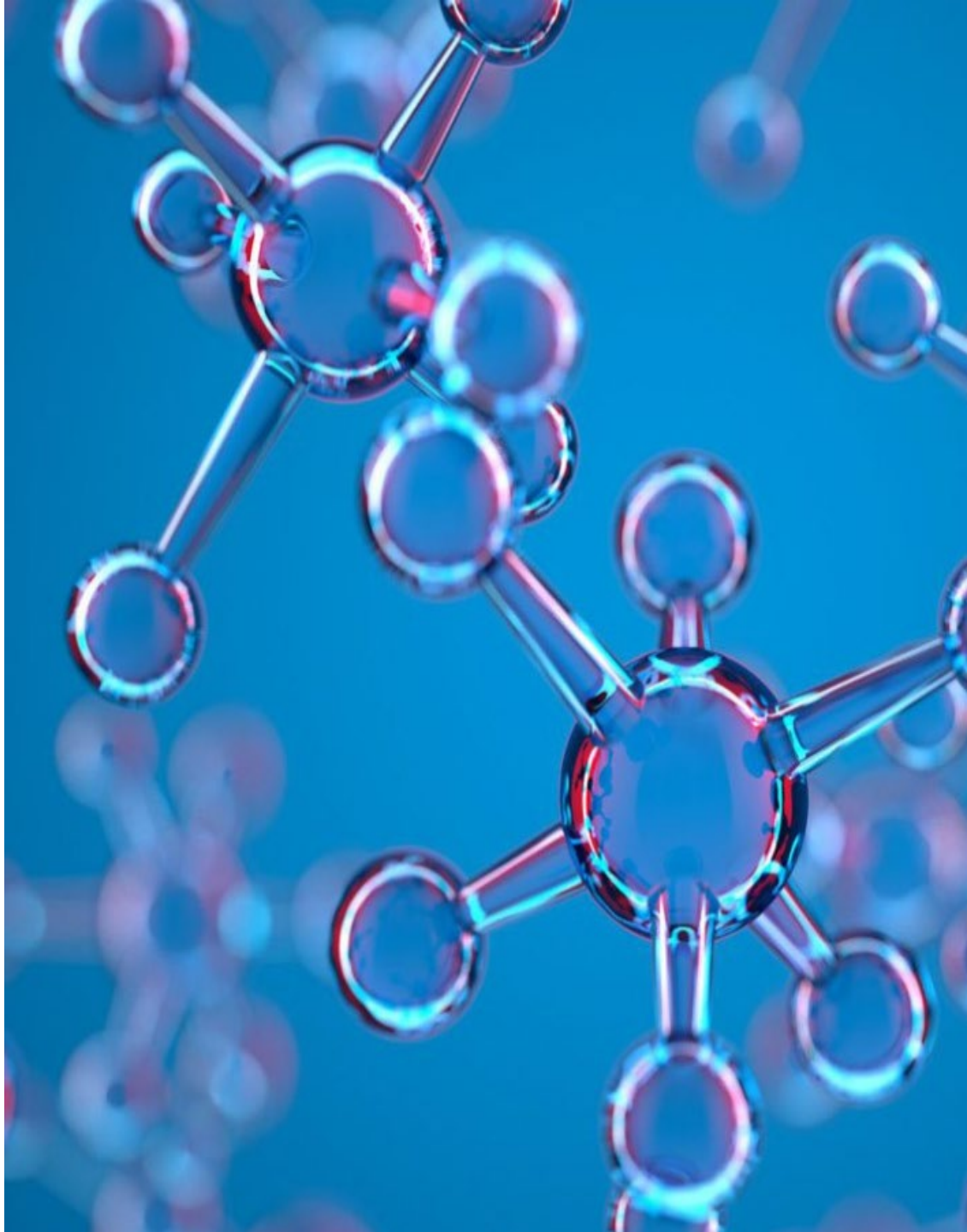
Addition of PFAS Testing

We have received early approvals to test for both PFOS and PFOA in wells that enroll in the county program.



Questions?

Thank You

Strategies for Water Supply Resilience:

A Small Water Systems Guide to Maintaining Safe, Affordable, and Reliable Water

Challenges to Small Water System Supplies

Water supplies across Santa Cruz County can be considered reliable to the vast majority of county residents. Most residents receive their water from one of six (6) large water system, which are City of Santa Cruz, City of Watsonville, Scotts Valley Water District, San Lorenzo Valley Water District, Soquel Creek Water District and Central Water District. These large systems work diligently to ensure that both current and future residents will have reliable and affordable water. However, some smaller water systems face challenges that are different from those of the large suppliers. These challenges vary in nature, but most originate from the limited customer base of these water systems, which restricts their ability to manage issues cost-effectively. These challenges include but are not limited to;

1. **Expanding Regulatory Requirements:** Small Water Systems, which may serve as few as 15 residences, must meet many of the same requirements as the largest water systems in the county. All the costs required to comply with new reporting requirements, or testing and treating a new contaminant (such as PFAS of Hexavalent Chromium) must be spread across far fewer customers.
2. **Aging Infrastructure:** Many small water systems were built from the 1960's through 80's and continue to utilize much of the original infrastructure. Many of these components are reaching the end of their expected life cycles and will require significant investment to replace.
3. **Lack of Personnel:** Most small water systems are volunteer run and struggle to find individuals to help manage the system. While some work can be offset with contractors, these systems still require significant oversight to manage.
4. **Fiscal Sustainability:** Many small water systems do not collect sufficient revenue to cover unexpected expenses or regularly scheduled repair work. When a major system component fails, the cost is usually covered through a one-time assessment. These unexpected financial burdens can be particularly difficult for residents on fixed incomes.
5. **Vulnerable Potable Water Supply:** Many small water systems only have one source of water and limited options for installing a new source. Should the primary water source fail, or water quality no longer meets standards, then the water system may be left without any potable water supply.

This guide is intended to help small water systems navigate these challenges and ensure their customers have a reliable supply of water in the future.

Definitions

Before getting into the strategies to address water supply challenges, here are a few key terms to be aware of:

- **Consolidation**: when a smaller system is connected to a larger water system and then dissolved. The small systems customers are now provided service by the larger water system.
- **Interconnection**: when a smaller system remains independent but has a physical connection to a larger water supplier. This allows the system a backup water supply from which they can purchase water.
- **Managerial Consolidation**: when a smaller water system is not physically connected to another system, but the system is no longer managed locally. All management is done by either a neighboring water system or a private company.
- **Agreement to Share Resources**: An agreement with a nearby water system, usually another small system, to share costs. This can help to spread the cost of a service, such as an operator or financial planner, among more connections.
- **Large Water System**: A water system that serves more than 200 residential connections.
- **Small Water Supplier**: A water system that serves between 15 and 199 residential connections.
- **State Small Water System** (SSWS): A water system that serves between 5 and 14 residential connections.
- **Household Well:** A water system that serves between 1 and 4 residential connections.
- **Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO):** Agency that ultimately approves the connection of two water suppliers.

Supply Resilience Strategies

There are four main strategies to address the five challenges that were identified above, however not every strategy will be a solution for every challenge. The table below provides a simple summary of the four main strategies and whether it can be a solution for each challenge.

Challenge	Expanding Regulation	Aging Infrastructure	Lack of Personnel	Fiscal Sustainability	Loss of Potable Water
Strategy 1: Consolidation					
Strategy 2: Interconnection					
Strategy 3: Managerial consolidation					
Strategy 4: Agreement to Share Resources					

Table 1: Solution, Partial Solution, Not a Solution

Depending on the challenge your system is facing, you should select the most appropriate Strategy and review the steps provided below. Please note, Santa Cruz County can also review the available information with you to help determine which strategies might be most appropriate.

Strategy 1: Consolidation

Consolidation has the potential to address all five of the previously outlined challenges, however it will be the most expensive and time-consuming option.

Santa Cruz County can provide a price estimate to physically connect with the Small Water Supplier or State Small Water System with a Large Water System, however there are many other factors that must be considered when determining the cost to consolidate. These costs often total roughly $50,000 per connection on top of the cost physically connect the two systems. This is a sizable cost and most small water systems will not have the funds on hand to manage that cost. There are possible consolidation funding opportunities (Funding and Incentives for Consolidation), however most are directed to Disadvantaged Communities, a designation most small water systems are unlikely to meet. With that in mind, identifying funding will be crucial.

Step 1 – Compile all your system documentation

Consolidation will require significant collaboration with outside entities, so it will be important to gather all available information to help them understand your system. These will be things like permits, system schematics, governing rules, water quality records, violation history, financial records, etc.

Step 2 - Contact the Large Water System you will be working with

Use the table below to find key information on connection fees, rate schedules, and contacts for the water system you are interested in consolidating with.

Water System	New Residential Service connection Fee (guidance doc for process)	Whole water system connection fee (intertie)	Customer Rate Schedule	Consolidation Contact Person and Email Address
City of Santa Cruz			Rates | City of Santa Cruz	
City Of Watsonville			Rates | Watsonville	
Soquel Creek Water District			Rates & Fees | Soquel Creek Water District, CA	
San Lorenzo Valley Water District			Rates & Fees | San Lorenzo Valley Water District	
Scotts Valley Water District			Scotts Valley Water District - Rates and Fees	
Central Water District				

Table 2

Step 3 – Complete an engineering report

Unless you have an existing report, you will need to complete an engineering report that will show the Large Water System if your water system infrastructure meets its requirements. Generally, that will mean meeting the same standard as a brand new residential service, which are the American Water Works Association (AWWA) standards. AWWA standards are extensive and include properly sized pipes, shut-off valves, fire-hydrants, residential

meters, and more. If your water system does not meet AWWA standards, the Large Water System will likely not proceed with consolidation until those standards are met.

An engineering firm can review your existing water system and determine what work would need to be completed to make it acceptable for the large water system. They should also be able to provide an estimated cost to complete the upgrades.

Step 4 – Create a financial support mechanism

Now that you have an estimated cost to upgrade your system, the next step will be to create a mechanism to pay for them. The small water system must create a funding mechanism that will allow them to collect funds from every customer served, which can be challenging. One possible approach is to create a County Service Area (CSA). For more information on this process, please see the County Public Works page on CSA Formation.

Step 5 – Hire a contractor to complete the work

Once the financing is in place, a contractor should be hired to complete full design, permitting and construction of your Small Water System upgrades. There should be ongoing communication with your system and the Large Water System throughout this process to ensure nothing is overlooked.

Step 6 – Dissolve the Smaller Water System

Once the consolidation is completed, your water system will need to provide a written request to Santa Cruz County asking that its domestic water supply permit be cancelled. It will be necessary to cancel any associated business licenses and insurances for the dissolved public water system. Also consider the need to close bank accounts and transfer deeds, titles, and surface water rights if applicable. And finally, make sure to provide important records, such as distribution maps and operations plans, to the receiving water system staff.

Strategy 2: Interconnection

In this strategy, your system continues to be independently managed, but it has the ability to purchase water from a Larger Water System. This strategy can be effective if there are concerns about the reliability of your water systems water supply. For example, if your system relies on a well that could fail or is impacted by an emerging contaminant (such as PFAS or Hexavalent Chromium). Connecting to a nearby system provides a source of water with known quality and capacity, which will also reduce the regulatory burden associated with meeting water quality requirements. However, this will not help a water system that is struggling with failures in other components of the system or with lack of capacity to manage the system locally.

Step 1 – Complete an engineering report

You will need to complete an engineering report that will determine the best method of connecting to the Large Water System. This should be a significantly lower cost to design because your water system will not need to be upgraded to meet AWWA standards. An engineering firm should be able to provide an estimated cost to complete the intertie.

Step 3 – Create a financial support mechanism

Unlike a full consolidation, an intertie may have a price range that allows you to avoid creating a CSA to cover the cost of the project. Using the engineering report and cost estimate, your water system could pursue a private loan to cover the cost of installation. The monthly payment on that loan could then be incorporated into the customer's bill.

When planning potential rate changes due to the inter-tie installation, you should also consider the ongoing cost of connection fees for the Large Water System (see Table 2). These are a set charge that is billed to the connection regardless of whether water is used or not.

Step 4 – Hire a contractor to complete the work

Once the financing is in place, a contractor should be hired to complete full design, permitting and construction of your intertie. There should be ongoing communication with your system and the Large Water System throughout this process to ensure nothing is overlooked.

Strategy 3: Managerial Consolidation

In this strategy, the water system does not physically connect to any other system, but an outside agency takes over the governance, management and operation of the water system. This could be a neighboring Large Water System or a private company that operates water systems, such as California American Water (CalAm). This can solve problems related to the local capacity to manage the water system.

Step 1 – Compile all your system documentation

Managerial Consolidation will require significant collaboration with outside entities, so it will be important to gather all available information to help them understand your system. These will be things like permits, system schematics, governing rules, water quality records, violation history, financial records, etc.

For your financial records, it will be particularly important to provide information on how billing rates have changed overtime for your system. If your system has not been increasing prices over time to keep up with rising costs, this can make your system less attractive new

manager. The manager will not want to take over management of your Small Water System and immediately need to do a big rate increase on their new customers.

Step 2 – Contact the possible managers

If the manager is a local public water system, please see the contact information provided in Table 2. If you are looking for a private company to manage the system, a list of possible agencies is below.

Company Name	Phone Number	Email

Strategy 4: Agreements for Shared Resources

This strategy can help two (or more) water systems work together to access greater economies of scale for the services it provides. As an example, two water systems may be independently contracting with an operator to collect samples and perform general inspections. By jointly contracting an operator, those systems may be able to negotiate a single contract that can be spread across the members of both systems, reducing the total cost per resident.

As part of our consolidation study, the County analyzed the estimated driving time between water systems as a proxy for how likely the water systems would be to utilize a Mutual Aid Agreement. This was largely based on a service provider, such as an Operator, being able to effectively serve both systems in a single day. This analysis generated a table that showed each water system and all the neighboring water systems that were within the reasonable proximity, such as a 10 minute drive (Appendix 2).

Alternatively, your system could utilize the States **Consolidation Outreach Map Tool**. This map tool allows users to locate water systems near an address or other existing water system

Step 1 – Contact the neighboring water system

Once you have reviewed Appendix 2, you should be able to identify the water systems that you may wish to create a Mutual Aid Agreement with. On request, Santa Cruz County staff can provide contact information for any water system that you would like to contact. If desired, County staff can also facilitate communication between your systems.

Step 2 – Create and approve the agreement

Once your two water systems agree to work together, you will need to create a Mutual aid agreement and/or Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that details specifically what your systems are expecting from one another. A template MOU can be found in Appendix 3.

Once created, both water systems governing bodies should review and approve the document before it becomes official. At that point, the document can be executed, and new contracts can be drafted accordingly.

Where to Start

If one or more of the supply resilience strategies described above are of interest, the County can help you get started with the following steps:

Step 1 - Contact Santa Cruz County Water Resources

Our office will be able to provide key details that can aid you in determining strategies are feasible for your water system. These details include:

1. **Cost estimate for physical connections:** If you are interested in physically connecting with a larger water system, we have created a cost estimate for every Small Water System to connect with its nearest Large Water System (Appendix 1). Note, this estimate will only include the cost of installing the pipeline to connect the two systems. Costs related to design, permitting, management, and connection fees would not be included.
2. **Service Boundary information**. Water service providers are only allowed to provide services within specific areas. County staff can tell you if your water system is already within the receiving systems boundary or not.
3. **Contacts**: The county can connect you with the water system you are interested in partnering with, LAFCO, and the Division of Drinking Water SAFER Engagement Unit.

From:	Becky Steinbruner
To:	Paul Lego; Sierra Ryan
Subject:	Re: Please Discuss Report on PFAS at Buena Vista Migrant Farmworker Camp and Alta Vista Apartments at Nest County Water Advisory Commission Meeting
Date:	Friday, May 30, 2025 9:44:51 PM

HI, Sierra,
Thank you for your response and background information about this project. I agree that it is unfortunate that the report did not explain the issue as clearly as you have done.

It would be good if there could somehow be a follow-up article about this because I know that Nathan's work is superb. Do you think it would help to have staff publicly clarify things om a testimony at the Supervisors meeting?

I am curious why my letter to the Commission is not included in the June 4 agenda packet?

Sincerely,
Becky

On Thursday, May 29, 2025 at 11:12:59 AM PDT, Sierra Ryan <sierra.ryan@santacruzcountyca.gov> wrote:

Hi Becky,

The article is going in the agenda packet under items of interest so we might talk about it though there isn't really any action to take. I found that article to be very misleading in its representation of the status and timeline of permitting. Right now we are waiting for the system to approve a monitoring plan. Since this is a new technology, the monitoring and maintenance plans had to be developed from scratch and approved by the State and the water system. Nathan worked hard to take examples of similar plans from large water systems and turn it into something that this system can commit to. I was really disheartened that this good work to ensure the safety of the water system customers was not well articulated in the article despite the reporter having the information. I'm always skeptical of media trying to pressure regulators to rush – you have been vocal about the need to vet and monitor new technologies (battery storage, recycled water) so I hope you understand that we don't want to approve anything related to drinking water until everything is finalized. We are also nearly at the approval stage and very excited to get the system online.

Thanks,

Sierra Ryan | Water Resources Program Manager
Water Resources Program | Environmental Health Division

Email: Sierra.Ryan@santacruzcountyca.gov
Phone: (831) 454-3133 | Cell: (831) 345-5202

From: Becky Steinbruner <ki6tkb@yahoo.com>
Sent: Wednesday, May 28, 2025 9:32 AM
To: Sierra Ryan <Sierra.Ryan@santacruzcountyca.gov>; Paul Lego <pglego@gmail.com>
Cc: Ray Pereyra <mar@cruzio.com>; Becky Steinbruner <ki6tkb@yahoo.com>
Subject: Please Discuss Report on PFAS at Buena Vista Migrant Farmworker Camp and Alta Vista Apartments at Nest County Water Advisory Commission Meeting

Dear Santa Cruz County Water Advisory Commission,
I hope that your Commission will discuss the information in the Santa Cruz Local report released today about the PFAS problem at the Buena Vista Migrant Farmworker Camp and Alta Vista Apartments. https://santacruzlocal.org/2025/05/23/unhealthy-tap-water-at-farmworker-housing-prompts-fixes/?utm_source=Santa+Cruz+Local&utm_campaign=bb18b990e1-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2025_05_24_01_33_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_f5d347e2d2-095fb227bb-446024507

Why isn't the filtering system operational and what has taken so long to implement it? Nathan Salazar from County Environmental Heatlh Services is quoted in the article.

Please consider sending a second letter to the County Board of Supervisors on this issue as it relates to the Rountree Detention Facility. Why aren't the residents of all of these facilities being provided bottled water?

Thank you.
Sincerely,
Becky Steinbruner