



County of Santa Cruz

HEALTH SERVICES AGENCY
Environmental Health Division
701 Ocean St. Room 312, Santa Cruz, CA 95060
(831) 454-2022 TDD/ TTY: Call 711
EnvironmentalHealth@santacruzcountyca.gov
www.scceh.org



AGENDA

SANTA CRUZ COUNTY WATER ADVISORY COMMISSION

Wednesday February 4, 2026, 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: 273 391 635 436 29 Passcode: pg6z9CX9

Dial in by phone +1 831-454-2222 Phone conference ID: 506 964 300#

A. OPENING

1. Call to Order
2. Roll Call
3. Introduction to Ryuun Ernst, new Commissioner for District 2.

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 December 3, 2025
2. Update from Groundwater Sustainability Agencies
3. Drought Response Updates
4. Water Advisory Commission Meeting Schedule for 2026

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. Review of County Water Resources Programs

County staff will provide an introduction and discussion about two areas of the Water Resources Program:

- a. Streamwood and Fish Monitoring Program
- b. Drinking Water Regulatory Program including the Local Primacy Agency.

Attachments: Staff Report

2. Commission Workplan

The WAC will discuss their priorities for the 2026–2027 Work Plan and take action to appoint a subcommittee to develop a Work Plan.

Attachments: Staff Report

2024–2025 Work Plan

Process for Updating Work Plan

G. UNFINISHED BUSINESS and UPDATES

None

H. CORRESPONDENCE

Email from Becky Steinbruner

I. BOARD OF SUPERVISORS ACTION ON ITEMS AFFECTING WATER:

1) <https://santacruzcountyca.primegov.com/Portal/Meeting?meetingTemplateId=1009>

January 27, 2026. Consider the Santa Cruz County Water Resources Management Status Report for 2025.

J. ITEMS OF INTEREST

- 1) Water Advisory Commission Biennial Report for 2025–2025 (attached).
- 2) LA Times, January 9, 2026. California is free of all drought, dryness for first time in 25 years. <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2026-01-09/california-has-no-areas-of-dryness-first-time-in-25-years>

K. AGENDA ITEMS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS

LAMP Updates

New Environmental Health Software (HS Gov Tech)

Hexavalent Chromium Rules

L. ADJOURNMENT



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Water Advisory Commission



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Minutes

SANTA CRUZ COUNTY WATER ADVISORY COMMISSION

Wednesday December 3, 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

A. OPENING

Both the Chair and Vice Chair had excused absences. Commissioner Cheap nominates Paul Lego as temporary chair, second by Wilson, unanimous.

1. Call to Order
2. Roll Call.

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

B. PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS

Becky Steinbruner – States update to bulletin 118 is open for public comment until Friday.

C. CONSENT AGENDA

1. Approval of Meeting Minutes for October 1, 2025
2. Update from Groundwater Sustainability Agencies
3. Drought Response Updates

No discussion or public comment. Moved by Cheap, seconded by Wilson, unanimous.

Lego was absent but can still vote as the minutes.

D. COMMISSIONERS' REPORTS

Opportunity for Commissioners to provide brief updates

Cheap - Got the well testing through the County the results. Extremely efficient, sampler came up from Santa Barbara.

Lego - New Hexavalent Chromium Maximum Contaminant Level is in place. Anyone in exceedance needs to have a compliance plan in place by the end of January. A group of small water agencies is challenging the new MCL with the State. Judge has heard both sides and we should hear more in January. The US standard is 100 PPB, the old state standard was 50ppb, now it is 10ppb. There are many places in the US where the standard is exceeded with naturally occurring levels. No money to pay for compliance. Centralized compliance is difficult for a small water company.

Moonshot missions has been helping San Andreas Mutual with the compliance report and another firm to do a preliminary engineering report for centralized treatment. They are funded by private entities.

E. STAFF REPORTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Software update at EH goes into effect on December 22nd. Presented at GRA on the Well Ordinance Update. The salmonid and steelhead coalition prepared a guidance document for other counties and credited Santa Cruz several times.

F. NEW BUSINESS

1. New County Well Database

Kevin Harmon presented on the work he has done training Azure OCR to modernize the County's well database by re-evaluating all of the well completion reports.

What DWR did in updating the layer manually is similar to what the County has done, though not as extensive. The utility of this work is state-wide as the DWR templates that were used are state-wide. Some consultants are interested in this as well.

Q: Can this be combined with water quality information?

A: Could consider ways to combine with GAMA well data.

Cheap: It would be great for the County to do workshops for drillers and geologists to basically solicit better information. Grant finishes at the end of March.

Public comment:

Q: How long did it take to train?

A: Probably took a week to train and then more time for post-processing which is the bulk of the time. Probably a couple hundred hours altogether.

Q: When will the public be able to see the information? Interested in trends in well destructions. Could be useful for people interested in buying property to look at surrounding areas. How are ASR wells recorded in this information?

A: It will be posted to GIS web by the end of January. We could consider adding injection wells as a separate category – need to check with Land Use about that. Have not looked for trends in destructions or why some Well Completion Reports were not sent to DWR.

2. 2025 Water Status Report

Some small water systems don't have good leak detection. It is really hard to detect even big leaks in the distribution systems. BBWC has seen significant Leak detection is an opportunity.

Very cool report, very comprehensive. It really tells a story. Great to get on the regular agenda as good, it is a good story to tell. Consumable to the public.

Recommends sending this to other agencies throughout the State. Might be good to circulate.

Erin points out that there has been success in agricultural conservation as well as municipal water use. They were able to conserve 5,000 AFY.

Public commenter agrees it should be on the regular agenda. Including the work that Kevin has done could be good. Could be included in a Connecting the Drops.

Commissioner Cheap moves that the WAC has reviewed the report and endorses it and suggests that it be presented to the Board of Supervisors on the Regular agenda. Seconded by Wilson. Unanimous.

G. UNFINISHED BUSINESS and UPDATES

None

H. CORRESPONDENCE

None

I. BOARD OF SUPERVISORS ACTION ON ITEMS AFFECTING WATER:

No Discussion

J. ITEMS OF INTEREST

No Discussion

K. AGENDA ITEMS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS

Workplan

LAMP Updates

New Environmental Health Software (HS Gov Tech)

Join meeting with SWS forum to discuss Hexavalent Chromium rule

L. ADJOURNMENT 6:01



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Subject: February 4, 2026 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
 - o 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 and consultants have formed a steering committee, the first meeting of which is scheduled to occur on December 11, 2025. Staff received payment for Invoice No. 4 in the amount of \$33,229 from the DoC on December 2, 2025, and \$91,163 for Invoice No. 5 on January 14, 2026, \$105,248, for Invoice 6 on January 8, 2026 (staff is unsure why payment was received for Inv. 6 prior to Inv. 5).
 - o Department of Water Resources (DWR) Watershed Resilience Pilot Grant, \$2 million: Staff and consultants met with DWR on January 13, 2026 to discuss the status of the project; the public review Watershed Resilience Plan will be available for review on or about February 20, 2026 and the consultant team will host "office hours" on February 26 at 9:00 am and 6:00 pm to discuss the draft plan; staff received payment for Invoice No. 6 in the amount of \$410,916 from DWR on January 5, 2026 (note payment for Invoice No. 5, in the amount of \$414,421, which staff submitted to DWR on September 4, 2025, is still pending).
- College Lake Integrated Resources Management Project
 - o Water Treatment Plant & Intake Facility
 - Work continues at the Intake Facility and Water Treatment Plant; commissioning meetings are ongoing. The 60-day process operational period is currently on hold due to seasonal pumping restrictions; staff from Veolia, Carollo Engineers, and PV Water

continue to work on improving the treatment process with use of aged polymer.

- Installed the Passive Integrated Transponder (PIT) Tag Detection Array Related to Monitoring South-Central Coast Steelhead Passage in the weir area as part of the project the Board approved on October 15, 2025; conducted testing.
 - Installed the Acoustic Doppler Current Profiler; conducted testing.
- Treated Water Pipeline
 - Project closeout activities are ongoing.
- Environmental: Monitoring continues on a monthly basis per permit requirements; annual reports have been submitted per the permit requirements.
- Adaptive Management Plan (AMP): Fall 2025 vegetation surveys were partially completed (some transects remained submerged), and Watsonville Wetlands Watch started removing invasive species and conducting vegetation management where accessible as per the AMP.
- Outreach Activities: Website and social media updates are ongoing.
- Watsonville Slough System Managed Aquifer Recharge & Recovery Projects
 - Permitting: Work on permit applications continues with staff and consultants corresponding with permitting agencies. Staff and consultants met with State Water Resources Control Board staff and US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) staff on January 9, 2026, Clean Water Act 401 Water Quality Certification meeting. Staff took USACE staff on a site tour on January 15, 2026.
 - Environmental: The Board approved the addendum to the Environmental Impact Report on March 19, 2025. 60% design plans for a compensatory mitigation pond were received from ESA and are currently being reviewed by staff.
 - Outreach: Communications are ongoing; staff and the support team continue to meet with property owners.
 - Property Rights: Four of eleven properties have closed escrow, others remain pending.
- Supplemental Well No. 3 Improvements Project
 - The Board, on December 17, 2025, adopted Resolution 2025-10, Awarding Contract to Pacific Infrastructure Corporation for Construction of the Supplemental Well No. 3 Improvements Project, No. 30-62; Approve Finding Project Qualifies for Class 1 and 2 Categorical Exemption
 - The engineer's estimate was \$2,082,954; project bid summary is provided below

- Staff issued the Notice to Proceed, effective January 20, 2026; the substantial completion date is May 20, 2027
- Recycled Water Facility Electrical Upgrades Project
 - The General Contractor will be mobilizing on Wednesday January 26, 2026. The Process MCC (Motor Control Center) VFDs (Variable Frequency Drives) have been procured and are on hand, in preparation to for the planned recycled water facility outage during the first two weeks of February.
 - The distribution pump VFDs have been procured and will be installed upon receipt of backordered parts.
- Sustainable Groundwater Management Act Well Monitoring Network Expansion
 - Permitting: Work is ongoing.
 - Property Rights: Staff is engaged in discussions with property owners about proposed wells that would be located on privately owned land.
- Environmental: Staff is engaged with consultants to prepare categorical exemptions in compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act.

Santa Cruz Mid-County Groundwater Agency

- The Agency Board met on December 11, 2025. At the meeting, the Board:
 - Received an update on the evaluation of funding options for expenses associated with Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) compliance. A memorandum on the funding options evaluation is expected in March 2026.
 - Approved the appointment of two private well owner (PWO) representatives to fill positions that expired at the end of 2025. There was the reappointment of an incumbent, and the appointment of a new member. These are 4-year appointments.
 - Received an overview of how airborne electromagnetic surveys have been used in groundwater sustainability planning in the Mid-County Basin.
- The next regular meeting of the Agency is on March 19, 2026, at 6:00 pm.

Santa Margarita Groundwater Agency

- The next regular meeting of the Agency is on February 26, 2026, at 6:00 pm. At the meeting, the Board will:
 - Receive an update and authorize submittal of the Basin Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) Annual Report for Water Year 2025.

- Receive an update on the Basin GSP Periodic Evaluation and provide direction on preparing an amendment to the Basin GSP.
- Approve filling a vacancy for an alternate private well owner position on the Board.

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



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Subject: February 4, 2026, Water Advisory Commission

Title: Drought Response & Outreach Plan (DROP) Update

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:

- Currently, roughly 210 applicants have enrolled in the Regional Waterboards free well testing program. 196 wells have been tested and 24 are on the waiting list, down from 82 in October.
- Since the December 3rd meeting, no new results have been received.
- Staff provided guidance to several well-owners with E. coli exceedances and detections of Total Coliforms.
- County staff continues to work towards installing POU treatment systems at the Rountree Facility in South County, which is above the limit for PFOA. Staff hope to have the units installed in February of 2026.
- 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



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Subject: Water Advisory Commission Schedule for 2026

The Santa Cruz County Water Advisory Commission Meetings for 2026 are as follows:

February 4, 2026
April 1, 2026
June 3, 2026
August 5, 2026
October 7, 2026
December 2, 2026

By: Sierra Ryan

Water Resources Program Manager



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Subject: February 4, 2026 Water Advisory Commission Consent Agenda

Title: County Water Resource Program Introductions and Updates

Background

Fisheries/Watershed Health Programs

The Streamwood Program, initiated in 2009, evaluates and modifies stream wood with the goal of leaving wood in the creeks to provide habitat. The staff manages a multi-agency oversight team, permit reporting, and provides outreach and education about the importance of streamwood. Program elements include intake and responding to requests, initial field visits, site review with hydrogeologists, and coordinating with tree crews for wood modification when required. Funding for this program is provided through a Wildlife Conservation Board Grant and Zone 4. The grant is funding some exciting work that will be discussed further at a later meeting.

The Juvenile Steelhead and Stream Habitat Monitoring Program is a partnership program with 6 public agencies to fund sampling of juvenile salmonids and stream habitat at 41 sites in 4 watersheds: San Lorenzo, Soquel, Aptos and Corralitos. The County is the lead for the Section 10 permit to allow disturbing and possibly killing of steelhead and coho salmon (take) and the data analysis.

Local Primacy Agency

Water systems serving 15-199 connections and those that serve non-community and/or transient uses (businesses, schools, restaurants, camps, etc.) are regulated by the EHS Drinking Water Program acting for the State Water Resources Control Board – Division of Drinking Water (DDW) through the Local Primacy Agency agreement. The Board adopted the role as an LPA in 1993. As the Local Primacy Agency, the County is responsible for implementing and enforcing the Federal and State Safe Drinking Water Act requirements to ensure small public water systems deliver a reliable and adequate supply of water that is pure, wholesome, and potable to the users at all times.

The program has always required some Environmental Health funding. The permit fees applied to the regulated water systems are already significantly higher than the

State DDW charges, yet they do not cover the full cost of the program. The difference between the permit fees and the overall program costs has grown to potentially outweigh the benefits of local control. County staff are considering the possibility of returning the Local Primacy Agency to the State, something Monterey County did last year.

State Small Water Systems – Those systems with 5-14 connections are regulated under both State and [County](#) regulations through the EH Drinking Water Program.

By: Sierra Ryan, Water Resources Program Manager



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Subject: February 4, 2026 Water Advisory Commission Regular Agenda

Title: Water Advisory Commission Work Plan Update

Recommended Action: Discuss priorities for 2026–2027 and create a subcommittee of no more than three Commissioners to develop the update to the Work Plan.

Background:

In April 2022, the Commission adopted a process for updating the Work Plan, which requires biennial updates and outlines a series of questions for commissioners to consider before adding new topics. At the August 2024 Water Advisory Commission meeting, the Commission adopted the 2024–2025 Work Plan. Since then, there has been turnover among commissioners and significant progress on issues included in the previous plan.

Updates:

The Commission is now operating beyond the end date of the previous Work Plan. The 2024–2025 update introduced substantial changes to reflect the revised Powers and Duties finalized during the Commission Restructuring Process. Given the Water Advisory Commission's limited capacity, the Commission should identify a scope of topics that can be reasonably addressed during the 2026–2027 timeframe. A subcommittee of no more than three commissioners will be tasked with incorporating the Commission's direction into the written Work Plan.

By: Sierra Ryan



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2024 – 2025 Work Plan

August 2024

OVERVIEW

Consistent with its bylaws, the Water Advisory Commission (WAC) will focus on priority water resource related issues, policies and projects, with the intent of taking one or more of the following actions:

- Advise the Board of Supervisors (BOS) on issues related to water resources.
- Work cooperatively with county departments, other county commissions, public and private agencies, and concerned members of the public, to formulate advice to the BOS.
- Serve as an information clearinghouse for the BOS and other County commissions.
- Advise the BOS on potential areas of cooperation with other public and private agencies and organizations.
- Provide a public forum to educate the WAC and the community on water issues.
- Support the work of County staff in implementing water resource programs.
- Monitor and evaluate implementation of key policies and programs and advise the BOS as needed.
- Proactively identify water resource issues of concern that are not being addressed by other advisory bodies to the BOS.

BACKGROUND

The Water Advisory Commission (Commission) was established in 1975 to serve as a policy advisory body to the BOS on issues relating to the use and protection of the county's water resources. The Commission consists of seven members, five of whom are concerned citizens appointed by individual supervisors and two that are appointed at large. The two at large positions represent public water purveyors (200 or more connections) and private or mutual water companies (five to 199 connections) in the County. The Environmental Health Services (EHS) Division of the Health Services Agency provides staff support for the Commission. In July 2024, Sierra Ryan, Water Resources Manager, is serving as lead staff.

Staffing, funding, and other resources available to the Commission necessarily limit the duties and responsibilities of the Commission. Therefore, the Commission utilizes discretion in devoting time to those activities that are most important to achieving its overall goal of enhancing and preserving Santa Cruz County water resources. County departments including Environmental Health and Community Development and Infrastructure will assist the Commission in its work, by including the Commission in water related correspondence with the BOS, and by having staff provide timely oral reports on pending issues. For more information about the Commission visit its webpage:

<https://scceh.com/Home/Programs/WaterResources/WaterAdvisoryCommission.aspx>

PRIORITY ISSUES

1. WATER QUALITY

Background

The creation and maintenance of a sustainable water supply is not solely about the availability of water. In some cases, consumers have access to water, but that water is not safe to drink due to various water quality issues. Also, Federal and state water regulatory agencies have, over time, added to and tightened regulations for water quality such that water sources that were once considered potable no longer meet water quality standards. While larger water providers generally have the required resources and infrastructure to measure water quality and comply with changing standards, compliance with current water quality standards can create a significant operational and financial burden for small water companies and individual well owners. In many cases, the cost of compliance with new Maximum Contaminant Levels (MCLs) is onerous enough to put a small water company at risk of bankruptcy or make potable water unaffordable for an individual well owner. The California Department of Water Resources has taken the position that the primary solution to these problems should be consolidation of small water companies and individual well owners into larger water providers. Water systems considering consolidation, however, often face many operational, financial and political hurdles which prevent consideration of consolidation until the situation becomes an "emergency". Current water quality issues in Santa Cruz County include, but not limited to:

1. High Nitrate levels – Many well owners and small water companies have Nitrate levels near or above the 10Mg/L (Nitrate as N) MCL due to agricultural or septic system effluents near their water source.
2. Chromium 6 – Chromium 6 occurs naturally at 15–30 ppb in several Santa Cruz County aquifers. Historical MCL's of 50 or 100 ppb did not require mitigation of Chrome 6. Recent proposed changes of the MCL from 50 to 10 ppb will require expensive treatment to meet.
3. PFAS Compounds – PFAS "forever" compounds are just gaining

recognition as water contaminants and have resulted in multi-billion dollar lawsuits with companies like 3M. Testing and quality standards are fairly new and many water companies are just discovering that they may have PFAS contamination.

4. Salt Water Intrusion – Salt water intrusion is a well-known issue within Santa Cruz County. While largely managed by the Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSA's), salt water intrusion can be a major issue for coastal private well owners, small water companies, and large water districts.
5. Biological Contaminants – Biological contaminants including E coli and Enterococcus, affect both drinking water and health hazards for recreational waters.
6. Harmful Algal Blooms – These naturally occurring processes can create toxins resulting in health hazards for recreational waters.
7. Other emerging contaminants – Federal and state water agencies may add to the list of potential new water contaminants and/or update the MCL's for existing contaminants resulting in new regulations and compliance issues.

WAC Role

The WAC should gain first-hand knowledge of the details of water quality issues in the County, including the current MCL's/standards, the effects of contaminants in excess of the standards, and the procedures, equipment and costs required to test and treat water to within those standards. The WAC should identify and understand who, within Santa Cruz County, is affected by these water quality issues including, in particular, small water providers and well-owners. The WAC should receive reports on research, and advocate for policies and grant funding to help county water users, particularly small and disadvantaged water systems and well owners, comply with water quality standards. The WAC should educate the BOS about water quality issues and resources for compliance, and help the BOS understand the hurdles of well owners and small water companies related to both water treatment and consolidation to help prevent "emergency" situations like Big Basin Water Company.

2. SUSTAINABLE GROUNDWATER MANAGEMENT

Background

The Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA), codified at Water Code §§10720 et seq., required that groundwater basins form Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSAs) by 2015 and develop and implement plans to achieve sustainability. Santa Cruz County includes several groundwater basins as identified by the California Department of Water Resources, some of which are high priority and managed; others are low priority and not managed, [click here for a map viewer](#). Groundwater basins in the county managed by a GSA include the Santa Margarita Basin, the Santa Cruz Mid-County Basin, and the Corralitos Basin.

From north to south, the three GSAs that exist within the County are: the [Santa Margarita Groundwater Agency](#) (est. 2015), the [Santa Cruz Mid-County Groundwater Agency](#) (est. 2015), and the [Pajaro Valley Water Management Agency](#) (est. 1984). The County, while not a water purveyor, is involved in each of the three GSAs, either directly via a joint powers authority, or indirectly by means of committee-level participation. The County has the responsibility of reviewing and approving well permit applications, and many domestic wells as well as small state systems are located in unincorporated Santa Cruz County.

SGMA defines a sustainable groundwater basin as one that is not experiencing:

- Significant and unreasonable chronic lowering of groundwater levels indicating a depletion of supply
- Significant and unreasonable reduction of groundwater storage
- Significant and unreasonable seawater intrusion
- Significant and unreasonable degradation of groundwater quality
- Significant and unreasonable land subsidence
- Depletions of interconnected surface water that have significant and unreasonable adverse impacts on beneficial uses of the surface water

WAC Role

The WAC should maintain a focus on the issues of sustainable groundwater management, support regional supply planning efforts (especially in regard to developing conjunctive use and groundwater recharge opportunities), proactively engage the BOS in advancing support for sustainable regional water supply alternatives as they emerge, and advise the BOS as appropriate. The WAC should receive, review, and potentially accept regular reports from County staff and/or representatives from GSAs and the water purveyors within the County.

3. DROUGHT AND CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACTS ON WATER RESOURCES

Background

[California's Fourth Climate Change Assessment, Central Coast Region Report](#) (Langridge, 2018) states, "*The Central Coast Region is notable for its extensive natural ecosystems, many of which will be impacted by climate change. Hardwood forests, scrublands, and herbaceous grasslands comprise most of its land cover, with significantly less intensive agriculture and small-to medium-sized cities in the region. There is a strong demand for development in rural areas and agriculture is being developed on lands formerly supporting grazing or natural vegetation. The region continues to reflect an economic and social disconnect between prosperous coastal communities and agricultural areas with many low-income farm workers, inequalities that may result in disadvantaged groups suffering disproportionately from the impacts of climate change.*"

With respect to water resources, the report states that climate changes that will affect the Central Coast include:

- Temperatures, both maximums and minimums, are anticipated to increase through the next century, with greater increases in the inland region.
- Precipitation is expected to increase slightly, but precipitation variability will increase substantially.
- Atmospheric river events are expected to increase.
- Sea level is expected to continue rising.
- Fog impacts are uncertain.
- Droughts are predicted to remain a serious challenge to already stressed water supplies.
- Water supply shortages, already common during drought, will be exacerbated.

In 2023, approximately 273,132 people used 44,845 acre-feet of water (including agricultural uses) within the County. Groundwater accounted for 76% of the total supply, surface water accounted for 20%, and recycled water accounted for 3.6% ([Santa Cruz County Water Resources Report for 2023](#)). Drought conditions lead to less rainfall, and less groundwater recharge, and resulting increased water use. Increased groundwater production may lead to lowering of groundwater levels, increased seawater intrusion, groundwater quality degradation, subsidence, and loss of interconnectivity between surface streams and groundwater dependent ecosystems.

WAC Role

The WAC should maintain a focus on drought and climate change impacts on water resources and receive, review, and potentially accept reports from County staff and/or experts in the field. The WAC should proactively engage with the BOS on issues related to climate change impacts on water resources and advise the BOS.

On December 13, 2022, the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors adopted the Drought Response and Outreach Plan (DROP) as part of the Climate Action and Adaptation Plan. The DROP was created in response to SB 552, which requires Counties to develop plans to assess potential drought and water shortage risk and propose interim and long-term solutions for state small water systems and domestic wells within the county, including the following 5 elements:

- (1) Consolidations for existing water systems and domestic wells.
- (2) Domestic well drinking water mitigation programs.
- (3) Provision of emergency and interim drinking water solutions.
- (4) An analysis of the steps necessary to implement the plan.
- (5) An analysis of local, state, and federal funding sources available to implement the plan

The role of the WAC is now to act as the standing task force, as required by SB552, which is confirming that the elements proposed in the DROP are implemented.

4. CONSOLIDATION

Background

Consolidation is the combining of two or more water systems. In general, consolidations involve a smaller water system being absorbed into a larger water system. As water infrastructure is aging, regulations and water quality monitoring

requirements are increasing, and finding qualified staff to operate water systems is becoming increasingly difficult, smaller water agencies may consider consolidation with a larger water agency to provide stable water service to its customers. Other reasons for consolidation can be a mandatory consolidation in the event of a water system failing to meet water quality standards, or failing to meet water supply requirements. The California State Water Resources Control Board may order mandatory consolidations for systems that are classified as a Public Water System or State Small Water System, the system serves a disadvantaged community, and the system consistently fails to provide an adequate supply of safe drinking water.

As there are a large number of small water systems in Santa Cruz County that may not have resources (technical, managerial, or financial, or any combination thereof) to provide consistent water supply, consolidation will likely become more widespread in the future.

WAC Role

The Water Advisory Commission should focus on the following activities related to water system consolidation:

- a. Gain first hand knowledge of the details of a system that is looking to consolidate with a larger water system. Including what happens to the water system if the consolidation effort fails.
- b. Gain first hand knowledge of the details of the larger water system that a smaller agency could potentially consolidate into. Including:
 - i. The feasibility of connecting a larger system to a smaller system.
 - ii. The challenges of expanding the system and taking on extra monitoring and maintenance of the smaller system.
- c. Educate the County Supervisors, affected water users and other stakeholders regarding the processes for consolidation.
- d. Advocate for policies and grant funding to assist small and large water systems with consolidation efforts.

5. COORDINATION WITH OTHER COUNTY COMMISSIONS

Background

In 2014, discussion was initiated between three County commissions (Commission on the Environment (COE), Fish and Wildlife Advisory Commission (FWAC) and Water Advisory Commission (WAC)) that have significant overlap in

their scopes regarding protection of water resources and related environmental issues. The Inter-Commission Coordination Working Group (ICCWG) was formed in an attempt to clarify the distinct and shared areas of focus of each commission.

In 2024, the BOS instituted a Commission Restructuring Process to try to improve the efficiency of the County's Commissions. As part of that process, the scope of the WAC and COE were modified and the overlaps between the three commissions reduced. This should keep the scope of the ICCWG to issues that are large and multi-faceted, making more efficient use of Commissioners time.

WAC Role

Developing the three commissions' alignment around positions on water resource management issues and identifying and maintaining discrete roles of the commissions respective to their particular subject matter expertise and bylaws should continue to be the focus of this work. The WAC should continue to participate in the ICCWG and joint commission meetings, focus on resolving joint strategies on issues that require coordination with other commissions, reduce redundancy in effort and find synergies with these other commissions' work where possible. This will ensure that the BOS is kept apprised of significant water resource management issues in a meaningful manner that is inclusive of other related significant issues the County currently faces (fisheries conservation and recovery, climate change adaptation, etc.)

6. OTHER ISSUES AS NEEDED (TBD)

Background

The WAC occasionally becomes aware of issues that warrant investigation and interaction with the BOS regarding County policy. While many of these issues fall within broader subject areas already on the WAC agenda, other issues may arise that are outside of the WAC's current scope. Two examples may include Karst Protection Zones and the Pajaro River Flood Protection Project.

WAC Role

While the County is well supported by knowledgeable policy-makers and other water stakeholder groups that can inform the BOS, the WAC is the only advisory body specifically focused on water resource management, as enabled by County code, and should maintain and strengthen that role with the BOS as much as possible. These somewhat urgent, new issues are not unusual, and maintaining the ability to respond to them in a timely manner is of great

importance to the WAC. The meeting frequency of the BOS and WAC often limits the opportunity for timely engagement on new issues, but the WAC should endeavor to maintain involvement in them, nonetheless. Specifically, the WAC should exercise the option to hold emergency meetings to address issues like this as they arise.



County of Santa Cruz

Water Advisory Commission

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<https://scceh.com/Home/Programs/WaterResources/WaterAdvisoryCommission.aspx>

Process for Revising WAC Work Plan

Purpose and Process:

The Santa Cruz County Water Advisory Commission (WAC) Work Plan should be reviewed annually, and revised biannually to incorporate relevant and emerging issues in order to maintain the Commission's effectiveness as a public forum, as an advisory body to the Board, and as a supporter of County staff efforts.

Given resource constraints of County staff, an individual or party proposing revisions to the Work Plan will be responsible for developing a brief summary on the topic of interest by answering the questions below. This process also applies to the WAC advising the BOS on pending state and federal legislation.

Questions for New Issues/Topics/Pending Legislation:

(1-2 sentence answers are sufficient.)

- (1) Who are the proposing parties? (Example: County Supervisor, WAC Commissioner, County staff or at the request of another advisory body.)
- (2) Provide a brief description of the issue/topic/pending legislation. (Optional - Provide the executive summary and analysis written by the independent state or federal legislative analyst.)
- (3) What is the envisioned action that the proposing party requests from the WAC? (See page two for guidance.)
- (4) Is there another BOS advisory body taking the topic under consideration? If so, how do you envision coordination between the WAC and that advisory body?
- (5) Who will be the primary party handling the detailed research and analysis (if needed) in order for the WAC to discuss and take action?
- (6) How do you propose the WAC fit the topic into the time constraints of six annual WAC meetings given the existing workload?
- (7) Do you have other specific recommendations to make to the WAC?

Possible WAC Actions/Roles/Points of Influence: (From the draft Work Plan)

Consistent with its by-laws, the WAC will focus on priority environmental issues, policies and projects, with the intent of taking one or more of the following actions:

- Advise the Board of Supervisors (BOS) on issues related to water resources.
- Work cooperatively with county departments, other county commissions, public and private agencies, and concerned members of the public, to formulate advice to the BOS.
- Serve as an information clearinghouse to the BOS and other County commissions.
- Advise the BOS on potential areas of cooperation with other public and private agencies and organizations.
- Provide a public forum to educate the WAC and the community.
- Support the work of County staff in implementing water resource programs.
- Monitor and evaluate implementation of key policies and programs and advise the BOS as needed.
- Proactively identify water resource issues of concern that are not being addressed by other advisory bodies to the BOS.

Adopted April 2022

From: [Becky Steinbruner](#)
To: [Sierra Ryan](#); [Paul Lego](#)
Cc: [Second District](#); [Becky Steinbruner](#)
Subject: Interesting New Technology for Desalination Units Located Deep in the Sea
Date: Monday, January 19, 2026 10:31:29 AM

******CAUTION:** This is an EXTERNAL email. Exercise caution. DO NOT open attachments or click links from unknown senders or unexpected email.****

Dear Santa Cruz County Water Advisory Commission,
The January 17, 2026 Santa Cruz Sentinel featured an interesting article on page A3 about emerging technology for deep-sea desalination units.

I found the same article in other news sources, and felt the one below is of greatest interest because of the video interview attached.

https://tucson.com/news/nation-world/science/article_3a727bfa-2abe-51e4-88bd-bb4e4a81ea9f.html

Please share this at the next Commission meeting for public discussion.

Thank you.
Sincerely,
Becky Steinbruner



County of Santa Cruz

Water Advisory Commission

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Water Advisory Commission 2024-2025

Biennial Report

This report summarizes the activities and accomplishments of the Santa Cruz County Water Advisory Commission (WAC) during 2024 and 2025.

ROLES OF THE WATER ADVISORY COMMISSION

The WAC was established in 1975 to serve as a policy advisory body to the Board of Supervisors (Board) on issues relating to the use and protection of the county's water resources.

In 2024, the County completed a commission restructuring process, which included changes to SCCC 2.38 overseeing the role of the County's commissions. In response, the section of the SCCC overseeing the Water Advisory Commission, SCCC 2.69, as well as the bylaws overseeing the work of the WAC were changed. The changes removed some duties that were duplicative of the Fish and Wildlife Advisory Commission, and added duties that reflect the WAC's responsibilities under Senate Bill 552.

The roles of the Commission, as outlined in the updated SCCC 2.69 are as follows:

- (A) Advise the Board of Supervisors on all matters relating to water policy.
- (B) Recommend policies to the Board of Supervisors to ensure that the production of water and the development of additional water supplies are consistent with the growth management program and the General Plan of Santa Cruz County.
- (C) Recommend to the Board of Supervisors any policies necessary to protect surface water, groundwater, and recreational resources of Santa Cruz County.



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- (D) Facilitate drought and water shortage preparedness for State small water systems and domestic wells within Santa Cruz County.
- (E) Provide opportunities for coordinating and communicating with the State and other local governments, community-based organizations, local water suppliers, and local residents on a regular basis and during drought or water shortage emergencies.
- (F) Undertake other duties relating to water resources, as requested by the Board of Supervisors.

Staffing, funding, and other resources available to the WAC necessarily limit the duties and responsibilities outlined above. Therefore, the WAC utilizes discretion in devoting time to those activities that are most important to achieving its overall goal of enhancing and preserving Santa Cruz County water resources through its 2-year workplan. County departments (Environmental Health, General Services, Community Development and Infrastructure, and the Office of Response, Recovery, and Resiliency) assist the WAC in its work as appropriate.

COMMISSION STRUCTURE

The Commission consists of seven members, five of whom are concerned citizens nominated by individual supervisors and two that are appointed at-large. The two at-large positions represent public water purveyors and small private or mutual water companies in the county. In April 2024, Paul Lego was elected to serve as Chair and Frank Cheap was elected to serve as Vice-Chair. In April 2025, Nate Gillespie was elected to serve as Chair and Brian Lockwood as Vice-Chair.

Membership during 2024-2025 was as follows:

1st District: Frank Cheap
2nd District: Ray Pereyra, vacant



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3rd District: Linda Wilson

4th District: Brian Lockwood

5th District: Bryan Largay, vacant, Sarah Easley-Perez

Public Water: Nate Gillespie from Scotts Valley Water District

Small Water System: Paul Lego from San Andreas Mutual Water Company

COMMISSION STAFF

Sierra Ryan, the Water Resources Program Manager in the EH division of the Santa Cruz County Health Services Agency, served as administrative secretary to the WAC throughout the reporting period.

MEETING DATES, TIME AND LOCATION

In 2024-25, meetings were held from 4-6 pm on the first Wednesday of even numbered months. Agendas are posted at least five days in advance of meetings, and are distributed electronically to local water districts and interested persons. Agendas and attachments are posted on the County website: <http://scceh.com/Home/Programs/WaterResources/WaterAdvisoryCommission.aspx>. Meetings are held at 701 Ocean Street, in the 5th Floor Redwood Room unless otherwise posted on the agenda.

See Table 1 for specific dates, locations, and attendance of each meeting.

Table 1: Specific Meeting Dates, Attendance, and Locations

GOALS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

All information regarding the Commission activities is available on the internet. The website facilitates data access and makes the Commission's work more available to the public. The Commission website address is:

<http://scceh.com/Home/Programs/WaterResources/WaterAdvisoryCommission.aspx>

In addition to preparing an agenda and minutes from the previous meeting, staff regularly includes pertinent water related articles in the Commission agenda packets to stimulate discussion on related topics.

Listed below are the principal issues and events that were discussed by the Commission during the past two years, as prioritized in the 2024-2025 Work Plan:

- 1) Current water quality issues in Santa Cruz County: Presentations and discussions included PFAS treatments, hexavalent chromium rules, and implementation of the Local Agency Management Program (LAMP) including water quality monitoring.
- 2) Sustainable Groundwater Management: The Commission received written updates from the three GSAs in the county at every meeting. The Commission led the process to update the well ordinance, which had groundwater management implications. Those changes went into effect in August 2025.
- 3) Drought and climate change impacts on water resources: The Commission recommended changes SCCC chapter 2.96 to reflect the responsibility of the WAC to address drought and climate change, which were adopted by the Board of Supervisors in 2024. The WAC received written updates on the well testing and bottled water delivery program operated through the County at every meeting. The WAC had recommended that the County update the well GIS layer to better capture the location and depth of domestic wells. Staff completed the work and presented the updated database to the WAC in 2025.
- 4) Water System Consolidation: The WAC held a joint meeting with the Small Water Systems Forum in 2025 to discuss a staff-led project to study the feasibility for consolidation of all the small systems with their nearest large neighboring system. They also provided feedback on a guidebook that staff is developing to instruct water systems on their options when they are faced with long-term challenges.



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5) Coordination with other commissions: The WAC communicated with the Fish and Wildlife Advisory Commission during the commission restructuring process. With that process, fewer areas of overlap between the two commissions exist, so the WAC determined that it did not need to pursue the Intercommission Working Group at this time.

FUTURE GOALS

In the coming years the Commission will be following-up on current endeavors. These endeavors include oversite of SB 552 implementation, commenting on and providing recommendations to the Board on County Water Resource efforts, and staying abreast of Sustainable Groundwater Management Act implementation and water supply projects. The WAC intends to continue its trend of soliciting information from various individuals and agencies as this information relates to water resources in the county. As always, the WAC will continue to evaluate important issues affecting the County's water resources, respond to requests by the Board and the public, and make timely recommendations on both policy and other appropriate matters.

Prepared by:

Sierra Ryan

Administrative Secretary, Water Advisory Commission