



## Legislation Text

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**File #:** 2021-0634, **Version:** 1

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**To:** Board of Supervisors, Sonoma County Water Agency Board of Directors

**Department or Agency Name(s):** Department of Emergency Management, Sonoma County Water Agency

**Staff Name and Phone Number:** Christopher Godley, 565-2052, Grant Davis, 547-1911, Steven Hancock, 547-1998

**Vote Requirement:** Majority

**Supervisorial District(s):** Countywide

**Title:**

Drought Conditions Update and Local Emergency Proclamation Continuation

**Recommended Action:**

- A) Receive Update on Drought Conditions
- B) Continue Local Emergency Proclamation Due to Drought Conditions

**Executive Summary:**

On April 27, 2021, the Board of Supervisors proclaimed a local emergency due to drought conditions in the Sonoma County Operational Area. Critically low rainfall over the last two years has resulted in historically low water storage levels in the region's two water supply reservoirs and storage levels continue to decline.

The adverse environmental, economic, health, welfare and social impacts of the drought continue to pose an imminent threat of disaster, and threaten to cause widespread potential harm to people, businesses, agriculture, property, communities, the environment, wildlife and recreation in Sonoma County. Therefore, this item requests the Board of Supervisors approve a 60-day continuation of the April 27, 2021 proclamation of local emergency.

This item also provides an update on drought conditions and actions taken to date.

**Discussion:**

Due to the continued dry conditions in the Russian River Watershed, Lake Mendocino and Lake Sonoma are at their lowest levels for this time of year since filling in 1959 and 1984, respectively. As of July 6, 2021:

- The water supply storage level at Lake Mendocino was 29,867 acre-feet, approximately 27 percent of the available water supply pool. This is a decline in storage of 6,249 acre-feet since the last Board update on drought conditions.
- The water supply storage level at Lake Sonoma was 126,765 acre-feet, approximately 52.6 percent of the available water supply pool. This is a decline in storage of 16,946 acre-feet since the last Board update on drought conditions.

The U.S. Drought Monitor provides the location and intensity of drought conditions across the country. As of July 6, 2021, all of Sonoma County is classified into the D4 category (Exceptional Drought).

### Temporary Urgency Change Petition (TUCP)

To address the extremely dry watershed conditions and low water supply storage at both Lake Mendocino and Lake Sonoma, Sonoma County Water Agency (Sonoma Water) filed its third Temporary Urgency Change Petition (TUCP) since June 2020 with the State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board) on May 11, 2021. The Petition requested that the water year-type for both the Upper and Lower Russian River be classified as *Critical*. On June 14, 2021, the State Water Board issued an order approving Sonoma Water's requested changes. Based on a *Critical* water year type, the minimum instream flow requirement for the Lower Russian River will be reduced from 85 cubic feet per second (cfs) to 35 cfs and the minimum instream flow requirement for the Upper Russian River will remain at 25 cfs until December 10, 2021 when the order expires. As an additional action to preserve storage in Lake Sonoma, the order requires Sonoma Water to reduce its Russian River diversions by 20 percent from July 1 through December 10 compared to the same time last year at all points of diversion under Sonoma Water's water rights.

Sonoma Water staff continue to work closely with State Water Board staff, the Mendocino County Russian River Flood Control and Water Conservation Improvement District, and other municipal and agricultural stakeholders on the Upper Russian River for demand reduction with a goal of preserving 20,000 acre-feet of water supply in Lake Mendocino on October 1, 2021. Sonoma Water staff believe this is the minimum storage level needed to ensure there is adequate water supply for human health and safety needs for communities on the Upper Russian River, and to make reservoir releases to meet minimum instream flow requirements should dry conditions continue through the end of the year.

### Santa Rosa Plain Drought Resiliency Project

On May 11, 2021, Sonoma Water and County staff presented an overview of the status of the drought in Sonoma County, and specific actions currently underway or planned by Sonoma Water and other County departments/agencies in response to the drought emergency. The Board directed Sonoma Water and County staff to return to the Board to seek authorization and funding to expedite design and environmental review for activating one of Sonoma Water's Santa Rosa Plain wells to assist in addressing drought impacts. On May 18, 2021, the Board approved a concurrent budget resolution providing \$400,000 of County contingency funds to support this effort.

The proposed project would bolster water supply reliability for Sonoma Water's water contractors, and address water shortages impacting the agriculture sector. In general, the Proposed Santa Rosa Plain Drought Resiliency Project (Project) consists of two phases:

- Phase 1 will utilize the county contingency funds and entails completing the necessary engineering, environmental review, and other activities needed to activate one of Sonoma Water's Santa Rosa Plain wells.
- Phase 2 involves developing the planning and pre-design activities necessary to seek anticipated state drought emergency funding to activate the remaining two Santa Rosa Plain wells, in addition to adding recharge capabilities via groundwater banking.

These collective activities are intended to result in increased drought resiliency by helping drought impacted communities and assist in longer-term groundwater management activities under the Sustainable

Groundwater Management Act. Sonoma Water staff have formed an internal team to coordinate its activities and facilitate collaboration with partners in implementing the proposed Project. A Project timeline is being established and will be provided in subsequent Board updates.

#### Environmental Resources Drought Activities

Sonoma Water staff continue to meet weekly with staff from the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), and the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board (Regional Board) to discuss Russian River fishery and water quality conditions.

Sonoma Water staff collects data annually about the abundance of salmon and steelhead in the Russian River watershed. Since fall 2020, counts of returning adult salmon and steelhead have been low, but mild winter conditions have supported survival of fry. Traps operated in both Dry Creek, and in the mainstem Russian River below the inflatable dam at Mirabel, captured good numbers of fish migrating to the ocean. Salmon and steelhead smolts and juveniles have been observed in the estuary during seining efforts in May and June. Unfortunately, very low flow in smaller tributaries has precluded fish from leaving smaller streams, and fish survival rates over the summer is expected to be poor. Sonoma Water staff worked with CDFW to rescue fish from these streams.

Sonoma Water and Regional Board staff met in April and July to consult on plans for water quality monitoring during the 2021 dry season. Sonoma Water staff are continuing water quality monitoring, which is being conducted through the use of continuously recording datasondes (e.g. temperature, dissolved oxygen, turbidity, pH) and water grab sampling (e.g. nutrients, turbidity, bacteria) at multiple locations, including in the East Fork Russian River upstream and downstream of Lake Mendocino, Lake Mendocino, the mainstem Russian River, and the Russian River estuary. Water quality data is included in the weekly hydrologic status updates to the State Water Resources Control Board, NMFS, CDFW, and the Regional Board as it becomes available.

Sonoma Water staff are also monitoring mainstem Russian River algae to gather ecological data for algal populations that are representative of habitats available in the Russian River. This effort is intended to identify the composition, abundance, cover, and change over time of algae species in the Russian River. It is also conducted to gain a better understanding of how and what ecological conditions influence algae populations in the Russian River. Algae monitoring is conducted biweekly at four locations on the Russian River (Hopland, Jimtown, near Syar Vineyards in Healdsburg, and at Patterson Point). Sonoma Water staff share observations of status of algae and cyanobacteria with the Regional Board to help inform further sampling for public health.

Sonoma Water staff shared a drought fisheries habitat sampling plan with NMFS, CDFW, and the Regional Board. Activities include upper and lower Russian River habitat and fisheries monitoring through the duration of the temporary urgency change order (TUC Order). Sonoma Water staff evaluated appropriate sampling locations in early June and biweekly monitoring has begun. Sampling results are discussed during the weekly meetings with NMFS, CDFW, and the Regional Board.

#### Government Affairs

Governor Newsom and legislative leaders have reached a tentative agreement to provide more than \$2 billion for drought infrastructure funding and \$1 billion for water arrearages that resulted from the COVID-19

pandemic.

The tentative agreement would allocate funding for drought relief, multi-benefit projects, Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) implementation, conveyance projects, septic to sewer conversions, recycled water projects, groundwater remediation, and other drinking water and wastewater projects. As of July 8, the agreement passed out of the Legislature and now awaits the Governor's signature.

Sonoma Water has been advocating extensively for investments in water infrastructure through state funds (such as the General Fund and/or general obligation bond funds) and federal funds. This advocacy has included strong support for conveyance, SGMA implementation, groundwater remediation, recycled water projects, and other funding categories. Sonoma Water has provided funding recommendations to Newsom Administration officials, Senate and Assembly leadership, testified during budget subcommittees, and advocated to dozens of legislators and their staff.

Some of the funding will go through existing funding programs. The details for some categories may be established through subsequent budget trailer bills.

The budget bill "junior," AB 129 (Ting D-San Francisco), proposes the following categories and amounts:

- \$663 million to the Department of Water Resources for the following projects and programs
  - \$200 million for small community drought relief
  - \$100 million for urban community drought relief
  - \$200 million for multi-benefit projects
  - \$60 million for SGMA implementation
  - \$100 million for conveyance projects
  - \$3 million for immediate drought support
- \$1.385 billion to the State Water Resources Control Board for the following projects and programs.
  - \$650 million for drinking water projects with priority given to disadvantaged communities
  - \$650 million for wastewater projects with priority given to septic-to-sewer conversions with local investment for wastewater projects
  - \$85 million for groundwater cleanup and recycled water projects
- \$985 million to the State Water Board for water arrearages due to COVID-19

This funding will help to address some immediate drought-related issues. Additional funding is still needed to increase water resilience. Sonoma Water will continue to advocate for further investments, particularly in the areas of dam safety, conveyance, climate resilience, recycled water, flood protection and other categories.

AB 129 also includes a section that proposes additional funding that is contingent upon the enactment of future legislation. This contingent proposal would appropriate \$2.5 billion from the General Fund for the following purposes:

- \$730.7 million for a water and drought resilience package
- \$440 million for a climate resilience package

- \$200 million for an agricultural package
- \$65 million for a circular economy package
- \$200 million for local parks grants
- \$258 million for a wildfire prevention and forest resilience package
- \$500 million for supporting affordable student housing projects for the University of California, the California State University, and the California Community Colleges, as well as for support of campus expansions for the University of California and the California State University
- \$4.68 million for a climate-related service program
- \$67.5 million for the California Access to Justice program

Sonoma Water staff will continue to actively advocate for funding and for reasonable implementation details.

### Community Affairs

Sonoma Water and the other Sonoma-Marin Saving Water Partnership (Partnership) member agencies held a successful Drought Drop By event on June 12, 2021 at sixteen locations in Marin, Sonoma, and Mendocino counties, giving out roughly 10,000 drought kits containing water saving devices for customers to install. The June 12 Drought Drop By event received positive media coverage in both television and print that helped bring greater awareness of the seriousness of the drought and the need for customers to take action to reduce water use. Two additional Drought Drop By events are in the planning stages, with tentative dates for Saturday, August 21 and Saturday, October 9. Materials procurement is underway, with the dates to be finalized as soon as staff is assured that supply chain issues due to COVID-19 have been resolved and the timely delivery of the goods to be distributed is assured.

Another regional drought outreach initiative launched July 1, 2021 in the form of a regional challenge event and will continue for the duration of July. Called the *Saving Water Challenge* (<https://www.savingwaterpartnership.org/challenge/>), customers are encouraged to participate and challenge themselves to save water through a series of 31 water saving tips, with customer entries from the Partnership's utilities eligible to win water saving prizes at the conclusion of the event. A press release, along with a months-long series of social media posts and additional paid advertising by the Partnership has begun to help publicize the challenge.

The Partnership is also continuing to work on other drought related initiatives, including a trusted messenger video project for later summer deployment, a regional webinar series focused on the applicability of greywater as a drought-proof water source, a marketing presence at the Sonoma County Fair's Summer Fun Fest, and finalizing work to launch the Partnership's updated website. The website will now feature a low water use plant database and an irrigation-scheduling tool with a percent reduction feature to adjust watering times to meet locally mandated irrigation reductions easier.

Lastly, the Partnership's summer advertising campaign, called *Drought is Here. Save Water.*, is ongoing. Yard signs featuring the campaign tag line arrived July 6, with distribution to the contractors planned in the next several days, so some additional saturation of the message will occur in the region by the end of this month. In addition, Sonoma Water has expanded its outreach efforts to include partnering with Mendocino County stakeholders including the Russian River Watershed Association. New communication tools implemented include a XFINITY streaming video public service announcement and Lake Mendocino water storage advertisements that allow the public to follow how conservation efforts are impacting Lake Mendocino's water storage capacity. Staff continue to provide community drought presentations and encourages the community

to contact Sonoma Water’s Community and Government Affairs Division to schedule a presentation for their organization. To date, Sonoma Water staff have presented to over two dozen organizations throughout our region and have conducted over 150 media interviews in an effort to educate our community about the drought. The Press Democrat on June 27 published an extensive investigate piece on the drought. Staff continue to provide daily drought updates on Sonoma Water’s website (sonomwater.org).

Interagency Drought Task Force

Sonoma Water staff, in coordination with the Sonoma County Department of Emergency Management, have established an Interagency Drought Task Force to provide multi-agency, multi-discipline coordination and information sharing through the duration of the current drought. The task force meets monthly and has over thirty participating agencies representing local, state, regional, and tribal partners.

A working group within the task force is being established to conduct a water shortage risk assessment for the purpose of identifying current and future water hauling needs across the county. The working group will be identifying how much water hauling is or will be needed, the locations of water hauling needs, and the use or need for the water. This risk assessment will be used to support the development of drought related contingency or response plans or future drought resiliency projects.

Continuance of Local Emergency Proclamation

As required by Government Code section 8630, the Board must review the proclamation of local emergency every 60 days and determine if there is a need for continuing the local emergency. Due to the ongoing adverse impacts of the drought, staff recommend that the Board of Supervisors approve continuation of the April 27, 2021 Proclamation of a Local Emergency Due to Drought Conditions in the Sonoma County Operational Area for an additional 60 days.

**Prior Board Actions:**

June 18, 2021: Board of Directors approved emergency drought response actions including adopting a resolution making findings of a need to perform emergency work without bidding to protect health, property and essential public services; and delegating authority to the General Manager of Sonoma Water to take actions necessary pursuant to the restructured agreement for water supply.

June 8, 2021: Board received drought conditions update and continued the April 27, 2021 local emergency proclamation due to drought conditions.

May 18, 2021: Board adopted a concurrent budget resolution providing \$400,000 of contingency funding to support Santa Rosa Plain Drought Resiliency Project.

May 11, 2021: Board received an update on current status of drought conditions and adopted a concurrent resolution urging a 20% voluntary reduction in water use and other specific actions.

April 27, 2021: Board of Supervisors adopted Resolution Proclaiming a Local Emergency to Drought Conditions in the Sonoma County Operational Area and Requesting the Governor to Seek a Presidential Declaration.

**FISCAL SUMMARY**

<b>Expenditures</b>	<b>FY 21-22 Adopted</b>	<b>FY22-23 Projected</b>	<b>FY 23-24 Projected</b>
Budgeted Expenses			
Additional Appropriation Requested			

<b>Total Expenditures</b>			
<b>Funding Sources</b>			
General Fund/WA GF			
State/Federal			
Fees/Other			
Use of Fund Balance			
Contingencies			
<b>Total Sources</b>			

**Narrative Explanation of Fiscal Impacts:**

None.

<b>Staffing Impacts:</b>			
<b>Position Title (Payroll Classification)</b>	<b>Monthly Salary Range (A-I Step)</b>	<b>Additions (Number)</b>	<b>Deletions (Number)</b>

**Narrative Explanation of Staffing Impacts (If Required):**

N/A

**Attachments:**

None.

**Related Items "On File" with the Clerk of the Board:**

None