



Legislation Text

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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): All

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 May 21, 2021:

- The water supply storage level at Lake Mendocino was 36,116 acre-feet, approximately 32 percent of the available water supply pool.
- The water supply storage level at Lake Sonoma was 143,711 acre-feet, approximately 58 percent of the available water supply pool.

On May 18, 2021, the U.S. Drought Monitor was updated to show the location and intensity of drought across the country. This most recent updated map classified the eastern half of Sonoma County into the D4 category (Exceptional Drought) with the western portion of the county remaining in the D3 category (Extreme 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*. If approved, 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 for the term of the order. As an additional action to preserve storage in Lake Sonoma, Sonoma Water has committed to reducing its Russian River diversions by 20 percent between July 1 and October 31 compared to the same time last year.

On May 19, 2021, the State Water Board provided notice of Sonoma Water's Petition, providing the public with a 15-day comment period, which ends on June 3, 2021. Sonoma Water staff anticipate the State Water Board will issue an order approving the TUCP soon after closure of the public comment period and will address any comments received by the public in mid to late June.

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 until 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 collect 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, are catching good numbers of fish migrating to the ocean. 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 are working with CDFW to rescue fish from these streams.

Sonoma Water and Regional Board staff met in April to consult on plans for water quality monitoring during the 2021 dry season. Sonoma Water staff have begun 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, the mainstem Russian River, and the Russian River estuary.

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, Jintown, 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. Proposed activities would include upper and lower Russian River habitat and fisheries monitoring through the duration of the next temporary urgency change order (TUC Order). Sonoma Water staff plan to evaluate appropriate sampling locations in early June, with biweekly monitoring to begin soon after.

Sonoma-Marin Saving Water Partnership

Sonoma Water and the other Sonoma-Marin Saving Water Partnership (Partnership) member agencies are

continuing planning and preparations for the “Drought Drop By” event scheduled for Saturday, June 12, 2021 from 9:00 AM to 1:00 PM. The event will take place at fifteen locations throughout Marin, Sonoma, and Mendocino counties. At these locations members of the community may drop by and pick up a free drought bucket with water efficiency tools, such as a hose nozzle and water saving tips. Complete information about the event is now on the Partnership’s website at <https://www.savingwaterpartnership.org/dropby/>. Event advertising is already underway using digital ad content for websites and social media, print media ads, and a concentrated broadcast radio campaign planned leading up to the date.

The Partnership’s outreach campaign has now transitioned to the “Drought is Here. Save Water.” tag line and is being used for the development and deployment of lawn signs, billboards, banners, window clings for businesses, and more. This is in addition to the continuing multi-media advertising on web and online news sites, social media, and sponsored feature article placements in The Press Democrat newspaper. As a result of this and significant additional community outreach meetings, new earned media is occurring weekly to help expand the reach of the message to save water.

Community & Government Affairs

Government affairs staff from Sonoma Water, the County, and stakeholders continue to work with state representatives on the development of several drought relief funding options, including the Senate’s drought relief bill and Governor Newsom’s May Revise. A funding matrix has been developed by the working group that illustrates the source of future potential drought funding and the priority drought relief projects which may receive such funding. The working group has communicated with community stakeholders to gather drought relief projects from all sectors of our community. Collectively, we will continue to monitor the funding opportunities and support each other to ensure our region receives as much drought relief funding as possible and appropriate. Staff continue to provide support to federal, state and local officials on drought workshops and informational hearings, as needed.

Community Affairs

Most recently, the California Department of Water Resources’ Save Our Water Campaign announced it will immediately place paid media advertisements in the Mendocino and Sonoma media markets to support immediate drought and water conservation messaging. As directed by the Board at its last drought update meeting, more aggressive drought messaging will appear in the public service announcements, including more humorous advertisements featuring the drought dog. Staff continue to provide daily drought updates on Sonoma Water’s website (sonomwater.org).

Interagency Drought Task Force

Recognizing the complex impacts and challenges associated with the current drought conditions, 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 will:

- Establish a clearinghouse of water shortage/drought related information.
- Assess the regional effects of current and projected drought conditions, including socio-, economic, and environmental impacts.
- Help identify and support potential infrastructure improvements; identify and align projects with funding opportunities.
- Coordinate actions to respond to water shortages and alleviate impacts.

- Coordinate public education and outreach.

Invitations to the task force have been sent to local, regional, state, and federal agencies with the first convening of the task force scheduled for early June.

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 a 60-day continuation of the April 27, 2021 Proclamation of a Local Emergency Due to Drought Conditions in the Sonoma County Operational Area.

Prior Board Actions:

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

May 11, 2021: 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

| Expenditures | FY 20-21 Adopted | FY21-22 Projected | FY 22-23 Projected |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Budgeted Expenses | | | |
| Additional Appropriation Requested | | | |
| Total Expenditures | | | |
| Funding Sources | | | |
| General Fund/WA GF | | | |
| State/Federal | | | |
| Fees/Other | | | |
| Use of Fund Balance | | | |
| Contingencies | | | |
| Total Sources | | | |

Narrative Explanation of Fiscal Impacts:

None.

Staffing Impacts:

| Position Title (Payroll Classification) | Monthly Salary Range (A-I Step) | Additions (Number) | Deletions (Number) |
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Narrative Explanation of Staffing Impacts (If Required):

N/A

Attachments:

None.

Related Items “On File” with the Clerk of the Board:

None