



## Legislation Text

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**File #:** 2021-0878, **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):** 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 September 1, 2021:

- Lake Mendocino

The water supply storage level at Lake Mendocino was 19,105 acre-feet, approximately 17 percent of the available water supply pool for this time of year. This is a decline in storage of 10,762 acre-feet since the last Board update on drought conditions.

- Lake Sonoma

The water supply storage level at Lake Sonoma was 115,493 acre-feet, approximately 47 percent of the

available water supply pool. This is a decline in storage of 11,272 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. Currently, of Sonoma County and the surrounding Bay Area is classified into the D4 category (Exceptional Drought).

#### State Water Board Emergency Regulations for the Russian River Watershed

On July 12, 2021, the Office of Administrative Law approved emergency regulations to address the dire drought conditions in the Russian River watershed. The State Water Board adopted the regulations in order to most effectively administer water rights, ensure adequate reliable water supplies for minimum human health and safety needs, and prevent the unreasonable use of water in the Russian River watershed. The regulations give the State Water Board emergency regulatory authority to issue water right curtailments in the Russian River watershed to prevent the diversion and use of water unavailable at diverters' priority of right-including releases of stored water-and to prevent the diversion and use of water that threatens the availability of water for minimum human health and safety needs.

Due to the decreasing level of Lake Mendocino and pursuant to the emergency regulations, the State Water Board issued approximately 1,500 orders curtailing pre and post 1914 appropriative water right holders and riparian claims in the Upper Russian River on August 2, 2021, and approximately 300 pre and post appropriative water right holders in the Lower Russian River on August 10, 2021, directing them to stop (curtail) their diversions. The orders allow recipients to file for an exception to divert for human health and safety needs. More information on the State Water Board's actions related to the Russian River is available at: [https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/drought/russian\\_river/](https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/drought/russian_river/) <[https://gcc02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.waterboards.ca.gov%2Fdrought%2Frussian\\_river%2F&data=04%7C01%7CSteven.Hancock%40scwa.ca.gov%7C72bb1f7f35654952b01208d96ef7a12b%7Cc93b7179f57841648fe1c2704c730887%7C0%7C0%7C637662832104196837%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWljojMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjojV2luMzliLCJBTiI6IklhaWwiLCJXVCi6Mn0%3D%7C1000&sdata=rguKQvlp51N7IE3J%2FCMIwNi%2FcMtIGXrHTK5U3u3YeMM%3D&reserved=0](https://gcc02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.waterboards.ca.gov%2Fdrought%2Frussian_river%2F&data=04%7C01%7CSteven.Hancock%40scwa.ca.gov%7C72bb1f7f35654952b01208d96ef7a12b%7Cc93b7179f57841648fe1c2704c730887%7C0%7C0%7C637662832104196837%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWljojMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjojV2luMzliLCJBTiI6IklhaWwiLCJXVCi6Mn0%3D%7C1000&sdata=rguKQvlp51N7IE3J%2FCMIwNi%2FcMtIGXrHTK5U3u3YeMM%3D&reserved=0)>

#### Current Water Supply Conditions & 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 TUCP 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. As of August 27, 2021, Sonoma Water, in collaboration with its retail customers, had reduced its diversions from the Russian River by 22 percent compared to the same time-period last year.

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 to preserve storage in Lake Mendocino.

Sonoma Water had established a goal of being at or above 20,000 acre-feet of water supply storage in Lake Mendocino on October 1, 2021, as a 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. On August 26, water supply storage in Lake Mendocino dropped below 20,000 acre-feet and is currently projected to be at or below 15,000 acre-feet on October 1, 2021.

#### 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 is intended to 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.

Sonoma Water is striving to complete Phase 1 by late summer. Activation of the Phase 1 well could result in an additional 200,000 to 500,000 gallons a day (approximately) to be delivered. This water will assist residents and ranchers who have lost domestic water supply and need water for health and safety in areas experiencing severe water shortages. One of the wells could also produce an additional 1 million gallons daily (approximately) for Sonoma Water's water contractors to help alleviate drought impacts to their customers.

With Phase 1 nearing completion by late summer, Phase 2 efforts have now also been initiated. Sonoma Water is currently striving to complete the necessary planning and design for Phase 2 ahead of the anticipated release of State and Federal grant funding opportunities that could assist in the Phase 2 implementation. The implementation schedule for constructing the improvements needed for Phase 2 remains subject to the continuation of emergency drought conditions.

#### 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 fish distribution, fish habitat and water quality conditions.

Sonoma Water staff collects annual salmon and steelhead abundance data in the Russian River watershed. Since fall 2020, counts of returning adult salmon and steelhead indicate that populations are low compared to historic levels, 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, and discussed during the weekly meetings, 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, 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 their efforts and coordination with Sonoma County Environmental Health in monitoring for potential harmful algal blooms related to public health. Sonoma Water staff are also assisting the Regional Board with deploying and retrieving devices (solid phase adsorption toxin tracking or SPATT) to monitor cyanotoxins in the water column over time.

Sonoma Water staff shared a drought fish habitat sampling plan with NMFS, CDFW, and the Regional Board. Activities include upper and lower Russian River habitat and fish 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 of water depth at several locations in mainstem Russian River is ongoing. Additional sampling to assess fish assemblage and distribution is also ongoing but it occurs less frequently. Sampling results are discussed during the weekly meetings with NMFS, CDFW, and the Regional Board.

### Government Affairs

Governor Newsom proclaimed a state of emergency for drought on April 21, 2021, to cover the most affected counties. On May 10, 2021 and July 8, 2021, the drought state of emergency was expanded to cover 50 counties of the State. The drought emergency proclamations directed state agencies to take immediate action to bolster drought resilience and prepare for impacts on communities, businesses, and ecosystems if dry conditions extend to a third year.

As part of the drought relief financial assistance, \$500 million was authorized for DWR by the Legislature pursuant to the Budget Act of 2021 (Stats. 2021, ch. 69, §112) and its Trailer Bill. Assembly Bill 148 (Stats. 2021, ch. The Trailer Bill 115, § 97) authorized DWR to make grants and direct expenditures for interim or immediate relief in response to conditions arising from a drought scenario to address immediate impacts on human health and safety and on fish and wildlife resources and to provide water to persons or communities that lose or are threatened with the loss or contamination of water supplies. Below is the breakdown of the \$500 million in authorized funds for DWR:

- \$100 million for Urban Community Drought Relief
- \$200 million for Multi-benefit Projects
- \$200 million for Small Community Drought Relief

On September 7, Sonoma Water's state legislative advocate is hosting a regional drought grant funding webinar. The purpose of the webinar is to ensure organizations in our region understand where drought grant funding is available and how to apply. In addition, it is our hope collaboration amongst organizations will take place to share priority drought projects and help bring in necessary drought funding into our region.

The State Water Board has funding available to address drought-related drinking water emergencies. Funds are administered by non-profit organizations as well as the State Water Board. Eligible recipients include:

- Individual Households
- Small Water Systems (typically serving less than 3,000 people)

Eligible projects include, but are not limited to:

- Bottled water or hauled water
- Vending machines
- Well repair, rehabilitation, and replacement
- Emergency interties

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 second successful Drought Drop By event on August 21, 2021 at 13 locations in Marin, Sonoma, and Mendocino counties, giving out approximately 3,300 drought kits containing water saving devices for customers to install. The August 21 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. One additional Drought Drop By event is planned for Saturday, October 9.

Another regional drought outreach initiative launched July 1, 2021 in the form of a regional challenge event and continued through the end of August. The *Saving Water Challenge* ([<https://www.savingwaterpartnership.org/challenge/>](https://www.savingwaterpartnership.org/challenge/)), encouraged customers 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. Prize winners will be selected and announced soon.

The Partnership continues to work on other drought related initiatives, including a series of trusted messenger videos, now available for viewing at:

- [<https://www.savingwaterpartnership.org/drought/>](https://www.savingwaterpartnership.org/drought/).

The Partnership is also working on a regional webinar series focused on the applicability of greywater as a drought-proof water source.

The Partnership has also launched its updated website, which now features 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. Additional new features in development include improved business-focused resources and tools.

The creation of these business resources is being coordinated with the Sonoma County Economic Development Board (EDB) for joint promotion and distribution on the Partnership's and EDB websites. Proposed tools include downloadable resources for the hospitality industry, such as water-on-request table

tents, linen change cards for hotels, and template newsletter articles for use by local chambers and business groups. A coordination meeting for further discussion of these and other opportunities to better serve the business community during the drought occurred on September 2, 2021. The EDB's business assistance team hopes to identify a business to participate in a Partnership water audit to create a video that can be used for promotion of this service to other businesses. The business assistance team wished to further consider these and other ideas before taking next steps.

Lastly, the Partnership continues its summer advertising campaign, *Drought is Here. Save Water*. Thousands of yard signs featuring the campaign tag line arrived in July and are being widely distributed throughout the county.

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. Sonoma Water staff have presented to more than two dozen organizations throughout our region and have conducted over 150 media interviews in an effort to educate our community about the drought. Staff continue to provide daily drought updates on Sonoma Water's website ([sonomwater.org](http://sonomwater.org)).

#### Interagency Drought Task Force

Sonoma Water staff, in coordination with the Sonoma County Department of Emergency Management, continue to support and facilitate the Sonoma 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 forty participating agencies representing local, state, regional, and tribal partners.

#### 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:**

July 20, 2021: Received Drought Conditions Update and Local Emergency Proclamation Declaration  
Continued

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

Expenditures	FY 21-22 Adopted	FY22-23 Projected	FY 23-24 Projected
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.

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

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

N/A



**Attachments:**

None.

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

None