

1st District Supervisor's Report, April 25, 2023

Water:

The Mendocino Water Resource Team technical Advisory Committee has been formed and met, giving direction to the consulting firm EKI staff Amir Mani for grant writing. The State Water Resources Agency Safe and Affordable Funding for Equity and Resilience (SAFER) grant program will likely be the source of funding for many of these grants. Mendocino Department of Transportation Director Dashiell has been very involved in this contract of \$270 K that the BOS approved to prioritize water projects for grant funding.

There are ongoing discussions among the districts of the **Upper Russian River Water Agency and the City of Ukiah** on sharing resources. They are working towards a legal agreement. They are moving quickly to make applications to the SAFER program, of up to \$40 million. The general atmosphere in negotiations is positive. Mendocino County is providing political support for this process, and I am in regular contact with our state representatives, who also are supportive of a collaborative water system for the Upper Russian River Basin. I am also advocating for this project as it moves through the LAFCO process. (This is one of 5 priority water projects that I identified for the BOS last October 2022).

Potter Valley Project (PVP):

I represent Mendocino County on the Mendocino Inland Water and Power Commission. This JPA is at the table to represent Mendocino County interests in the Russian River surface water supply.

PG&E is in a license decommission process with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission for the Potter Valley Project and will surrender their license by January 2025. The complete decommissioning process could take as long as 10 years. PG & E originally was planning to repair a transformer to continue generating power during that time, which would increase the flow of Eel River water through its hydro facility from its present limit of around 45 cubic feet per second to as much as 300 cfs into the Russian River Basin. Unfortunately, a seismic study that PG&E has commissioned suggests that there is a 1 in 900 chance of the dam failing if a 7.0 magnitude earthquake were to happen (the reservoir is near the Bartlett Springs fault line). As a result, PG & E announced March 20th that it is not closing the gates on the dam this year to lessen risk of the dam failing, reducing the amount of water that can be transferred to the Russian River basin. A letter from Congressman Mike Thompson (who represents Lake County where Scott Dam and Lake Pillsbury are situated) requested that more evaluation and feedback from constituents be heard before a permanent decision is made. If the dam gates are left open, Lake Mendocino will not fill during the summer months and water restrictions (curtailments) for downstream users may return.

The Russian River Water Forum interview process on the future of the PVP has been completed and a summary report exists: https://mendoiwpc.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/RRWF_Interview_Findings_final-1.2023.pdf

Based on the results of the interviews, the level of awareness about the importance of Eel River water transfers via the Potter Valley Project is quite high and certainly people in our communities in the 1st District want to continue the availability of this important water supply source.

The next step to continue water transfers from the Eel River is the formation of a Planning Committee which will gather information on forming an entity to manage the process. This will include the type of entity that would represent water users, funding this new organization and project, and monetizing water costs for users downstream. The Planning Committee is being formed representing stakeholders both in the Eel River Basin and the Russian River Basin. The purpose of this effort is to inform policy regarding interbasin transfers.

Studies are being conducted to evaluate in ground water storage in Potter Valley. As part of the 2 Basin Solution, Scott Dam would be removed and Lake Pillsbury would no longer exist. Diversions from the Eel River would occur only during the winter with high flows. Water would then be stored in either the ground or new small reservoirs in Potter Valley. The rest of the water would go to Lake Mendocino. Not everyone is on board with this idea, but it is still being studied. Environmentalists and fisheries advocates maintain that there is extensive fish habitat behind the dam that would improve the fish populations in the Eel River if the dam was removed.

Congressman Jared Huffman is working on procuring \$500K funding for the Army Corps of Engineers (ACE) to raise Coyote Dam through Community Project Funding Grants. His office has reported that it is in the cue for funding, but it is not certain if there will be adequate funds to do the study this year. It is still on the ACE list of items to fund.

Except for the limited water releases through the Potter Valley Project, we will be in a much-improved position for the coming year with Lake Mendocino at capacity and much of our ground water recharged. Most ephemeral streams came to life again, and the Russian River flowed at its highest level in 4 years. There is a good snowpack in the Coast Range which will melt and keep the Eel River flowing longer into the summer.

Regardless, there are still drought effects happening, primarily in dead and dying trees. The BOS has passed an Emergency Resolution on Tree Mortality (November 2022) to reflect the numerous dead and dying trees in our local forests this past fall to allow the County to apply for grants to address this problem. Snowstorms throughout the winter brought down numerous trees onto local roads requiring a heroic effort by county road crews to keep everything open. (Special thanks to Mendocino County DOT crews who kept University Road open when a large oak fell blocking the way while 200 people were attending an event at the UC Hopland Research and Extension Center).

Other Water Issues:

The ***City of Ft. Bragg*** has been successful in obtaining grant funding to significantly increase their reservoir capacity by almost 75%. Fort Bragg plans to build three reservoirs to store a potential total of 44 million gallons of water, in a location near treatment plant infrastructure and high-power PG&E transmission lines. The city will fill these reservoirs during the winter when high flows occur from its existing water sources — Waterfall Gulch, Newman Gulch, and the Noyo River. — to fill these tanks, particularly during high flow periods in the winter months. (This is one of 5 priority water projects that I identified for the BOS last October 2022.)

The ***Ukiah Valley Basin Sustainable Groundwater Agency (UVBGS)*** successfully submitted its first year Annual Report to the Department of Water Resources on its activities. (I am the chairperson of this JPA). The UVBGS has applied for grant funding to continue to update the Groundwater Management Plan as

required by law. This includes doing more studies on how our groundwater is recharged; how different wells in the basin draw down water when pumps are running (hydrologic studies) and also the potential for creating a recharge basin at River Park that would mimic a natural water feature in the Russian River.

There have also been 2 meetings on how UVBSGA is going to comply with state regulations on new wells. State Water Resource Agencies want expensive hydrological studies for wells that pump more than 2-acre feet per year (domestic wells). UVBSGA is looking at all options on how to comply with yet another potentially expensive unfunded state mandate. The 16 wells that are monitored in the Ukiah Basin for groundwater levels show very good recharge even during the past 3 drought years. The initial data suggest that the Ukiah Valley Basin groundwater is being managed sustainably. At the moment, ground water levels are quite high from winter rainfall and will be adding significant water to the flow of the Russian River in the next few months.

Bree Klotter has been appointed by the BOS to fill the open seat on the **Redwood Valley County Water Agency**. With her appointment, RVCWA board of directors is completely staffed.

Economic Development:

Supervisor Haschak and I work as an Ad Hoc Committee to manage the contract with West Company and Regional Government Services to provide economic development services for Mendocino County. West Company was successful in assisting the city of Ft. Bragg to procure a grant of \$1.5 M for a passive ocean desalination pilot project with ONEKA, a company specializing in this science. The grant supports the Blue Economy initiative that Ft. Bragg is embracing.

Mendocino County is also represented by West Company on the California Economic Resiliency Fund (CERF) Redwood Region and the Sonoma Mendocino Economic Development District (SMEDD). These 2 organizations are gateways to applying for significant grant funding for infrastructure and other economic development support from the state and federal governments. Most urban counties have dedicated Economic Development departments, so we are trying to at least be in the running using a consulting contractor for this function.

Public Safety:

Redwood Valley Warning Sirens: A public meeting was held on January 14th at the Redwood Valley Calpella Fire Station to introduce the warning sirens to the community. Fire Chief Kerry Robinson introduced Charles Klugston of CTC Mass Notification Systems and Brad Cox of Whelen Warning Solutions, contractors installing the equipment. They were working on placement of up to 4 sirens to alert Redwood Valley in the event of an emergency. The diverse terrain and vegetation makes it challenging to have everyone hear when the very loud sirens go off. The alarms are digital, solar powered with battery storage units. They are operated with radio frequency communications. There was a good-sized crowd and the county was well represented by myself, CEO Darcie Antle, OES member Travis Kilmer, Xuyen Malilla, and Garrett James. This project will be fully operational by this summer.

Budget Ad Hoc Committee:

Supervisor Williams and I serve on the Budget Ad Hoc committee and attended all the department meetings to discuss proposed budgets for the 2023-2023 Budget held April 5, 6 and 7. With sales tax

and transient occupancy tax down by at least 10%, the County will have less money for their general fund or discretionary spending, which makes up a little less than one third of the budget.

Further complicating the process is a lack of information from the Auditor Controller Tax Collector Treasurer Chamise Cubbison's office (AC/TTC). Presently the financial books have not been completely closed on the 2021-2022 Fiscal Year, so the ending fund balances and carryovers are not certain. Without this critical information, it is difficult for the Board of Supervisors to create an accurate budget for the next fiscal year.

As an independent elected official, Ms. Cubbison does not report to the Board of Supervisors and is accountable only to voters. Due to a lack of capacity in the Auditor Controller Treasurer Tax Collector's Office, the Executive Office (EO) has assumed some of the financial reporting responsibilities including forecasting payroll, salary projections, revenue projections and fund balances. Normally this work is done by the AC/TTC but these tasks haven't been provided regularly in the last 2 budget cycles.

Both the Board of Supervisors and the Executive Office have offered resources to assist the AC/TTC in catching up on financial reports needed for us to make a solid budget for the next Fiscal Year 23-23. The lack of cooperation by the ACTC office is truly discouraging. The BOS has authorized a contract to perform a forensic audit and assist with reporting, but we can't move forward without the cooperation of the AC/TTC. While it is true that the Board of Supervisors has combined the POSITION of Auditor Controller/ Treasure Tax Collector, we did not combine the offices. They both operate as separate administrative units.

There is a lack of transparency in the AT/TTC's office on information that even the Executive Office cannot access. The AC/TT has files in Excel format that are not part of the County's MUNIS finance system. Consequently, there is no independent way to check the true fund balance of the County. This is a serious problem that needs resolution.

A long-term solution would be to create a Department of Finance with no elected officials. This would require a majority approval by the voters to eliminate the AC/TTC elected position. Both Marin and Yolo County have this arrangement and people who handle their finances are hired based on professional qualifications, typically having extensive experience as Chief Financial Officers with degrees in Finance and are usually Certified Public Accountants. This is a model worth contemplating for Mendocino County that would improve financial efficiency, accountability and financial transparency.