

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

AGENDA TITLE: Drought Task Force Update

LISTENING TOUR REPORT:

A series of public meetings were held June 29, 2021 in Boonville and Mendocino, and June 30 in Fort Bragg and Willits. Supervisors Williams, and McGourty convened the Boonville and Mendocino meetings; Supervisors McGourty and Gjerde convened the Fort Bragg meeting; and Supervisors McGourty and Haschak convened the Willits meeting. Mendocino County Water Agency Program Manager Josh Metz attended all meetings. Meetings included water purveyors and constituents, and focused discussion on water supply conditions around the county.

These communities were chosen for this initial listening tour because they represent a large portion of unincorporated county land, and are known to be water insecure. While the Ukiah Valley has the largest county population, due to strategic action by the City of Ukiah and local water districts, the community is known to be relatively water secure at the current time. The Supervisors and Water Agency Program Manager appreciate the efforts of each community in organizing and convening concerned residents on short notice. This report includes summaries of key findings from each meeting and recommendations for Board consideration and action.

Background

Mendocino County Water Agency

The Mendocino County Water Agency (MCWA) is a special district governed by the Board of Supervisors, sitting as the Board of Directors. The district was originally established in 1949 to provide a mechanism for local participation in the construction of Coyote Dam on the East Fork of the Russian River. MCWA revenue is generated from a property tax increment that was established by State law in 1971, which does not exceed \$0.06 per \$100 of assessed valuation.

Until 1987, the County Department of Public Works administered the MCWA. The MCWA adopted an independent identity as a separate County department until 2011, at which point it was again integrated into an existing department. The MCWA is now administered through the Executive Office. The Water Agency provides project management for the following: The Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) implementation, Ukiah Valley Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency, California Statewide Groundwater Elevation Monitoring (CASGEM) Program, NPDES MS4 Phase II Permit, Proposition 1 grant management and the Water Agency Action Plan.

Mendocino County Water Districts

Mendocino County has approximately 28 individual water districts including municipal agencies and flood control (Attachment A). While these districts are managed by dedicated professionals, many lack the benefits of coordination and connectivity that would increase community resiliency in the face of drought. The County's rural character and dispersed population make broad connectivity an infeasible option. Never the less, connectivity and supply redundancies at more sub-regional levels could increase drought and climate change resiliency.

Regional Government Services Contract

Regional Government Services (RGS) was contracted to provide Drought Emergency Response Program Management as part of a multi-phase approach to re-establishing the Mendocino County Water Agency. The Phase 1 contract (Not-to-Exceed \$50k) was completed on June 10, 2021 provides for Joshua Metz to deliver Drought Emergency Response Program Management Services including staffing the Drought Task Force Ad Hoc Committee, serving as a point of contact for countywide drought response coordination, increasing connectivity and collaboration with water district managers around the County, and supporting Board of Supervisors considerations and actions on the future of the MCWA. A second phase of the MCWA re-establishment process will include a competitively bid strategic planning, organizational structure and funding alternatives process, along with continued Drought Emergency Response services. The third implementation phase would likely occur in Q1/Q2 2022.

Regional Findings

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Anderson Valley Community Services District

The Anderson Valley Community Services District (CSD) is in the process of planning and implementing a new community-wide drinking water distribution and waste water treatment system, using \$36M in grant funding from the State Department of Water Resources. The system will yield water connections to many homes within the district, and a membrane bio-reactor to treat waste water, yielding improved groundwater quality. While water supplies are scarce and there were reports of some wells running dry, the primary ask from the Anderson Valley CSD was support from the County in producing an urban growth model, which would help them secure funds to add system capacity to accommodate expected housing needs.

Mendocino Community Services District

The Mendocino CSD of about one square mile relies on around 420 privately owned wells serving about 1,000 full time residents and another 2,000 visitors daily. District residents depend on being able to purchase water from the City of Fort Bragg during dry years, and a number of businesses rely on being able to purchase water every year as part of their operating costs/needs. The district is very concerned about the ability of its residents to continue securing hauled water during this year, and into the future. Tactical and strategic actions are requested. Tactical action during the current year could include: Temporary waivers of permitting requirements for the installation of new storage tanks; Supporting the delivery of water via the Mendocino Railway to the City of Fort Bragg for use by County residents south of the city; Ensuring storage and water access for the County's most vulnerable residents. Strategic actions over the coming years could include: Prospecting and establishing new surface and/or groundwater sources; Increased off-stream storage to capture winter flows; Funding and implementation of new water transmission facilities to connect coastal communities; and Improvements to waste water treatment and reuse capabilities.

City of Fort Bragg

The City of Fort Bragg relies on surface water diversion from the Noyo River to meet the needs of its 7,298 residents. In dry years, it is also the primary water source for hauled water to points south including unincorporated County land and the town of Mendocino among others. During our site visit an water system tour, the Public Works Director acknowledged the critical role the city plays in supporting other coastal communities, and estimated at current rates, the city could afford to supply those communities through the end of August. As of Tuesday July 6, there had been a precipitous drop in the Noyo River water level at the city's intake point (from a depth of 2.27' above the intake to 0.59' above intake). This significant drop has increased local apprehension about water supply, and the city's ability to continue supplying water outside its boundaries. The Public Works Director indicated that the city could rapidly lose the ability to ship outside its boundaries if the trend in water levels at the Noyo intake continues (i.e. *in a matter of days/weeks vs Aug 31 as previously reported*). The situation on the coast is urgent.

City of Willits

The City of Willits has been making strategic investments in water storage and transmission capabilities that leave the community in a relatively strong position under the current drought emergency. As of June 30, reservoirs are reported at 79% capacity (1057 acre-feet), and there are 3 existing wells supplying groundwater for various uses. They are moving ahead with plans for to enhance the city's ability to access treat and transmit additional groundwater resources in the years ahead. The city also maintains accurate usage data to monitor trends over time. While the city is in a stable position, outlying communities including Brooktrails and Little Lake Valley have concerns about their respective surface water, and ground water supplies. Concerns about over drafting of groundwater were raised, along with water use for agriculture while supplies for urban use are limited.

Regional Dependency

The findings from the listening tour yielded insight in to the relative security of unincorporated communities around the county, as well as the interdependencies the communities have with one another. Tactical response that depends on communities supporting each other may be required to get through the current drought year. Over the longer term, strategic action and collaboration will be necessary to realize increased water security and resiliency.

Recommendations:

1. County provide leadership in mitigating impending water emergency on the coast. Engage with key

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stakeholders to develop water supply and accessibility solutions. Lowest hanging fruit options include: Water-by-rail leveraging the Mendocino Railway from Willits to Fort Bragg; Prospecting new surface and/or groundwater sources and potentially emergency well drilling; Engaging State and Federal partner agencies in meeting community drinking water needs.

2. Temporary permit waiver for installing up to 5000-gallon water tanks to meet drinking water needs.
3. Increase County water supply and drought mitigation coordination and information sharing capacity to meet current and longer-term water security and resiliency needs.