



County of Santa Cruz Board of Supervisors

Agenda Item Submittal

From: Health Services Agency

Subject: 2024 Annual Water Status Report

Meeting Date: February 11, 2025

Formal Title: Accept and file the Santa Cruz County Water Resources Management Status Report for 2024

Recommended Action

Accept and file the Santa Cruz County Water Resources Management Status Report for 2024.

Executive Summary

The Health Services Agency (HSA) Environmental Health Division (Division) is presenting the attached annual report - Santa Cruz County Water Resources Management Status Report for 2024 (Water Resources Report). The annual Water Resources Report summarizes the countywide water resource management activities with input from over a dozen agencies and organizations throughout the County. This year's report reflects the impacts of, and preparation for, changing hydrologic cycles.

Discussion

Since 2004, HSA Environmental Health has assumed a lead role in coordinating many water resources efforts among County departments. Each January, HSA Environmental Health prepares a report summarizing water resource conditions within Santa Cruz County, including the activities by County staff and other local agencies for improved management of county water resources. The Board accepted the 2023 Water Resources Report on January 30, 2024.

The 2024 Water Resources Report is attached, with the following highlights from the report included.

Water Resource Management activities during 2024 were influenced by:

- Rain: A second consecutive, though thankfully less eventful, wet year led to the end of the Governor's drought declaration for Santa Cruz County.
- Construction: Soquel Creek Water District, Pajaro Valley Water Management Agency, and the City of Santa Cruz Water Department all made progress on constructing new water supply projects. These projects combined a total similar amount of water to the capacity of the Loch Lomond Reservoir.
- Algal blooms: Large Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs) occurred throughout the county this year, most notably at Pinto Lake, closed for nearly four months, and at Corcoran Lagoon. The County Water Quality Viewer now has a "Serious Risk" category.

Key highlights for the year include:

- Municipal water use remains lower than it was when recent drought restrictions

were in place and is around 23% below the water use levels of the early 1980s.

- Several big retirements took place over the year: Rosemary Menard, Santa Cruz Water Director retired in February; Dr. Audrey Levine, Supervising Water Quality Specialist for the County of Santa Cruz, retired in July; Ron Duncan, General Manager of the Soquel Creek Water District retired in October.
- The County of Santa Cruz Board of Supervisors adopted amended ordinances regulating well construction and Individual Water Systems. The new ordinances strive to strike a balance between making domestic and replacement well permits straightforward and attainable, while ensuring that new, larger wells are thoroughly evaluated for their impact on the Public Trust.
- Voters passed the local initiative, Measure Q, which will provide stable funding for projects that benefit the environment and the impacts of climate change. Water projects are listed as a priority.
- Voters also passed the Statewide initiative, Proposition 4, which includes significant funding for water projects. Local match may be provided with funding from Measure Q.

The Water Advisory Commission approved the report at the December 4, 2024, meeting and voted to submit it to the Board of Supervisors.

Financial Impact

The recommended action has no financial impact.

Strategic Initiatives

Operational Plan - Sustainable Environment

Submitted By:

Monica Morales

Recommended By:

Carlos J. Palacios, County Administrative Officer

Artificial Intelligence Acknowledgment:

Artificial Intelligence (AI) did not significantly contribute to the development of this agenda item.