



## County of Santa Cruz

### Water Advisory Commission

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<https://www.scceh.org/>

# Drought Response Working Group Meeting Summary

Meeting 4, August 16, 2022 9am-noon

**Working Group members in attendance:** Edan Cassidy (SMGWA), Frank Cheap (WAC, private well owner), Paul Lego (WAC, small water systems), Brian Lockwood (WAC), John Ricker (at-large environmental), Stephen Rider (PV Water), Becky Steinbruner (at-large small water system customer)

**Working Group members not in attendance:** Rachel Smith (RCAC), Jon Kennedy (MGA)

**Guests:** Julia Ekstrom (DWR), Pat Hanley, Nicole Launder (Bracken Brae Country Club), Martin Mills (Pure Source Water), Ray Pereyra (WAC), Liz Taylor

**Santa Cruz County Staff:** Sean Abbey (Water Quality Specialist), Tatiana Brennan (Senior Administrative Analyst, OR3) Erin McCarthy (Water Resources Planner), Sierra Ryan (Water Resources Manager), Nathan Salazar (Environmental Health Specialist)

## Summary of key points and recommendations

### Key points, general

- County CAAP (Climate Action & Adaptation Plan) update will go to the Board of Supervisors (BoS) for review and consideration of approval in Dec., 2022. The Drought Response and Outreach Plan (DROP), based on the work of the Drought Response Working Group (DRWG) and Water Advisory Commission (WAC), will be included in that CAAP update.
- A draft of the DROP will go to the WAC at their October 5, 2022 meeting for consideration of approval. DRWG members are encouraged to attend that meeting.
- A draft of the SB552 response plan will be circulated to the DRWG members prior to October 5 for review.
- OR3 is lead on developing the CAAP update, and are doing that in collaboration with other local jurisdictions that are also doing Climate Action Plans.

- In the future, the DROP could be amended if the WAC brought a request to the BoS.
- Office of Response, Recovery, and Resiliency (OR3) was formed in 2020 in response to the CZU Fire. Its role is to mobilize during emergencies, help with recovery, and build resilience to climate change. OR3 may therefore have a role in immediate response to damage to a water system during emergency.
- The group reviewed documents developed as resources in response to the CZU Fire. In the future, more resources could be prepared in advance of an emergency.
- The County does not force consolidations, but would support a consolidation effort if that was desired by all involved parties. County has authority to enforce certain standards to be met by small water systems. The State has forced consolidations and it is a drawn out process that has historically only resulted from serious/ongoing failure by water systems to meet standards.

### **Key points, surviving the CZU Fire - Bracken Brae Country Club**

- Nicole Launder, Water Commissioner at Bracken Brae Country Club, presented on the impacts of the CZU Fire on the water system at Bracken Brae, on how the County could be more helpful in responding to emergencies, and on accessing resources to help recover from the fire damage. Three main topics that the system had to address were 1) restoring a water supply in the short-term, 2) accessing funding, and 3) a long-term solution which was a decision to consolidate with SLVWD. Ms. Launder provided a number of suggestions for the County which are included in the Recommendations Section, below. Some points made during the presentation include:
  - Bracken Brae was able to navigate the difficult process of accessing FEMA funding because they had engineering resources, had documentation of their system as required by FEMA, and fought through the difficult process. Most/many small water systems were not/would not be able to navigate that process successfully.
  - Ultimately they were able to receive about \$3M in total of federal assistance for clean up, temporary solution and rebuild.
  - The County could play a more helpful role in the process of accessing FEMA assistance.
  - Treatment plant was lost in fire, water storage, pump house, and several homes were lost.
  - Documentation of the system prior to the emergency, and of the damage post-emergency, was essential for applying to FEMA.
  - Water to Bracken Brae was not restored until end of Dec (fire was in August) by install of a temporary storage tank.
  - System did not have adequate insurance, only got \$90,000 but that was helpful for setting up a temporary system. Many systems may not have adequate insurance.

- A decision was made to consolidate with SLVWD after considering a number of options and considering the cost of maintaining the small water system. SLVWD received a grant that can help with some of the costs.
- A representative from Forest Springs Water System was not able to present, but would have provided additional perspective on surviving the CZU Fire.
  - Forest Springs was not able to access FEMA funding because they did not have the resources to navigate that difficult process. Many small water systems are/would likely be in an unfavorable position for navigating this process successfully and are likely also under-insured.

### **Recommendations for water systems, surviving the CZU Fire - Bracken Brae Country Club**

- Water systems need to be prepared with documentation (video or photo-documentation) of system; this was needed for FEMA application. FEMA funding is intended to fund rebuild of similar system as the one damaged.
- Water systems should keep an inventory.
- Water systems should ensure they have adequate insurance.
- Water systems that are not-for-profit need clear documentation of that status; this was needed for FEMA.

### **Recommendations for the County, surviving the CZU Fire - Bracken Brae Country Club**

- Provide list of contacts to assist with recovery. It was hard to find the right person at the County.
  - Public Works looked at wastewater system at golf course and meeting with them was helpful for damage assessment
  - County staff (Salazar) was helpful to get clearance to clean up debris in order to prepare for temporary water storage system
- Reach out to water systems instead of waiting for people to come to County
- Establish list of steps to go through for recovery process
- Connect people with CalWarn
  - The connection to CalWarn was helpful; it led to connection with an engineer from Paradise
- Prepare a list of detailed steps needed to get access to financial resources
- Try to influence damage recovery process – FEMA effort was not focused on wildfire damage
- County is critical in this process as the County was the first line of contact for most of the assistance needed
- Consider working to improve the process of dealing with fire debris through private property program

- Organize a future small water system meeting to address the lessons and recommendations from Bracken Brae and other systems recovering from fire
- Consider ways to address access issues during fire:
  - Work with CalFire and utilities
  - Consider a way for water system operators to get access to their systems during fires, when safe, so they can help fire fighters access water

### **Outcomes of discussion of recommendations in the draft Recommendations Table**

#3. Email list-serve: build a repository of email addresses that County can use to send updates when necessary; create platform for people to voluntarily provide email addresses; regular email updates will not be sent by County as that is difficult for County to manage.

#6. Paying community leaders: Revise: Change “pay community leaders” to “collaborate with outreach specialists”

#7. Join RCRC: SR and TB will revisit this offline to determine which County program is best suited to get involved with RCRC.

#8. Updating groundwater emergency ordinance: staff to review ordinance and prepare recommendations for WAC; WAC review ordinance and consider recommendations.

#18. Incentivize metering: Clarify “encourage/incentivize metering”; remove reference to requiring meters on new & replacement wells

#23, 25 & 26: revise to include recommendation to make resources available but to not set requirements:

- remove #23
- change #25 from “require systems to complete reserve analyses, including timeline to demonstrate steps are being taken” to “encourage and facilitate systems to complete reserve analysis”
- change # 26 from “require systems to build reserve over time” to “encourage and facilitate systems to build reserve over time”
- revised #25 and revised #26 may be combined: “encourage and facilitate systems to complete reserve analysis and to build reserve over time”

#29. Consolidation decision-support tools: Revise to include the words “**by all parties**” as follows: “Develop tools to support decision-making about consolidations, and to support consolidation process itself when that is the preferred option **by all parties**, including...”

#31. Audits and rebates for vulnerable systems: Revise to include the word “voluntary”; **Voluntary** water conservation audits and rebates for vulnerable systems

#32. Consider using grant funds to purchase water hauling truck: Revise to: “Evaluate options to guarantee availability of hauled water in the county. Include investigating the feasibility of priority contracts with existing water haulers, and the purchase a water hauling truck (\$350,000)”

# 35. Decentralized water storage: remove this recommendation

#36. Parcels without tanks or with undersized tanks: Include language about assistance available and about how to determine appropriate tank size for each household.

#### **Additional recommendations**

- County staff convene to determine which County program may want to participate in RCRC.
- Include recommendation to create dedicated grant-writer position.
- Include historical context in the plan, i.e., how County responded to historic droughts and what is different now.