



# SIERRA CLUB

## REDWOOD CHAPTER

### Upper Russian River Ecological Integrity Position Paper

The Sierra Club Redwood Chapter Water Committee works with legislators, state agencies, local water agencies, and industrial/agricultural water users to advocate that the chapter's water resources receive environmentally sensitive management.

We would like to raise issues concerning the ecological integrity of the Upper Russian River for consideration alongside the "[Statement of Interests](#)" at the November 3, 2025 WAC meeting.

With expected changes in the diversion from the Eel to the Russian River and the recent [2025 NMFS Russian River Biological Opinion](#), now is the opportunity to update the goals for managing the Upper Russian River (URR) so that there is an increased focus on resilient water supplies for all use types and improving the ecological integrity of the river. The primary challenges are:

- how do we refocus efforts on the need to restore the ecological integrity of the natural systems for all, while balancing growing demands with a limited water supply;
- how do we manage a limited water supply when there is limited transparency and accountability in use; and
- who pays for water infrastructure that might be needed? While all physical infrastructure has a maintenance life, green infrastructure where appropriate can be less costly and is typically multi-benefit. [For a fly over of the RR click here.](#)

The State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) declared the Russian River as fully appropriated in 1989. A variety of complicated interests rely on water flows of the URR, particularly in the hot, dry months—an issue exacerbated by poor accounting of water availability and little transparency in water needs. One tool that has been tested by the SWRCB is the voluntary [water sharing](#) program. A better understanding of water demands, community education, and other changes are still necessary before such a program can operate without Emergency Declarations. Flows during our driest periods could be better managed with a broader portfolio of tools. Options could include:

- A better water extraction demand forecasting tool for flow management from Hopland to Healdsburg, possibly using more transparent water rights with the new Waterboard [Upward](#) system. Large users could forecast their usage in a tool to inform water releases
- monitoring by river section of underground storage (gaining or losing) during proposed water release changes or flow pulses;
- more onsite storage ponds to capture winter precipitation for summer use, and
- improved water use monitoring, metering, and reporting requirements, to name a few.

## Specific Water Cities and Districts Published Urban Water Use

[Potter Valley Irrigation District](#) (Pop. 1,700): This district serves more than 272 agricultural customers and 6,960 acres. A [Nov 2021 study suggested alternative supply options](#) to help address reliability in the face of a two-basin solution.

Ukiah (Pop. 16,072 ): [Urban Water Management Plan \(UWMP\)](#) documents show the city's total water consumption was 3,030AF in 2020. It documents a RR water right of 16,507AF. The Ukiah Valley Ground Water basin, a Holocene alluvium, receives an annual aquifer recharge of about 25,300AF per year, and size is in excess of 400,000AF. Ukiah identifies [30,000 neighbors](#) and 8 water agencies including Hopland in Ukiah Valley.



Cloverdale (Pop. 8964): [UWMP](#) documents show the city used 1,320AF in 2020 for a population of 9,213 people. It documents water rights of 27,920AF from RR and 73,653AF from Big Sulfur Creek.

### Sonoma Water Contractors

For reference from [Sonoma Water UWMP](#), Sonoma Water Contractors with 600,000+ customers, used 44,530AF in 2024, and have water right to RR of 75,000AF/yr. This supply is drawn principally from Lake Sonoma, and is withdrawn at the Wohler-Mirabel collector. See #1 [Statement of Interest](#).

Lake Sonoma's water storage is 250,000AF. Lake Mendocino storage is 110,000AF and it is ~68 river miles upstream of the Dry Creek confluence.

The information in this brief has been obtained from public-domain sources. If any information is used for public policy, its validity should be verified separately.

Sierra Club Redwood Chapter lead author Neil Hancock. [neilh@wLLw.net](mailto:neilh@wLLw.net)

## References with links

- [1] Sonoma Water “Statement of Interests” ;  
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- [2] 2025 NMFS Russian River Biological Opinion ; <https://www.sonomawater.org/biological-opinion>
- [3] Fly over of Russian River ; <https://river-runner.samlearner.com/?lng=-123.1861892522816&lat=39.19752951053286>
- [4] SWRCB voluntary water sharing program  
[https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/drought/russian\\_river/docs/2022/2022-rr-water-sharing-program-factsheet.pdf](https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/drought/russian_river/docs/2022/2022-rr-water-sharing-program-factsheet.pdf)
- [5] Waterboard Upward <https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/upward/>
- [6] Potter Valley Irrigation District  
<https://www.mendolafco.org/files/cd1276348/PVID+2025+MSR+SOI+FINAL.pdf>
- [7] Nov 2021 study suggested alternative supply options <https://freetheeel.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/PVID-Water-Supply-Alternatives-lo.pdf>
- [8] Ukiah Urban Water Management Plan (UWMP)  
[https://wuedata.water.ca.gov/getfile?filename=/public%2Fuwmp\\_attachments%2F5114719986%2FUkiah%20FINAL%202020%20UWMP\\_Errata%20-%20May%202022%20\(05.03.2022\).pdf](https://wuedata.water.ca.gov/getfile?filename=/public%2Fuwmp_attachments%2F5114719986%2FUkiah%20FINAL%202020%20UWMP_Errata%20-%20May%202022%20(05.03.2022).pdf)
- [9] Ukiah identifies 30,000 neighbors [https://cityofukiah.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Ukiah\\_WaterHandout.pdf](https://cityofukiah.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Ukiah_WaterHandout.pdf)
- [10] Cloverdale UWMP  
[https://wuedata.water.ca.gov/getfile?filename=/public%2Fuwmp\\_attachments%2F9850415885%2FCloverdale\\_2020UWMP\\_Final\\_wAppendix.pdf](https://wuedata.water.ca.gov/getfile?filename=/public%2Fuwmp_attachments%2F9850415885%2FCloverdale_2020UWMP_Final_wAppendix.pdf)
- [11] Sonoma Water UWMP  
[https://www.sonomawater.org/media/PDF/Water%20Resources/Water%20Supply/UWMP/Sonoma%20Water%202020%20UWMP\\_June%202021-ADA.pdf](https://www.sonomawater.org/media/PDF/Water%20Resources/Water%20Supply/UWMP/Sonoma%20Water%202020%20UWMP_June%202021-ADA.pdf)

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