

# Business Services & External Affairs Division

## Annual Report – 2025

### Overview

In 2025, the Business Services & External Affairs Division advanced Sonoma Water's mission through operational excellence, strategic investment, community engagement, and strong intergovernmental partnerships. Across information technology, administrative services, fiscal management, communications, and government relations, the division delivered measurable improvements that strengthened resilience, transparency, efficiency, and public trust.

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### Information Technology Section

#### Enterprise Group Policy Modernization

The IT team completed a comprehensive, year-long review and modernization of several dozen Active Directory Group Policies governing servers and workstations. Hundreds of individual settings were standardized, consolidated, documented, and cleaned of outdated or conflicting configurations. This effort resolved long-standing system issues and significantly improved network reliability, cybersecurity posture, and long-term manageability.

#### Stream Maintenance Application – Project Completion

The Stream Maintenance Application was successfully developed and fully deployed. The application improves data collection, reporting, and coordination between field and office staff and now supports core environmental services operations, increasing efficiency and accuracy across programs.

#### FirstNet Mobile Device Migration

The agency is now halfway through a multi-year migration to FirstNet mobile devices. This transition improves device reliability, reduces hardware procurement costs, and strengthens communications during emergencies, disaster response, and Emergency Operations Center activations.

#### Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Resilience

Multiple cybersecurity hardening initiatives were implemented, including expanded multi-factor authentication, improved patch management workflows, enhanced endpoint monitoring, and

updated configuration baselines. These upgrades strengthened the agency's overall cyber resilience and supported alignment with state and federal security frameworks.

## **Help Desk & Support Improvements**

Customer support processes were strengthened through improved onboarding workflows, updated knowledge base documentation, and standardized troubleshooting procedures. These enhancements reduced response times and improved service quality for internal customers.

## **Lake Sonoma Wireless Internet Buildout**

IT staff installed an enterprise-grade wireless network with satellite internet access at Lake Sonoma. This infrastructure supports agency operations as well as public and community events, including the annual Steelhead Festival.

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# **Administrative Services Section**

## **Workforce Recruitment & Training**

Human Resources successfully coordinated:

- 14 new full-time recruitments
- 21 full-time promotions
- 39 extra-help hires, including promotions

The team also completed bias and performance evaluation trainings, conducted seven job demands analyses, redesigned the HR/Risk intranet, published the quarterly *Water Cooler* employee newsletter, and coordinated the Employee Communications Committee (ECC).

## **Records Retention Schedule Approval**

In April 2025, the Board of Directors approved Sonoma Water's Records Retention Schedules following years of staff review and collaboration. Upon approval, the Records Team launched agency-wide messaging and targeted training to improve understanding of retention requirements, compliance obligations, and the importance of records management.

## **Agency-wide Records Assessment**

From July through October 2025, Sonoma Water completed a comprehensive records assessment with an external consultant. Through surveys, Voice of the Customer sessions, interviews, and on-site analysis, the assessment evaluated operations, governance, compliance, staffing, and technology. The resulting Roadmap Review & Recommendations Report provides findings, best practices, budget estimates, timelines, and clear guidance for future improvements.

## **Board of Directors Agenda Coordination**

Clerical Support staff processed 93 Board agenda items in 2025, managing scheduling, submission, tracking, and distribution of final approvals to ensure smooth governance operations.

## **Risk & Insurance Process Improvements**

The section led a comprehensive review of risk and insurance processes, including renewal and reporting workflows. The effort clarified asset coverage, improved documentation, and streamlined and automated processes where appropriate.

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# **Community & Employee Engagement Section**

## **Record-Breaking Student Engagement**

During the 2024–2025 school year, the Water and Energy Education Program reached a record 18,200 students across 786 classes through classroom visits and field trips. A major highlight was the unveiling of a new mural at the Sonoma Water Education Center, created in partnership with the California Indian Museum and Cultural Center and local youth artists to honor Indigenous relationships with water.

## **Lake Sonoma Visitors Center**

Approximately 10,000 community members visited the Lake Sonoma Visitors Center—making 2025 the most successful year of the partnership between Sonoma Water and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Staff provided tours, answered public inquiries, and expanded educational programming, including a new weekly fish hatchery tour offered every Monday morning.

## **Social Media & Digital Engagement**

Sonoma Water's social media presence continued to grow, surpassing 15,000 followers across platforms. Engagement included:

- 1,400 content shares
- Average engagement rate of 7.23%
- 9,600 reactions and likes

## **Employee Engagement & Training**

In alignment with the strategic plan, a dedicated team developed and delivered two professional development trainings focused on performance evaluations and bias-aware interview practices.

## **Strategic Plan Implementation**

Implementation of the five-year strategic plan advanced through the new Strategic Pillar Strategy Lab program. These labs provide targeted support to strategic plan leads and ensure continued progress toward agency goals.

## **Project Management Office – Projectmates**

The Project Management Office continued cross-functional collaboration to implement Projectmates, a cloud-based construction project management platform. Phase 1 (construction management) was completed early in the year, and Phase 2 (design engineering) is nearing completion, improving collaboration, cost control, and efficiency.

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## **Fiscal Services Section**

### **Budget Process Improvements**

Fiscal Services launched a multi-year initiative to streamline and automate the budget process, improve communication, and strengthen financial integrity. This work will continue into 2026 with collaboration across all divisions.

### **Grants & External Funding**

In total, \$9 million in grant revenue was received, with an additional \$3.5 million awarded in 2025 to support agency priorities.

### **Invasive Species Prevention Partnership**

Fiscal Services coordinated a new five-year Project Partnership Agreement with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to expand the Invasive Species Prevention Program at Lake Sonoma and Lake Mendocino.

### **Sanitation Rate Relief Program**

The Sanitation Rate Relief Program supported 239 customers, providing \$247,000 in assistance. This represents a 7% increase in total relief dollars and a 13% increase in eligible customers compared to the prior year.

### **Water Transmission Rates**

Working closely with the Water Advisory Committee and Technical Advisory Committee, Fiscal Services developed a water transmission budget and rate plan that received unanimous approval. The approximately 10% rate increase ensures funding for critical aging infrastructure investments.

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## Public Information Officer

### Media Relations & Press Outreach

The Public Information Officer issued more than two dozen press releases on topics including reservoir operations, storm response, habitat restoration, and regional water supply. Staff provided ongoing support to reporters and expanded outreach related to the Eel-Russian Project Authority through interviews, fact sheets, and coordinated messaging.

### Community Webinar Engagement

Sonoma Water hosted the virtual forum *“Rainfall and Reservoirs: Water Year Wrap,”* featuring expert panelists discussing water supply conditions, winter forecasts, and emerging forecasting needs. The webinar attracted more than 100 community members and media representatives.

### Internal Communications

The PIO team continued production of *The Week Ahead* email, providing staff with updated talking points and event information to ensure consistent and informed community engagement.

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## Government Relations

### Forecast-Informed Reservoir Operations (FIRO)

In October 2025, Sonoma Water and its federal and state partners finalized an agreement to update the Lake Mendocino Water Control Manual. This historic revision incorporates forecast-informed reservoir operations, modernizing flood control rules for the first time in the dam’s 66-year history. The project represents the first FIRO-based water control manual in the nation.

### Sub-seasonal to Seasonal Forecasting Advocacy

Sonoma Water played a leading role in advocating for Sub-seasonal to Seasonal precipitation forecasting funding. The Weather Act Reauthorization Act of 2025 authorizes \$50.3 million annually from FY 2026–2030 for pilot projects, including western precipitation forecasting. The legislation advanced through the House Science Committee in September.

## **Salmon Recovery Funding**

Federal legislation enacted in March 2025 included \$65 million for the Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery Fund. Since FY2000, PCSRF has received \$1.88 billion in funding, due in part to Sonoma Water's sustained leadership and advocacy.

## **State Budget Successes**

- Secured \$5.5 million in Proposition 4 funding for the Potter Valley Project to support fish passage and habitat restoration
- Secured \$3.5 million for Small Groundwater Sustainability Agencies, supporting five-year Groundwater Sustainability Plan updates

## **Golden Mussel Prevention**

Advocacy efforts successfully expanded eligibility for mussel prevention grants and doubled the mussel prevention sticker fee, stabilizing funding and elevating statewide awareness of the threat posed by Golden Mussels to water supply systems.